

The Counter-Cultural Call of Women

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Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 00] Well, if you haven't noticed, we are currently in our world, in our culture, in our moment in history, we are in the middle of a war on gender.

You know what I mean? If you look around, if you look at movies, if you look at Hollywood, if you look at what's coming out of the States, but not just the States, the West at large, the idea, the very idea of gender, of there being male and female, that very idea which has been assumed for thousands of years without question, is now suddenly in the last generation, the last few decades, it's being attacked.

The idea that genders are fixed is under attack, and you see it in schools. Children are actively encouraged by schooling curriculums to question their own gender.

You see it in toilets, gender-neutral toilets. You see it in encouraging people to choose their own pronouns, rather than the pronouns you were assigned at birth.

And this is the movement, this is the war we're currently facing in our culture, this war on gender. Now, as Christians, we shouldn't be surprised at this, because this is just the most recent manifestation of the bigger rebellion of humans against their Creator.

[1 : 30] That's what it is, and we know that. The Bible makes it quite clear that since the fall, we have been in rebellion against our Creator, and every boundary that God places for our lives that are good for us, we want to cross.

We want to break those boundaries. And so this war on gender is just the latest manifestation in sinful humanity, wanting to break every boundary that our Creator has made for our good.

And we know that. But we still face this cultural war that we're in as Christians. And what that means is that to suggest that not only God made males and females specifically different, but to suggest that each has a different role to play in creation, in society, and in the church, to even suggest that these days is unacceptable, right?

When you suggest that males and females are a sign made by God different, and they have different roles to play, well, then you're seen as archaic, oppressive, and bigoted today.

And that is why passages like 1 Timothy chapter 2, the passage we're dealing with this morning, that talk about the specific role of women in the church, that's the topic, that's why passages like that are so uncomfortable.

[2 : 54] Uncomfortable to hear, and I assure you, uncomfortable to preach on. Especially when you get to verses like verse 11. If you have your Bibles open, 1 Timothy chapter 2, verse 11 and 12, listen to what this says.

And as I read it, just note how uncomfortable you are. Note how it rubs up against everything our culture tells us to think. A woman is to learn quietly with full submission.

I do not allow a woman to teach or have authority over a man. Instead, she is to remain quiet. I mean, how much does that rub up against the way that our culture is going?

And so when we read things like that in the Bible, the first temptation, the knee-jerk reaction is to write this off, to say, no, no, well, you know, Paul was actually, he was talking into a different culture.

It doesn't apply today. And many Bible teachers try to do that because passages like this are so uncomfortable. The temptation is just to explain them away or to avoid them altogether.

[3 : 56] You know, when you're putting preaching roster together, ooh, that's a tough one, let's just skip that. Let's just go straight to chapter 3. And many, many people will do that. Many people will try to explain passages like this away or avoid them altogether, but we must not fall for that.

We don't do that here at St. Mark's. We tackle the tough passages because we believe that everything in the Bible is inspired by God and is here for us in 2023 as much as it was for the

original church that Paul wrote to.

And what I want us to see this morning is that passages like this that really rub up against our political correctness are actually more important for us than ever.

And passages on the role of genders are more important than ever given the cultural war we're facing. See, because not only is there a deep wisdom in understanding the different roles that God has designed for men and women, but it's when Christians, and in this case women, Christian women particularly, embrace rather than avoid their counter-cultural call.

It's when they embrace their counter-cultural call that the church becomes most effective to reach a lost and confused world. And so what I want us to do this morning is look at this passage, dive into it, and consider what is this counter-cultural call of Christian women that the Bible is calling women to.

[5 : 39] And as we look at this passage, there are two elements of this counter-cultural call that I want us to look in turn. The first element, and I do encourage you to have your Bibles open in front of you, especially because we don't have the screen, so I don't have the outline or the verses behind me.

So you need to see these. Don't just take my word for it. Don't ever do that. Don't ever take our word because we're standing up here and we have fancy clothes or we're in a pulpit, that this is what the Bible says. You've got to see this in your own Bibles, right?

