**St Martins C3 – May 7, 2023**

**Women in Church Leadership**

**Sermon Summary:**

Occasionally a topic arises in our pastoral discussions that warrants being addressed in church. Jonty and I have been asked by several members where we stand on women in leadership roles in the church. So, I am going to outline where we stand as a church on that issue today. We accept that there are very good Biblical scholars who take varying approaches to interpreting key passages of scripture on this topic. I am not going to contrast all those arguments today. I am simply going to present where we stand as a church on the issue and how we came to that conclusion.

In C3 Church Christchurch, we invite people into leadership roles within our church based on their spiritual maturity and gifting, not based on their age, race or gender. – How did the scriptures lead us to that approach?

**Read: Genesis 1:26-28**

Men and Women are created in the image of God and were both given equal responsibility to rule over the world God created.

**Read: Galatians 3:26-28**

Paul is reflecting the model that he saw in Christ and in the empowering of the Holy Spirit on the whole church. We are all one in Christ and are all called to extend God’s Kingdom. Therefore, Paul concludes that Christ’s Church ought to function like a body, where every member is valued and contributes. (Romans 12:4-8 & 1 Corinthians 12)

This may raise the question of specific passages in the New Testament, which specifically restrict women from speaking in church. (Eg: 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 & 1 Timothy 2:11-15) Why would Paul give instructions like this to churches where he is trying to promote God’s ideal of being all one in Christ? – There are a couple of possible explanations:

1. Generally, Paul is working towards an ideal, however, he is accepting of some social norms in the meantime.

Paul does this with his attitude towards slavery. In his letter to Philemon, Paul encourages Philemon to set his slave Onesimus free, because Onesimus is a brother in Christ. However, Paul also accepts that Philemon still has the legal right to treat Onesimus as a slave. Paul is encouraging a return to God’s ideal, while accepting that may take time given social norms of his day.

Likewise, we see Paul using women in leadership positions in his ministry team. Therefore, Paul is working towards God’s ideal. However, he still is accepting that it will take time for the social norms to change in the churches.

1. Paul was addressing some situations in Corinth and Ephesus that required a stricter approach.

With their newfound freedom, it seems women in these churches were being disruptive and spreading false teaching, so Paul shuts them down with a ban on them speaking in church. This may seem heavy handed from our perspective, but culturally appropriate at the time. However, it doesn’t mean that we ought to apply Paul’s specific approach to these churches as a rule for all time.

As I mentioned at the start, the Biblical qualifications for leadership in the church are spiritual maturity and gifting, not gender, age, race, or anything else. That is why we don’t disqualify women from being in leadership positions in our church. Our encouragement to all our church members is to seek God’s purpose for your life and seek His full potential for you.

**Suggested questions for Connect Group discussion:**

*Do you agree or disagree with our church’s approach to women being in leadership positions in our church?*

*What are some of the Biblical principles that have shaped our thinking on this issue?*

*If God wants all His People to reach their full potential, in what ways are you seeking to grow into the fullness of the giftings that God has placed on your life?*

*What are some of the objections we raise to disqualify ourselves from doing all that God has called us to do?*

*How has what we have discussed this week changed your perspective or challenged you?*

**Monday’s Devotion – Faith first**

**1 Timothy 6:11-12**

*But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*

This week we have been looking at who qualifies to be a leader in the church, w hich is a topic Paul addresses in his letter to Timothy. So we are going to spend some time in these letters this week. Although Paul’s instructions are focused on church leaders, the principles apply to all of us, as we seek to fulfil God’s purposes for our lives. This week we will look at five broad categories of growth as a Christian in these letters.

The first one ought to be pretty obvious and it is mentioned in this passage above. We need to prioritise nurturing our faith in God, because all our values, thinking and behaviour flows from our faith.

The faith that Paul is referring to here, is not the specific faith where we trust God to answer a certain prayer, but rather a whole life commitment to building a relationship with God. That is something that requires daily nurturing. There is always more of God to know. We can always we go deeper with Him. So, are we nurturing that relationship? Are we growing? Or, are we neglecting something that ought to form the foundation of everything else we do? Let us take Paul’s encouragement and fight the good fight of the faith.

