



**KING'S  
CHURCH**  
EDINBURGH

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# Men & Women, and Church Leadership

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## 1 Timothy 2:8-15

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I was in an airport this week – there were lots of people and lots of shops. Some of those shops seemed to have a magnetic attraction that worked only on men, and others pulled in only women.

Dan from our travelling group went straight to Dixons, joining the mostly male crowd who were looking at the technology there. Accessorize was mostly populated with women, any men in there were accessories themselves. The Cath Kidston stall was 100% female, and the “win a sports car competition” probably had similar stats the other way. Even the companies with products for both genders still tried to separate things: different types of cosmetics in Boots, different types of magazines in Smiths, fragrances for him and for her in the Duty Free. For now, the toilets reflected a state of affairs that was immediately apparent to anyone trying to make money: men and women are different.

And by saying that, I have walked into a storm. There are two prevailing winds blowing powerfully in our culture. The first has been around a long time: women face huge injustices in many areas of life.

The other seems newer: any attempt to differentiate between men and women is seen as symptomatic of this and should therefore be silenced. Within that, there is our culture’s belief in self-definition, that even if science says that your chromosomes are

XX or XY, your feelings or desires are the ultimate guide to who you really are. How do we navigate our way through a storm this big and powerful? We need a map and a compass to show us where we are and where we need to go, and for Christians the Bible does this.

We're going to look at a passage from the Bible today which talks about there being differences between men and women. It's a complicated section which would require careful explanation even if we weren't living at a time of gender confusion. If you've ever looked at a map and thought, "I'm not quite sure what that's showing me," you'll know the feeling. But if the terrain is complicated, the map will be too. I'm going to go through the passage, and take the opportunity to teach what we at King's believe about gender, and church leadership.

Let's start with what we believe about the Bible. It is God's perfect Word to all people. We trust it and try to follow it in all that it tells us to do, including trying to build King's on the principles we see in the New Testament for church life. This can bring us into conflict with the world around us, and what we're looking at today is one of those areas. We're going against both of those prevailing winds. Because the Bible is God's truth it demands our best efforts to understand what it is saying and what it isn't saying. We study it carefully, get help from experts, and endeavour to come to trustworthy conclusions. Especially so when the topics are very emotive.

There are three sections in 1 Timothy 2:8-15:

1. Outward appearances and inner attitudes: men's prayers (verse 8)
2. Outward appearances and inner attitudes: women's fashion choices (verses 9 to 10)
3. Who gets to lead a church, how and why (verses 11 to 15)

## **1. Men's prayers**

Prayer was part of the church's public gatherings, so that's what Paul is talking about. He wants men to lift their hands as they pray, raising them towards God who hears and answers our prayers. But what really matters is what's happening in their hearts. Are they free from anger and quarrels, are they peaceable or always in conflict with others? Jesus taught the same thing when he said that we should fix any disagreement we have with someone before going to worship (Matthew 5:21-24). We know from 1

Corinthians 11:5 that Paul wanted women to pray too, but here he focuses on the tendency of some men to make a show of religion whilst really being hard-hearted towards others.

## **2. Women's fashion choices**

The same principle is at work when Paul talks about how women should dress, hence he links the sentences with “likewise also”. The outside should reflect the inside. There's a choice here, he suggests. You can dress to make yourself impressive, or you can live to make God impressive. Roman women would braid their hair and build it up into huge piles, and fix it and highlight it with gold and pearls and other precious metals and jewels. This kind of hair style needed an appropriate outfit, so that would cost plenty of money too. All their attention, therefore, was on how they looked, and not who they were. That's why Paul's alternative only mentions respectable clothing in brief and instead focuses on character qualities: Modesty / humility, self-control, godliness, good works. These, Paul says, are what make a woman really beautiful. These are what you want to spend your time on. Living this way frees you from the tyranny of fitting a standard of physical beauty, and chasing after riches needed to achieve it.

In both these instances, what the actions represent is what really matters. You can pray with your hands in your pockets if you're at peace with those around you. You could plait your hair and wear some jewellery if you focus people's attention on God's goodness rather than yourself. In both these instances, the qualities Paul mentions will only develop in us as we rely on the Holy Spirit, God Himself at work in each of us.

## **3. Who gets to lead a church, how and why**

Paul says that he wants women to learn and not to cause arguments (as he said of the men just earlier). He also doesn't want them to take a position of senior authority in the church, and he especially mentions teaching. He makes his case with two pieces of evidence from the creation accounts in Genesis. Finally he says something about childbearing that at first glance looks like nothing else he ever said.