And the first element of this counter-cultural call to Christian women is to pursue true beauty. To pursue true beauty.

Now, last week, if you were here, which I hope you were, we heard about men's counter-cultural call. There was Paul, who's writing this to Timothy, addressed last week's passage particularly to men, and it's summarized again in verse 8, which is the beginning of our passage this morning. It says this, Therefore, I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument. So what he's saying, that's the summary of last week's teaching, and what he's saying is that men, Christian men, are not to be like the men of the world.

[6 : 58] They're not to project power, their power, in the way that is typical of men in the world, which is in aggression and anger, right? As anybody who's driven with a man will know.

If he's driving, there's testosterone, and our immediate reaction is to be angry, is to be aggressive. But Paul writes, and he says, no, Christian men are not to fall into the pattern of the world and do what all the other men do, but they are instead to humble themselves in prayer.

So instead of to be what the world says a man should be, this independent man, you know, this kind of, this Hollywood kind of independent figure who's strong and doesn't rely on anyone, Christian men are actually the opposite.

True Christian masculinity is to be dependent and weak and humble oneself and find our strength in God through prayer, and men are to lead in that. Anyway, that was last week, so listen to that sermon if you haven't.

That is true Christian masculinity as opposed to masculinity in the world. But now we come to the passage on women. And Paul addresses women in a similar way and challenges one of the key ways women typically project power.

[8 : 18] And how is that? Through how they look. Now it's no secret that women in the world use their looks to gain power over men.

You only have to look at what advertisers do. If advertisers want to sell something to men, what will they do? No matter what it is, it can be a car, it can be a can of Coke, but they'll put an attractive woman with it.

Because advertisers know this is accepted science, that they sell better to men if there's attractive women, if they can use looks of women, because that has real power over men.

We know that. Our society knows that. Women know that. Now back then, what did that look like? What did women exercising their power over men look like?

Well, we see that in verse 9. Elaborate hairstyles, gold, pearls, and expensive apparel.

[9 : 23] Now those in that culture, those things were typically associated with sexually available women. So if you were seeking an available and sexually active outside of marriage, this is what you would look like.

You would use your looks to attract men to you. Today's version might be different. It will be different. Today's version of that, I suppose, is skimpy outfits.

You know those items of clothing you see sold to women and girls today that are like just way less material than what you're paying for.

You know, you see them and they're like 200, 300 rand, and it's like this size. I don't even know how that can fit on most women, and yet they make it fit. But you've got to ask, why do women, why do girls choose to wear those things?

Is it because it objectively looks good? No. It's because it's sexy. Right? Because they know this will attract men. This is men's weakness. Their eyes.

[10 : 34] And it is. And so this will have power over them. They appeal to men's lust. And outfits and the way women choose to present themselves in today's world is a way to get power.

It always has been. And the reason is because it works. Men fall for it. Men are weak. Especially when it comes to sexuality.

Especially when it comes to the eye gate, visual. That is men's weakness, sinful men's weakness. And women know that.

Society knows that, and they exploit it. But here, in today's passage, Christian women are called to refrain from using this power. Yes, you have this power.

Don't use it. Is what Paul is saying. Not only because that's unhelpful for your Christian brothers.

But, Christian women are called to focus on a different and counter-cultural kind of beauty.

[11 : 40] That the world doesn't tell you about. And that the world doesn't promote. But that is true beauty in God's eyes. And that is the beauty of a godly character. Look at verse 9 to 10.

Women are to dress themselves in modest clothing with decency. That's a character trait. And good sense.

Not with elaborate hairstyles, gold pearls, expensive apparel. But with good works as is proper for women who profess to worship God. decency, self-control.

But, decency, self-control. Self-control. Good works. works. These are the things that comprise true beauty in God's eyes.

But the world does not tell you that. The world puts no stock in those kind of things. You don't see, for example, on the cover of Vogue magazine, the headline article, 10 steps to kindness.

[12 : 37] Or how to improve your self-control. No. It's all about to look better. Not to be a better character. And yet, beauty of character that the world does not put stock in.

