

## Littlebourne Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2025 – 1 Timothy 2:8-15 – PH

<sup>8</sup> Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing. <sup>9</sup> I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, <sup>10</sup> but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. <sup>11</sup> A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. <sup>12</sup> I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. <sup>13</sup> For Adam was formed first, then Eve. <sup>14</sup> And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. <sup>15</sup> But she will be saved through childbearing – if she continues in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

This is a controversial passage of Scripture and to understand it we need to establish some basic points of doctrine.

Firstly do we all agree that all Scripture is God breathed and that what Paul writes is not his opinion but God's opinion? Last week we saw that Paul wrote with confidence in verse 7 *"And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle – I am telling the truth, I am not lying – and a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles."* Paul says what he writes is the truth. Our Reformed church claims that the Bible is the inerrant truth. The Scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit, they are infallible – which means incapable of error – and are authoritative – which means they are the final court of appeals for the life and conscience of all believers. If we have trouble with these points then are we not substituting our opinions over God's? If we don't agree with this, then we will be among those who only agree with the bits they like and believe they can ignore the bits they dislike. Are those not the ones that Jesus says that they did things in his name but he never knew them? Surrender to God is all or nothing; either for God or against him. There is no middle ground claiming to be a disciple following Jesus one day and ignoring him another day by doing what a disciple should not be doing in the expectation that Jesus will forgive without repentance. Does anyone believe God turns a blind eye to our sin when we deliberately choose sin? We are all sinners but a desire to ignore bits of Scripture we disagree with means we are being dragged away by our own desires and enticed to believe something that is untrue in order to satisfy our own desires. James 1:14-15 *"but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. <sup>15</sup> Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."*

Secondly do we all agree that Scripture is God communicating to mankind eternal truths which in some cases were for a certain time and place and yet at the same time are good for all time and place? Do we consider the Bible an instruction manual or a book of suggestions from which we can select the ones we like and ignore the ones we don't like. Our own denomination has chosen to ignore bits of Scripture that its leaders have decided no longer apply to our time after 1900 years when they weren't ignored. These are that women can be in leadership, that a church leader can be divorced and remarried, that God can bless same sex relationships, that there is no distinction between the roles of men and women, that a majority vote is God's will and that sex outside of marriage between a man and a woman is not sinful. There will be some in the church who believe all paths lead to God when Jesus says *"No one comes to the Father except through me"* John 14:6. There is a danger that if we don't stand firm and oppose falsehood, we end up sliding into compromise and error ourselves, since we are always inclined to corruption no matter how pure our Church may be on paper.

But it is equally dangerous to stand against things in a way that loses sight of our Lord Jesus. The law of love overrides many things. In the Bible, both Jude and James tell us to contend by having mercy on those who doubt and by saving those who wander <sup>19</sup> *My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, <sup>20</sup> remember this: whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.* (James 5:19-20). If we are

servants of the Lord, we *“must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. <sup>25</sup> Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, <sup>26</sup> and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.”* 2 Timothy 2:24-26. Our relationships must remain sufficiently respectful and dignified that we are able to speak in a way that they can hear and learn and, by God’s grace, repent.

Let’s look at the first verse in this passage:

*<sup>8</sup> Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.* I think that we can all agree that we should all pray and that our prayers should be guided by Holy Spirit to praise God and be in line with Scripture. So when for example we pray for healing, God says *I am the Lord that heals you* Exodus 15:26. The Word says *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.* (Isaiah 53:5) *Heal me, Lord and I shall be healed; save me and I shall be saved, for you are the one I praise.* (Jeremiah 17:14). We should have no problem with verse 8. Prayer is always good and should be done without being angry or argumentative. Paul must have found some in Ephesus praying in a way that was not helpful to the believers there.

*<sup>9</sup> I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, <sup>10</sup> but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.*

I don’t think we have a problem with these two verses either. If for example the women in the worship group or elsewhere are dressed immodestly and the focus of men is on their bodies, it will be a distraction. We know at many weddings, christenings, and even baptisms, women will show up in revealing clothing, elaborate hairstyles, expensive clothes and wear a lot of jewelry and make up to look attractive. That is inappropriate if it makes the focus of such events the womenfolk rather than God. We pray so often “lead us not into temptation” but as we all know the purpose of looking attractive is to attract attention on the person. And why would women dress inappropriately unless it is to get attention? When we worship shouldn’t our eyes and our attention be on God? Paul is just making a distinction between the outward beauty and the inward beauty of women. It’s not about how you look in church but how you serve in church. So far so good!