When we're working hard to understand the Bible, we need to start with the immediate context that it was written in. Paul's talking about the local church – praying together and receiving teaching – not other areas of public life. This particular church that Paul had sent Timothy to was under assault from “false teachers” – people saying things about Jesus and Christianity which weren't true, who had been particularly effective in

persuading some of the women in the church. Timothy was there, representing Paul, to sort this out and to make sure that the leaders of the church weren't going to make the same mistakes, but would instead teach what was true. That's why the very next thing Paul talks about (start of chapter 3) is church leadership...

We call the senior leaders of King's "elders" because this is the most common term used in the New Testament for those called to lead local churches. When we look at all the passages in the New Testament that talk about church leaders, we build up a picture of who they are and what they're meant to do. So let's zoom out a bit to look at what it says.

Paul and Peter both refer to leaders as shepherds, using well-known Old Testament language for leadership that implied care and direction and protection. (The Latin word for shepherd is pastor, which is why that term also gets used.) Another word used, with similar themes, is overseer. This might sound to us like a supervisor but in the original Greek has more the sense of being a watchman. That idea of protection is found in most references to leaders: They are instructed to guard the members of the church from false doctrine, and wasteful or destructive living.

The New Testament is clear that elders aren't the only people with leadership responsibility but they are ultimately the ones who direct the affairs of the church: they have governmental authority. Because of this, elders will give an account to God for the church that they served. The Bible tells us a lot about the character qualities required of any elder but our focus today is on something else that is required of them: that they be men. Eldership is not a role that any man can do, but it is a role that only a man can do, hence Paul's distinction between men and women in our passage today. Why is this? Because I know this will be troubling some of you, and maybe even causing you to have fears about yourself or the church, I want to start by demolishing six false assumptions.

### **1. Firstly, and most importantly, this is not a question of who is better than whom.**

In both creation and salvation, God treats men and women the same, and they are shown as having exactly the same value: We are all made by the one God in His likeness (Genesis 1:27). We are all saved from our sins by the death and resurrection of Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

### **2. It's not because the writers of the New Testament were blinded by their culture's sexism.**

Unlike many other Jewish teachers, Jesus taught women, had good friendships with them, used them as positive examples in His teaching, and declared their spiritual equality with men. The writers of the gospels also show that women supported His mission with finance and hospitality. It was almost only women who stayed faithful to Him when He was being crucified, and they believed that He had risen before the male disciples did. Women were recorded as being the first witnesses of the empty tomb and the resurrected Jesus, even though at that time the testimony of a woman was not accepted by itself in law.

### **3. It's not because Paul disliked women.**

His letters tell us that Paul was friends with and worked alongside many women.

### **4. It's not because women weren't educated when the New Testament was written.**

Many of them were, and the New Testament never makes good education a qualification for leadership anyway.

### **5. It's not because women were not allowed to do anything in the New Testament churches.**

The power of the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts were given to all, so women could pray and prophecy in public, along with all the other supernatural public activities Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 12. There were plenty of practical areas of church life that we're told that women were involved with too. Moreover, early church history shows that women were especially attracted to Christianity because it recognised their dignity as fully equal with men. There is a strong argument that the western concept of equality came to us from Christianity, and research into cultures reached with the gospel more recently shows this pattern continuing even today.

### **6. Submission is not defeat.**

Submission is a word with almost entirely negative connotations in our culture. The only people who submit are those who have been conquered, one way or another, and it is never good news when they have to. That is not what the Bible tells us.

Submission is the voluntary yielding of authority to another. All Christians are called to submit to each other and to God (Ephesians 5:21) as part of a lifestyle of humble service – and imitation of Jesus! So when Paul says the women should learn with all submissiveness, he is instructing them to be Christlike. Jesus' submission to the Father's will is celebrated by Paul in Philippians 2:5-11. He was not coerced into

submitting to the Father, He delighted to do so. He did not become less divine by doing this. He did not give up His intelligence by submitting but used it fully to achieve God's will. Submission didn't ruin His life: He was vindicated and glorified because of it. To demonstrate this is a great privilege.

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That's a lot about what's not going on, now let's look at what is going on. I'm going to show you very briefly some of what the Bible says about men and women, which should help us understand why the New Testament clearly assigns the role of eldership to certain men only. This helps us see why Paul talks to Timothy about Adam and Eve. He's making what's known as an argument from creation, saying, "this is how God made us." This means it is applicable for all of us at all times. Its application may look different in different cultures but the principle is for all people in all cultures. Not only does Paul do this but Jesus does this too (Matthew 19:4).