That the world doesn't care about. That you don't see on magazine covers. Beauty of character in God's eyes. That is true beauty. And that is what marks out true Christian women.

Now, the apostle is not saying that women are not to dress well. Okay? Let's just get that straight.

He's not saying that you can spot St. Mark's women by their 90s fashion.

But it's the principle behind what he's saying. He's saying, the Bible is saying, and this is God inspired through him, is saying to us, the first way Christian women are to stand out against the culture is to aspire to inner beauty more than outer beauty.

And so, women, it is worth asking how much time you spend on developing your godly character as opposed to how much time you spend looking in the mirror.

[13 : 48] Because the gospel allows you to be a person that you could not be before. The gospel and what Jesus has done gives us all power to change.

And particularly for women, it gives you power to be truly beautiful in a way that you could not be before. So, how much time do you spend on developing the kind of beautiful character that God calls you to as opposed to developing the outer beauty that the world calls you to?

And that is the only thing the world cares about. But we know what God cares about. That is the challenge to Christian women here. But I think it's also a challenge to Christian men.

Don't think you've escaped this morning. Because the challenge to Christian men is, well, is that what you look for in a woman? Is that what you really value in a woman?

Rather than what the world says you must value. Rather than what the world says every week and every day. It's through the media. It's telling you value beauty. Value external beauty.

[14 : 55] And it's trying to make you superficial. Whereas true beauty is what we should value as Christian men in women. Do you? It's worth asking.

But that is the first way, the first part of this counter-cultural call to Christian women that we see this morning. But the second part, the second way as we move on in the passage, that women are called to stand against the culture, and this is the most controversial one, is to let men lead.

To let men lead. Look from verse 11. A woman is to learn quietly with full submission. I do not allow a woman to teach or to have authority over a man.

Instead, she is to remain quiet. Okay. Now, I've got to qualify this. Paul is not saying here that women are never to speak in church. Or never to have roles where their voice is heard.

In fact, later on, he encourages actively women to teach younger women. There are prophetesses in the New Testament who stood up and gave prophecies when those were still needed before the Bible was complete.

[16:11] Women had very important roles in the early church. So what he's not saying here is just women must always just stay quiet. But it's in the context of what was happening in Timothy's church where it seems that the women were actually taking the authoritative teaching roles in the church and leading the church.

And the men were letting them. Because, hey, you know, the instinct for men is to be lazy. And if the woman wanted to go and lead the church, most men will go, okay, that's fine.

I'm just going to, you know, sit and watch rugby or whatever. Not that they had rugby back then, but you know what I mean. It is the men's instinct to just go, okay, fine, I'm so exhausted from a week at work anyway, so you do what you need to do.

That's kind of what was happening in Ephesus, it seems, that the women were standing up and taking the leading roles in the church. And that's what Paul writes against here. And he is adamant that that shouldn't happen.

And then he gives the reason. And what's fascinating, as you read the next few verses, is that the reason he gives that women shouldn't be leading the church and taking these authoritative teaching roles in the church, is not reasons that associated with something in Ephesus in that time.

[17:27] Like many people say, oh, you know, Paul was writing into a particular time and it just applied to that culture but not to ours. No, if you look at the next few verses, the reason he gives for this instruction is rooted in creation itself.

Look at verse 13 to 14. This is why he says that women shouldn't be leading authoritatively and teaching authoritatively in a church.

For Adam was formed first, then Eve, and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and transgressed. Okay, so again, I've got to qualify this.

This is not saying that women are naturally more gullible than men, as some people misuse this text. It's not saying that at all. But what it is, is that it's pointing to the different roles that God gave men and women in creation, which he did.

And Paul is mentioning what happens when these roles are ignored. So, if we go back to Genesis and we look what happened, in summary, God, when he created humans, he created the man first and then he created the woman.

[18:43] And they both had particular roles. The man's role was to lead the human project forward. He was the one who named the animals. He was the one who named Eve, woman.

And the man's role was to teach what God has said. So, what you may have noticed, or maybe not noticed, in Genesis, actually it was in Genesis 2.

