

Gender

Gender equality is an important theme in today's society. It's a very simple principle, it just means that "people of all genders should enjoy the same rights and opportunities in all aspects of their lives".

Many religious texts though, were written at a time when things were seen very differently. Men and women may have dressed the same, but that's about as far as equality went.

And this is very much the case for Christianity. It was always a bit of a man's club. The Church was founded on the teachings that Jesus imparted to the twelve disciples he'd chosen, and guess what, they were all blokes.

In certain passages, the New Testament makes clear that the gender rules are very strict. "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet." Those are the words of the apostle Paul. Apparently his dance evenings were hugely fun.

There are many Bible passages that take a different view, though, such as, "For all of you were baptised into Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." And Jesus didn't only hang out with his man friends, in fact after he was resurrected from death, the first people he saw were the Marys.

So when it comes to church rules, it's not entirely obvious where the lines will be drawn. In the Catholic and Orthodox churches, for example, if you're a woman, you can devote your life to God and the church by becoming a nun, but if you think you'd make a good priest? Not on the menu.

This is because many Catholics argue that male priests and bishops are ordained in an unbroken tradition that goes all the way back to the apostles, who were all men, and to Jesus himself. They see these men-only roles as sacred and unchangeable, no matter what anyone says.

In the Protestant church things are a bit different. After a lot of fierce argument, they decided to open the priesthood to women. The Church in Wales first ordained women in 1997, and 20 years later, the first woman bishop was ordained.

Societies are always changing, and how much religion, which represents the eternal, should change with them, is always a difficult question.