So what do the creation accounts tell us? You don't have to believe that Genesis shows us exactly how the world was made to believe that it teaches us why it was made and what this means. It was written so that we could understand who God is, and who we are. Genesis 1 shows us a sequence of related pairs in God's creation: Heaven and Earth, sun and moon, land and sea, etc. This sequence comes to a climax with the final pair to be described, man and woman. Humanity is distinct from all the rest of creation in that we alone are made in the likeness of God, and we alone are given the rest of creation as a gift. There is far more that unites us than divides us, but there are also differences. Our biology displays this theological truth: we are the same and yet different. In Timothy Keller's phrase, "we are equal but not equivalent". There can be no sense of superiority / inferiority between Christian men and women because the Bible teaches us that we are made different for each other. We are meant to fit together, and we cannot live without each other. We are also made different for God's sake: Both man and woman are made in God's image and we can only comprehend this image fully by rejoicing in what both maleness and femaleness tell us about God.

The devil hates anything that shows the greatness of God, so unsurprisingly he works to destroy the good that gender should do. Tragically, we often co-operate with him: Men asserting themselves through their greater physical strength and social power, to the hurt and denigration of women. Women fighting back through whatever opportunities they have to do so. Genesis 3 tells us that this battle of the sexes is a direct result of sin, our rejection of God and His ways. Behaviours that demean the

other gender, from mockery to abuse to institutional bias, are completely ungodly. But the way to correct the abuse of a good thing is not to abandon it but to redeem it. Knives can be used for violence – but this doesn't mean we shouldn't throw them all away or blunt them. We want them to be in the hands of doctors performing life-saving surgery, and cooks preparing life-giving food.

We have to carefully work out how to live the fullness of life that God intended for us, so that our gender differences are celebrated as good gifts from God. The sociological changes of the past century have given women new and more opportunities, which encourage us to affirm the Bible's teaching of men and women being equal in dignity as God's image-bearers. What we risk losing amidst this is the fact that men and women do have essential and vital differences which should also be celebrated.

There are two areas of life in which the Bible assigns different roles to men and women because of their gender: marriage and church leadership. These two areas are profoundly related to each other: the husband's role as head of the household is equated with that of a church elder. Ephesians 5 tells us that marriage is ultimately a picture of Christ's love for the church which should demonstrate to the world how Jesus treats the church and how the church responds to Him. Within a marriage, the role of illustrating Christ is given to the husband, and illustrating the church to the wife. This interplay between a husband and a wife is not meant to be how all men and all women relate to each other. And when Jesus returns, marriage will have served its function and neither husbands nor wives will play the roles they currently do. A Christian husband and wife need to work out what the roles they've been given look like where they live.

The one other place where certain men have a different role is in the church, which is called the household of God. Most early Christian communities met in private homes rather than public buildings, but "household" was also a powerful description of the familial nature of the relationships Christians are to have. Using this image, elders are called to take the role of head of the household. This is why elders are men – and usually husbands and fathers, because they have proved their trustworthiness for the role in the corresponding areas.

This teaching of "equal but not equivalent" is known as complementarianism. For us at King's, this means:

- All women and men are equal in value in God's eyes and ours.

- Gender is a God-given blessing which glorifies God when it is recognised and respected.
- Within marriage and church leadership there are distinct roles for men and women to play.
- Eldership in the church is equated with the role of the husband in the family, so only men should be appointed as elders.

Currently our elders are myself, Dan, and Matthew who leads our team. When we're doing our job well, people in the church feel secure, purposeful, and released to serve as God has gifted them...

- We're about to invite applications for the next intake on our leadership training programme, New Ground Academy – want to continue our current 50/50 split between men and women.
- Midweek small groups are usually led by men and women together, either in a pair
  - \* We try to have both men and women serving in all areas of church life, and any ministry or serving team can be led by either a man or a woman.
- We expect spiritual gifts to be received and used by women and men.
- And we welcome input and ideas from everyone.

Just to say, the New Testament does not give a job description for an elder's wife, so we don't either. Of course they have unique access and insight to their husband but they don't have defined roles and responsibilities in the life of the church. How they serve the church is up to them and the gifting God has given them.

Because the New Testament consistently describes teaching as a key part of an elder's role, most of our Sunday preaching will be done by the elders. Men and women from within and outwith King's can be invited to speak by the elders but do not do so with the same authority to direct the affairs of the church. And this takes us back to the passage we started with in 1 Timothy 2.

"Hang on," you might be thinking, "didn't Paul say that women couldn't teach or have authority over men in the church?" And if you've been here for many years you might add: "And didn't you used to not allow women to preach on Sunday because of that? What's going on?" Let me explain, because this is a recent change in our practise.

We have always believed that the New Testament celebrates women explaining the gospel and prophesying. And that it encourages both women and men to be "teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom" (Colossians 3:16) and expecting the Holy



Spirit to give them “utterances of wisdom” (1 Corinthians 12:8). Previously we have defined a sermon at a Sunday meeting as different from those contributions which are open to all, wanting to do justice to what Paul says in 1 Timothy 2. As we’ve continued to think this through, and been asked by people and the culture, “Are you sure you’ve got this right?”, we’ve been helped by recent scholarship to see what Paul is and isn’t prohibiting here. He is saying that women should not teach the church in a manner that resembles an elder teaching.