We didn't even read that from Genesis 3. But if you look at what God says, when he gives commands about the eating from the tree, for example, he tells the man, not the woman.

The man's job is to guard everything that God says and to pass it on, to teach and to guard God's word from being broken.

God gives his word to Adam to then pass on to Eve. Then woman is created and woman is created with a different role, but as important.

[19:44] Women are as indispensable as men in God's plan for humanity. Women are made to help the man do his authoritative role.

To back him up by specifically doing things that the man can't do. Women are made to give and nurture life.

They are the life givers of creation. I can't get pregnant, right? I can't have a baby. It's one of the most amazing things God has given humans the ability to do, but I can't do it.

Women, for example, that is one of the key roles of women in creation. Women have this amazing high calling to be the life givers and the nurturers of lives and families in a way that men can't.

And so together, if you take men's particular roles to lead, to guard, to teach, and women's particular roles to give and nurture life, and you put those together, those two sexes create the

perfect team to image God and to carry forward the human project.

[20 : 55] That was the plan. But it only worked when women particularly voluntarily submitted to their role under man's lead.

That's the only way that this beautiful teamwork could work. That is women's calling in a way. That was women's challenge, and it became even more challenging after sin to submit to the role under, because it's hard for any of us, isn't it, to submit to someone else's authority.

And yet, that is the way that God designed men and women to work together to carry forward His project in the world. One leading and one following and assisting and supporting that lead.

It's like dancing. Anybody who's ever done ballroom dancing will know the only way it works is when there's a leader and a follower. And it's not that the follower is worse than the leader, and it's not that the follower is any less valuable than the leader.

It's that they both recognize their roles. And most of the time in dancing, the lead is taken by the man, and the following is taken by the woman. And the dance only works when the roles are clear.

[22 : 12] And you don't have the woman, when she's dancing and following, going, oh, you know, this man is so oppressive to me. No, she understands that if both were leaders, the dance wouldn't work.

You'd step on each other's toes. You'd bump into each other. You'd both be pulling at each other. And if both are followers, the dance doesn't work, because then you don't know where you're going. And in the same way as dancing, it's only beautiful when each partner is taking their different but complementary role.

So that is how God designed humanity. That is how God designed men and women. When they both understand and embrace the role that God has given them, that's when it works.

That's when things happen. That's when it is a beautiful dance. So what went wrong? Well, the fall that we read about in Genesis 3 happened when these roles were disregarded.

The fall happened specifically when Eve took the lead and Adam failed to. Let's have a look actually again in Genesis. Turn there with me, Genesis 2 and 3, right at the beginning of your Bibles.

[23 : 23] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. If you want an explanation of what the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is and is and what's going on here, listen to our Genesis series that's available on our website.

I don't have time to get into that now, but the point that I want you to notice is that God created a boundary, and who did he tell? Who did he tell about that boundary?

Who did he give his word to? It was the man. The Lord God commanded the man, verse 16, you are free to eat from this tree, but not from any tree except this one, the knowledge of good and evil. But then look what happened, the next chapter. This is describing the fall of humanity into sin. How did it all start? Chapter 3, verse 6, the woman and the serpent had just had a conversation.

[24 : 42] The man was nowhere to be seen yet. And verse 6, the woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom.

And so she went to Adam and checked. Hey, this is what the serpent said. Do you think that's a good idea? Nope. That's not what she did. Even though Adam was the one who was instructed by God, no.

She, what did she actually do? She took some of its fruit and she ate it. And then she also gave some to her husband who was with her. And he ate it. Do you see what's going on here?

Eve is taking the lead. Even though Adam is the one entrusted with God's word. She doesn't consult with Adam. And Adam doesn't say anything. He fails to do his job to guard the word of God that is entrusted to him.

And so both of them are failing in their roles. Adam is just sitting in the background, taking a back seat, very passive, letting Eve drive.

[25 : 45] They're disregarding the roles that God has given them as man and woman. You think this thing about God giving men and women different roles.

