

HOLY WOMEN

1 Timothy 2:9–15

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I didn't realize we'd happen to hit this particular passage on Mother's Day.

“I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety” (1 Timothy 2:9–15, NIV).

I think that what happens to Saint Paul in the modern world is akin to what happened the other day to a policeman in Huntington Beach. He had on his hands a news crew that happened to be filming a striker. The cameraman was standing in the middle of the street, and the policeman gave him several warnings asking him to quit blocking traffic. They refused, and finally he wrote them a ticket. In revenge the cameraman pointed to a vendor that came along and double-parked. The next shot they showed was persons coming to buy the goods from the vendor's truck. The implication being that the policemen were against newsmen but allowed other people to break the law. What they failed to note in their footage was that the second shot they had of the vendor was taken when he obeyed the patrolman's warning and legally parked his vehicle. But through a slice the news team was able to portray the policeman in a way that was most unfortunate and not representative.

HOLY WOMEN

1 Timothy 2:9-15

I'm afraid it is rather easy to go through the New Testament and slice out particularly juicy anti-feminist passages and make Paul into a real woman-hater. It's fascinating also that this week in America the Episcopal church will be trying a bishop who allowed a woman minister to serve communion. That's a reformed church, which a number of leading churches belong to. They again deferred in giving women ordination. On the other hand there are churches like my own and women like my own mother who's been ordained. We've been ordaining for many years, and this has never been a serious controversy.

What can we say in regard to the role of women in this particular passage? I think, just by way of introduction, it should be noted that some use the Scripture without really understanding it. There is a difference between quoting Scripture and really getting behind the gist of what the Scripture is saying. Another temptation is to neglect the Scripture altogether in order to be culturally acceptable. Whatever the movement is, we as a church want to be relevant to culture, though we seek to shape a conviction or a theology that is not seriously interacting with the Scripture.

Understand that whenever we look at Scripture of a matter of our culture, we could attempt to integrate both the Scripture and the understanding of what is happening in our world. In the final analysis, we as Christians, we are people of the Book. It is the Book that gives to us the Lord Jesus Christ, that gives to us the record of doctrine and history, that leads us into a saving experience and relationship to the Lord. We must be mindful to continue to study that Book lest at any point in our pilgrimage we become static in our Christian experience.

I like what a leading Christian theologian said about studying the Scripture, "The word has to be free to remake and reform the church over and over again. The moment the church loses interest in working the mines of the Word because it thinks it has seen all there is to see, that moment the church also loses its power and its credibility in the world. When the church thinks it knows all

HOLY WOMEN

1 Timothy 2:9-15

there is to know, the opportunity for discovery is closed. The church then becomes old without perspective and without light and labor and fruitfulness.”

Today’s passage of Scripture has three perspectives of women that are seen: first, the Christian woman and her cosmetics; secondly, the Christian woman as a teacher in the Christian church; and third, the Christian woman as a mother.

I. First, the Christian woman and her cosmetics.

Verse 9: Women should adorn themselves. The word for “adorn” (KJV, NKJV) is the word from which, of course, we have cosmetics. It means simply to put in order or to arrange. That’s what all you wives are doing when you use cosmetics. You’re putting in order, and you are arranging. I would pronounce, if I had the authority, an anathema on all of those who use this Scripture to make or insist that women be as ugly as they could possibly be. There have been those, unfortunately, who have forgotten that the Scriptures say that women should adorn, should cosmeticize themselves.

If you want an appreciation of what the word “adorn” can mean in a different context of Scripture, turn to Revelation 21:2 where we have these words: “I saw the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” And if you think the Lord is going to send down a sloppy and ugly city, you are wrong.

What is Saint Paul up to in this particular passage on the Christian woman and her cosmetics?

A. He is speaking to insist that the Christian woman place stress and emphasis on the development of her interior life. That the concern with the exterior not be set so that it becomes pushed out of order and even pushed into the first priority. It is, indeed, as Saint Peter says in 1 Peter 3:3,4, a parallel passage to this: “Let not yours be outward adorning. But let it be the

HOLY WOMEN

1 Timothy 2:9-15

hidden person of the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious."

B. The qualifications of outward adornment that are suggested here by Paul are that women should be outwardly adorned with modesty and sensibly. In the King James is a very unfortunate translation, very difficult. It is "shamefacedness and sobriety" (1 Timothy 2:9). The word "shamefacedness" creates the image of a gal walking around with her eyes fixed on the ground being slightly embarrassed that she is a woman. It is really not the meaning or the understanding of the word at all. In fact, the word "modesty," which is used here and in the Revised text, is the only time this particular word is used in the New Testament. It can carry or connote the idea of respectfulness or respectability. It is best compared by contrasting what an immodest person would be.