In *Hearing Her Voice*, John Dickson shows that there are several public-speaking ministries mentioned in the New Testament, and the only one that is restricted to certain men is a form of “teaching”. This teaching is the preserving and passing on of the sayings and actions of Jesus, and the apostles’ commentary on them, which the apostles gave to all the churches they founded. The essential message and truths of Christianity. A teacher was responsible for ensuring that the church stayed faithful to what it had been told. Eventually these oral records were written down and recognised as the New Testament. So has this role of teacher ceased now that we all know what the New Testament is? No: it continues in every church to this day in what is interpreted, taught, and practised as divinely-revealed truth, and passed on as such to the next generation. We think that “preserving and passing-on” is a role for elders in the church, as it fits with the call to guard the church and the emphasis in the New Testament on elders being able to teach. They are to set the doctrinal agenda for the church.

Naturally, the Sunday sermon is an important context for ensuring this kind of “teaching” is given, but it is not the only context, nor does a sermon have to be “teaching” in this way. Often what’s said on a Sunday could be more accurately described in New Testament terms as exhortation – bringing challenge and encouragement – or even prophecy – bringing revelation of God’s will. Both should come from God’s Word, but aren’t necessarily defining it. This being the case, elders can invite anyone who is gifted, male or female, to speak on a Sunday. Elders will continue to do the majority of preaching, and always have the final say on what is taught and how. This is what we mean by the elders having governmental authority in their preaching and leading. This is also why we always try to ensure that there is at least one elder present at every Sunday meeting, serving the church with loving oversight.

With all this New Testament context in mind, let’s go back to 1 Timothy 2. Paul talks

about Adam being made before Eve – why does that matter? In the Bible, the firstborn child had certain rights and responsibilities. They didn't simply get the biggest inheritance to do with as they liked – they got the responsibility to care for their rest of their family. So Paul is saying that Adam was responsible for the care and protection of Eve – just as every husband is meant to care for and protect his wife, and every elder is meant to care for and protect their church.

Then he goes on to talk about how it was Eve who was deceived and not Adam. He can't be saying that women are more gullible, can he? No! He knows that the Bible records many more men than women fooling themselves and being fooled. The false teachers troubling that church were men! He wouldn't be surprised to see airport shops convincing both men and women to spend their money on things they don't need. Moreover, if Paul had thought that women were more gullible, he wouldn't have allowed them to do all the things that he does encourage them to do! What is going on? In Genesis 3, when God knows that Eve has been deceived, and that she and Adam have eaten the forbidden fruit, who does He talk to about it? He says to Adam, "What have you done?" Adam tries to shift the blame to Eve, who also tries to pass it on to the snake, but when Paul refers to this in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15, both times he says that the sin was Adam's. Why? Because Adam represented and was responsible for his family. Adam was standing right next to Eve when the serpent tempted her, and Adam did nothing about it! This is Paul's fear for the church at Ephesus, that it will become like Eden! False teachers are whispering into the ears of certain women to believe lies, and they are being convinced and starting to act on these, and their elders aren't doing anything about it! Don't let this happen, Paul commands Timothy. Teach what is right, what I gave you as God's revelation, and get the elders to do the same. Don't let them be like Adam and fail in their responsibility.

Finally, we get to the phrase "she will be saved through childbearing." What does this mean? It cannot mean that having children makes you a Christian. Obviously that excludes all the guys, and it will exclude many women as well. In this very same chapter Paul has already said that it's only God who saves us and this happens through Jesus alone. I think that Paul's imagination is still in Eden, in Genesis 3. There's a word in the Greek that's missing in most English translations of this phrase because scholars aren't sure if it needs to be there or not: "She will be saved through the childbearing." This isn't about any child, but one child. As the terrible consequences of their sin were laid before Adam and Eve, God made Eve a promise.

You brought this on yourself, and your husband didn't help you. But through you, I will bring hope to the world. He says to the serpent: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." (Genesis 3:15) Then it says, "The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living." (Genesis 3:20) Generation upon generation upon generation will come from you, Eve, and eventually the One who made you will be born through your descendant, Mary. And He will not fail. He won't abandon you like Adam did, nor will He humiliate or abuse you. He will care for and protect you and all your sons and daughters. He will crush the serpent's head, and defeat sin and death that came into the world through you. All women will find their hope in him, and all men too. He will save them from their sins, and reconcile them to each other through Him.

This is the day we live in. The fullness of this is still to come but it has begun. We can celebrate the differences between men and women because we're secure in our shared identity as children of God, adopted through Jesus. It takes a lot of getting used to, so we need to continually have grace for each other, and bear with one another when we get this wrong. But with God, all things are possible. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." (2 Corinthians 13:14)



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