You think it's only offensive in today's culture. Well, no. They found it offensive right at the beginning. They didn't like that idea. And so they disregarded those roles. And what that did, when men and women, who were meant to be this good, perfect team to image God and carry the human project forward, when they disregarded the roles that God has given them, that opened the door for sin and brokenness to enter into our world.

Because once they crossed those boundaries, why don't we cross all the boundaries? I want you to notice what happened afterwards. In Genesis 3, after the fall, God then, and we heard it earlier, he outlines the results.

And I think, you know, God is authoritatively giving this curse to humans, but I think he's doing it with pain in his voice. When I read it, I always imagine God is pained to give these results over to humans.

But they are the inevitable results of transgressing God's boundaries. And then each of the parties involved, he specifies the result that the fall and sin is going to have on them.

[27 : 05] And when he comes to women, and he specifies the results that sin will have on women, it's very interesting what he says. 3 verse 16. This is Genesis 3 verse 16.

He said to the woman, I will intensify your labor pains. You will bear children with painful effort. Your desire will be for your husband, yet he will rule over you.

So what God is saying to Eve, to woman, is that because of the fall, because of the entrance of sin into the world, it will now be even more difficult for you to fulfill your God-given role as life givers.

Now that will be hard. The very key act of giving life in bearing children will be painful. And the second part of it, it will be very hard for you to submit to the lead of men.

That's essentially what the language here means. When he says your desire will be for your husband, it's not just saying you will like him, or you will like how he looks. That language is actually your desire will be to rule over him.

[28 : 12] And yet he will rule over you. It is a desire for control. And so the curse, you see, the fall makes it even more difficult for women to fulfill their creation roles.

But there's also a curse for men. Have a look at the next few verses. Look at the result of sin for men. From verse 17. And he said to the man, Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, do not eat from it.

The ground is cursed because of you. You will eat from it by means of painful labor all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you.

So the curse of man is exhaustion and preoccupation with worldly labor, which means that he will happily let the women lead and rule and make decisions.

And so you see how both the man's and the woman's role have been manipulated by sin, such that there's going to now be a conflict between them, and the weaknesses of each are going to contribute to this conflict, because the door has now been opened for sin.

[29 : 30] And what that results in, of course, with the woman wanting to lead and rule over, often because she's actually probably better at it, because the man's just been sitting on his backside and hasn't really put any effort in.

And what that results in is a situation that you see in millions of homes today, where you've got a dad that's not engaged and a mom that's wearing the pants.

But that's not how Christian homes should be, and that's not how Christian churches should be, according to Paul's letter to Timothy. Paul's argument here in 1 Timothy is that the gospel, which has now saved us and which has broken the power of sin over us, is also a call to us, both men and women, to return to our God-given roles that he gave us before the fall.

And that is what Paul means by this very awkward verse in 1 Timothy 2 verse 15. Have a look at it. Go back to 1 Timothy if you're not there. But what Paul is saying here is that God calls us to return to our pre-fall good roles that he's given us, and he's talking specifically to women, and he puts it in this very weird way, verse 15, but she will be saved through childbearing.

What? Now you read that and you go, what is he saying? Does that mean that only women who bear children are going to be saved?

[31 : 08] Well, no, because that's ridiculous. That goes against everything else he says about salvation through faith alone, not through works. So what does he mean? And many theologians have scratched their heads for many centuries over this verse.

But I'll tell you what I think he means, and it's based on a lot of deep scholars who have thought through this in its context. And the reason I think he says this in such an obscure way, she will be saved through childbearing, is because I think Paul is deliberately saying two things at the same time.

He has a double meaning here. Let me tell you what I mean. The first thing that he means here, the first way to understand what he's saying here, when he says she will be saved through

childbearing, is he's talking about how the Messiah was going to come into the world, how God planned for the Messiah to come into the world.

In fact, back in Genesis 3, you don't have to turn there, but just before he curses women, before he tells women the result of the fall in their lives, he gives this amazing little promise, talking about her offspring and how he will crush the head of the serpent.

And it will be Eve's offspring. She will be responsible for bringing, which becomes later the Messiah, Jesus. She and her daughters, by doing, by fulfilling, by recapturing their role that God has given them to bear children, even though that is now more painful and more difficult, when they embrace that, that will be a key way that God saves the world.