*<sup>11</sup> A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. <sup>12</sup> I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.* We now come to the contentious verses that women won’t like. Other translations would replace “assume authority” with “usurp authority”. Reading this, does it not say that women should shut up and be quiet in church? I Corinthians 14:34-35 *<sup>34</sup> Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. <sup>35</sup> If they want to enquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.* Taken out of context without the reason for this, it may sound offensive to women. The Word of God is often offensive. Take for example Deuteronomy 22:28-29 *<sup>28</sup> If a man happens to meet a virgin who is not pledged to be married and rapes her and they are discovered, <sup>29</sup> he shall pay her father fifty shekels of silver. He must marry the young woman, for he has violated her. He can never divorce her as long as he lives.* Is this an example of Scripture no longer applying to our society and so we can ignore it? There are plenty more.

When it comes to the Old Testament, we are to accept the moral laws, but not the ceremonial and civil laws. The example mentioned on rape would probably come under civil laws rather than moral laws, though they do concern moral behaviour. The principle for sinning in the case of the rapist is that in making a woman unmarriageable, he has to look after her for life. We recognise that principle today, but

will apply it differently in our civil law today because our society isn't like it was in the early Iron Age. Apologists have sought to claim that Paul's words were about the church in Corinth where the women talked among themselves and were disruptive and the church in Ephesus where they dressed to impress and tried to dominate their menfolk. There is another example of a woman causing trouble in the early church. The church in Thyatira had a Jezebel prophetess leading people astray. Her actions infected the whole church. Again let's look at the principles here rather than the specifics. Disruption and distraction and coming under the domination of a prophetess leading people astray doesn't model good behaviour.

When Paul says women should not teach or have authority over a man in the church, he is being very blunt about the position of women in their relationship with men. The Bible is clear about the positions of men and women and that they have different roles. The man is the head of the house and has the ultimate responsibility for what happens there and his wife must respect her husband. As soon as a husband loses the respect of his wife, the marriage is on a downward slope. Ephesians 5:21-33 <sup>21</sup> *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.* <sup>22</sup> *Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.* <sup>23</sup> *For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour.* <sup>24</sup> *Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.* <sup>25</sup> *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her* <sup>26</sup> *to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,* <sup>27</sup> *and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.* <sup>28</sup> *In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.* <sup>29</sup> *After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church –* <sup>30</sup> *for we are members of his body.* <sup>31</sup> *'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.* <sup>32</sup> *This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church.* <sup>33</sup> *However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*

The authority of a man over his wife and his responsibility to love her and nurture her is what God desires in marriage and is part of his model of creation. What Paul is saying is not that husbands be should be the head... he says they are the head of the wife. Men are given roles by God – like responsibility, a job many do not want. Women in turn may want roles that they cannot have and have jobs they don't want. God has given us particular roles and we should seek to do them to the best of our ability.

When it comes to authority in the church, who has it? Do ministers or elders have authority over the flock? Jesus has the ultimate authority in his church. Leaders must not go beyond what is written (1 Cor 4:6). All demands on both pastoral and parental authority come from the Word of God. Leaders who reveal the Word of God must use the Bible to support their oversight, disciplining, revelation, preaching or teaching. When it comes to gifts, can they be exercised by both men and women? Romans 12:6-8 lists teaching and leading – but it says "let him teach" and "let him govern diligently". Men only. 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 lists gifts which are open to all – notice that it excludes teaching and leading. Paul is consistent in his letters about this. Holy Spirit is not double minded. There are many today who no longer accept what Paul wrote when differentiating male and female roles, because we live in an age of equality. As I see it, men aren't willing or able to fulfil the roles Paul, through the guidance of Holy Spirit, says are exclusively for men. Paul is quite blunt about women in leadership. I work with women in leadership whose gifts I recognise and appreciate. They do what men ought to be doing.