**Tuesday’s Devotion – Fan the flame.**

**2 Timothy 1:6-7**

*For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.*

We can easily neglect what God has given us. Consider Timothy and the call of God on his life. He was gifted to be a leader in church. Paul and others had identified this and released him into the lead role in the church at Ephesus. However, Paul can now see that Timothy was neglecting God’s calling and God’s giftings on his life.

There are a couple of obvious reasons why Timothy (and us) might neglect God’s calling on our lives. The first one is opposition. Timothy faced the challenge of people opposing his work in the church. This can be emotionally draining, so it is easier to back off. However, Paul encourages Timothy and us, to not be discouraged by opposition, but to identify it, address it and keep moving forward.

The second reason we might neglect God’s calling on our lives is we become distracted by other things. Paul reminds Timothy (and us) to remember what God called us to do and how He has gifted us to do it. As we return to our calling and seek God’s empowerment again, we will “fan into flame” that which God has gifted us and called us to do.

**Wednesday’s Devotion – Life and doctrine**

**1 Timothy 4:15-16**

*Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.*

Once we have prioritised developing our relationship with God and seek to fulfil His calling on our lives, we will be faced with challenges. So, how do we sustain this Christian walk? Paul’s encouragement to Timothy here is to “watch [his] life and doctrine closely.”

What Paul means by doctrine here, is his thinking about God and His ways. There are lots of varying ideas spread around about who God is and what He expects of us and some of those ideas are simply wrong. They will lead us and others astray. So, Paul encourages Timothy to know the scriptures well and allow them to shape his thinking in all areas of life.

Good theology however, doesn’t necessarily lead to good practice, if we don’t apply what we are learning. So, Paul encourages Timothy to make sure he is living out what he is teaching. Integrity is important. The way we live our lives ought to be consistent with what we believe and what we talk about.

So, how intentional are we in reading and reflecting on what God has revealed? Are we living a life of integrity where our behaviour is in line with what we believe?

**Thursday’s Devotion – Good morals**

**1 Timothy 4:12**

*Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.*

Holding on to a high standard of morality in our lives matters. In the previous chapter Paul was outlining that leaders in the church need to have a good reputation with outsiders. They need to be sexually pure and not given to drunkenness, etc. Put simply, as Christians we are empowered by a HOLY Spirit, therefore we have been empowered to live holy lives.

As we become increasingly liberal and secular as a nation, there will be increasing pressure on Christians to compromise their moral standards. However, we need to keep in mind that we are not measuring ourselves to other people in the world, our measure is Christ. We have a very clear example in Christ as to what a righteous life looks like, so let us not debate what we know is true, but rather seek to live it out in our lives.

Paul is not implying here that our morals are more important than our relationship with God, rather he is teaching that they ought to be a natural outcome of a good relationship with God. Not only that, but they are a good witness to the world around us of the transformation Christ is doing in us.

So, where might we be tempted to compromise morally? Where in our lives might our witness as a Christian be compromised because of poor moral choices we are making?

**Friday’s Devotion – Don’t neglect the practical**

**1 Timothy 5:8**

*Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*

In prioritising the spiritual dimensions of our lives we ought to never neglect what is practically needed, especially caring for those in our immediate family.

Paul’s argument here, is that those who don’t know Christ do basic things like this well, so it would be a poor example to others if Christians can’t follow through with a basic love for those around them.

Growing in our faith and influence isn’t just a matter of thinking the right things, but also doing the right things. Faith ought to be practically worked out in loving action. As the book of James reminds us, faith is revealed in our actions.

So, take a moment and consider how you are relating to and contributing to your immediate family? If someone was looking in from the outside, would they see faith in action? Let us not neglect the practical.

At the start of the week we considered the importance of continually growing into the call of God on our lives. That growth will be depend on how we grow in our faith, our giftings, our theology, our morals and our loving actions. Following Christ isn’t a one time commitment, it’s a life lived in grace and obedience.