[32 : 44] That's what Paul, I think, means here. When he says she will be saved through childbearing. He's talking about how the Messiah came into the world to save us all, and the place, the key role that women played throughout that story, as if to vindicate, because they played a role in women, Eve played a key role in the fall, but God, in his grace, has decided that women were going to play a key part in salvation as well.

Just as the fall came into the world through a woman ignoring her role, salvation came into the world through women embracing their God-given role, in this case, to bear children, even though that would be more difficult now.

So I think on the first level, Paul is talking about the history of salvation and the key role women played to bring salvation into the world, but I think there's a second meaning that this has.

I think what he says here is that as Christian women continue to embrace their God-given role more generally, to bring life and to nurture strong families and to support men rather than compete with them, however difficult and however counter-cultural that may be, as they embrace that role, they and the church will be saved from Satan's attempts to derail and to distract us as we work together as a team.

Then Satan can't get in because he knows the only way he can get in to distract us from our task that we're given as Christian men and women is to put hostility between us.

[34 : 27] That's worked in the garden and it works today as well and it works in the church. And so the way we defend against him is we take up our original God-given roles and that is what Paul is saying to women in particular here.

Now that's not saying that all women must therefore be at home and bear children because some women can't. That's not what they're called to.

But they are called still to be and to take up the role that God has given them in the church and in creation and therefore women should be asking, Christian women should be asking, how can I best fulfill my God-given creation role in a way that lets men fulfill theirs and supports them in doing that? As opposed to what the world is saying I should be. To oppose men, to stand up over men, to take men's role for myself. That's what the world is saying you must do. What the Bible says is to ask the opposite.

How can I best fulfill my God-given role? Not my world-given role. How can I best be what God says I should be and made me to be? In the home and in the church.

[35 : 43] It's to recognize that God has created an authority structure and that's the way that things are going to work well, like dancing. And it's to let men lead.

It's to recognize that that is the way the partnership will function best. And I know it's hard because sometimes men really are not good at that.

And there are many situations where you might think as a woman, I could do a better job and you might be right. But it's then that you've got to trust God's order.

And you've got to trust that what God has built and the authority structure He has put in place is best even if you don't know how. But again, men, you're not exempt.

Because I think this is a challenge for men as well. Because as Christian women embrace their roles, we need to step up.

[36 : 46] And embrace ours. Christian men should be asking, how can I embrace my role to guard God's deposit, to teach, to lead my church and my family in prayer?

To lead my family in being involved in God's kingdom and not wait for my wife to tell me to come to prayer meeting or to go to growth group, which so often happens, isn't it?

It's so often the woman who's leading their men to be more involved in God's kingdom. And yet it's our job as men to step up and take up our role if we expect women to support us.

And that's especially difficult when we're exhausted from all our worldly labors. Because when this happens, you see, when men and women start embracing their God-given roles in the family and in the church, it's then that we become effective and we will attract the world to the gospel. They might not agree with us. They might not agree with what look like oppressive and traditional roles. But it is what the world needs to see.

[38 : 05] What the world needs to see now more than ever is not the eradication of gender differences, but to see gender used in the way that God has designed it and to see the glory of God's created order in the midst of a confused world.

Will we show that to them? Let's pray. Lord, you are so wise and you have created us and you have created this world in ways that are beyond our understanding.

And Lord, we are honored when we think that you have given us as men and women such an important role to play in what you are doing in this world.

And Lord, we ask that you would give us some of your wisdom. Give us great wisdom to know how each of us, men and women, are to fulfill the beautiful roles that you've given us.

In each of the contexts that you've put us in, in our home, in our church. And Lord, we pray that you would help us to trust that you know what you're doing and that the authority structure you have put in place, even though it grates up against our culture around us, help us to trust that it is best and it is beautiful.

[39 : 37] And through it, we will become the people you want us to be, the families you want us to be, the church you want us to be, and through it, your name will be glorified in the world around us.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.