Verses 13 and 14 explain further <sup>13</sup> *For Adam was formed first, then Eve.* <sup>14</sup> *And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.* Adam's role was to lead that first family in the way God had taught him, to remind Eve what God had said and how they were to live. He was responsible. That is the role of a man: Adam, the first man, was the head not just of his wife, but is the head of all humanity, and men down the ages have sinned in the same way he did, by neglecting their

God given responsibility. Headship is how men and women relate to each other and to Christ, head of the church, and just as in Adam all sinned, in Christ all are made alive (Romans 5:18-19). It doesn't matter if a woman or a man is teaching false doctrine or heresy, Godly men should call them out. Adam failed in his duty to protect Eve from falsehoods told her by the serpent and we all pay the price as sin came into the world. "Did God really say that?" is what so many say when finding a passage with instructions contrary to their own desires.

The last verse of the chapter: <sup>15</sup> *But she will be saved through childbearing – if she continues in faith, love and holiness with propriety.* Taken the wrong way it can seem dismissive. Does it say that having children will save you? Are we not saved by grace? William Edwy Vine a Victorian commentator wrote "By means of begetting children and so fulfilling the design appointed for her through motherhood, ... she may be saved from becoming a prey to the social evils of the time and would take her part in the maintenance of the local church". We need children so the church has her future leaders and disciples to spread Good News! We need mothers full of faith, love and holiness.

Paul writes in his letter to Titus who was a church leader in Crete - Titus 2:4-2 *Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good.* <sup>4</sup> *Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children,* <sup>5</sup> *to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.*

Paul is not saying that women should not pray and prophesy in church, but those who are disruptive should be silent. When it comes to the role of men and women, the Bible clearly teaches that they are different. We all are given plenty to do and God equips us all to live faithfully in the roles we are given.

David Pawson who wrote an excellent book "Unlocking the Bible" described himself as being in the people recycling business, as we are taken from the rubbish tip (Gehenna was the rubbish tip in Jerusalem, which Jesus used to symbolise hell (Matthew 23:33)) through baptism of water and Holy Spirit to be what God intended us to be. When men behave like women and women behave like men, we distort the beauty of God's creation. Do we not want manly men and womanly women in the church so that God is glorified?

As we go on through the letter to Timothy we can see that the church needs order and management by Godly men in order to face the challenges that Christians face in societies which do not accept Jesus as Lord, and reject Christian values. Ephesus was city where Artemis was worshipped and the Roman empire a place where many beliefs were seen as equally valid. Today we're in much the same situation. The churches that still follow the Word of God faithfully grow. Those that don't are shrinking. This the reality which so many face as they soldier on hoping things will get better. A church has to be based on love, but it also has to follow Christ and not allow love of those who want to do what is not in his Word to override what is in his Word.

The Word of God speaks for itself under the guidance of Holy Spirit. John 16:13 *But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.* Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:13-16 about his own words which will apply to all his letters to the church, regardless of whether we like what he says or not. <sup>13</sup> *This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.* <sup>14</sup> *The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.* <sup>15</sup> *The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments,* <sup>16</sup> *for, 'Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.*

So keep on praying and keep on bringing before Jesus our concerns, our requests and our praise. He is in control and we can rely on him to guide and preserve his church as his precious bride, whatever the world throws at her. She is built on a rock and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

God gives us all a role to play in this building up of His church, in the work of the great commission - baptising with water and Spirit, and teaching people to obey all Jesus commanded. In the most important work of the church – in worship, faith and being united to Christ, we can say with Paul:

*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* Galatians 3:28. That is about salvation. Whatever our role, we all come to Christ undeserving but welcomed by our saviour.

### **Footnote**

This is my understanding of these verses in Paul's letter to Timothy. When we look at verses in Scripture we have to look at context, whether they are consistent with other verses throughout the whole Bible, what they actually mean in either Hebrew or Greek as written, and what revelation they bring to guide us in our walk with God. There are instances of God using women \*\* in the Bible doing what men could or should have done, but what they did is exceptional and does not override the prescriptive instructions given for men by the Holy Spirit who is the author of Scripture.

Sola scriptura; solus Christus; sola fide; sola gratia; soli deo gloria – these five tenets summarise the theology of the Protestant Reformed church. Scripture only; Christ only; by faith only; by grace only; glory to God alone.

The views expressed may not be shared by all of St Andrew's United Reformed Church congregation and leadership.

\*\* Judith and Esther, for example, did what only women could do because of where God positioned them. Deborah was judge because the menfolk all turned their backs on God. In the New Testament Priscilla with her husband Aquila revealed to Apollos somewhat more than he already knew. None were church leaders.

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