C. And, thirdly, from the prophet Isaiah (3:16-23), we get an idea of what immodesty might be. Isaiah indicates, "Behold the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with outstretched neck, glancing wantonly with their eyes, mincing along as they go, tinkling with their feet. The Lord blight the heads of the daughters and the Lord will lay bare their secret parts. In that day the Lord will take away the refinery of the anklets and the headbands and the crescents and the pendants and the scarves, the headdresses, the perfume boxes and the amulets." Twenty-one items of apparel, indicating that the women of Isaiah's day that he particularly was referring to had made their whole world a world of exterior fashion. And Isaiah, like Paul, is calling upon the women to be concerned with the inward adornment and cosmetics.

Therefore, the word "modesty" can be used in real sharp contrast to the kind of immodest dress that is flagrantly dress for the sake of dress itself. And for the sake of attention. The holy city is beautiful. It is glorious. That is the dress of women, but not the gaudy.

HOLY WOMEN

1 Timothy 2:9-15

The word translated “sensibly” has the idea of good judgment or self-control. It’s the word that is also used with men. It’s found in Titus 2:6. “Likewise urge the younger men to control themselves.” The same thing being asked of men is being asked of women here. Self-control or good judgment in dress.

And, furthermore, Saint Paul says “in seemly apparel.” The word “seemly” is the same word that is first used for “adorn.” It carries the idea in 1 Timothy 3:2. It’s the word that is used of a bishop or pastor. In that way it’s translated “dignified.” A pastor should be dignified. It’s the same word that can mean that, in dignified or respectfully arraigned apparel.

Then Paul says, “Not with braided hair.” That’s something far more than taking your little girl and braiding her hair in pigtails. The Scripture is not forbidding that. But it’s a particular hair fashion of the period, elaborately, decoratively arranged. Paul is forbidding that kind of thing.

This passage relates to persons in worship. You recall it begins, “I desire that every man lift holy hands” (1 Timothy 2:8). So both the teaching of men and women really have to do with persons in public worship together. Because some would have more means than others, it would be inappropriate for Christians in Christian community to flaunt what they have in the eyes of those who do not have anything.

Therefore, the restriction on gold, which would be ostentatious, and on pearls. And also costly apparel. The word for “costly” is the word from which we derive “plutocrat” and things like this.

What is very costly and what is very precious according to 1 Peter 3 is the jewel of the quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious or costly. It’s the same word. Not with costly adornment, but with an inner spirit which is very precious.

HOLY WOMEN

1 Timothy 2:9-15

So Christian cosmetics therefore are good judgment, common sense, inner beauty, not with ostentation, and good deeds are to emphasize the life of the Christian woman and her inner life.

The emphasis is upon helping others rather than an inordinate attention on oneself.

There's a common-sense approach in the gospel. It's a desire for women to be pretty but not the playboy philosophy of women that emphasizes the exterior of women. Women's lib rightly, I think, protests the dehumanization of the woman being treated as an object. Scripture talks about the inner worth and value of the human being.

II. The woman as a teacher in the Christian church.

That's the next thing that Paul speaks of. "Let a woman learn in silence in all submissiveness" (1 Timothy 2:11). If I were to identify difficult texts in the New Testament, this would be one of the three I would select. It's difficult because it involves, first of all, the understanding of the social and cultural background that the apostle is writing in. Ultimately, it's understanding what he actually is saying. And, thirdly, it involves applying it in today's world, and the church today as well.

In the first century the woman was treated somewhat as a thing. She was forbidden to learn the law. She had no part in the synagogue service. She sat apart in the synagogue. A man came to the synagogue to learn; the woman came to hear. It was forbidden for a woman to teach in school, not even the youngest children. A strict rabbi did not greet a woman on the street, not even his mother or wife or daughter. One rabbi said the woman's work was to send her children to the synagogue, to attend to domestic concerns to leave her husband free to study and be there for him when he returns. A Jewish man in one of his prayers thanked God he was not a Gentile, a slave, or a woman. At Ephesus, where the temple of Diana was located, it was serviced by temple prostitutes. If a Greek woman was of a higher and more refined status in culture she lived

HOLY WOMEN

1 Timothy 2:9-15

a rather confined life. She might live in her own quarters and not appear at meals. She never appeared in the streets alone or went to any public meetings.

Given that kind of a background, we can begin to look at what Paul was actually teaching here.

The church had the reputation in the community of being a loose house, or a place where the most unspeakable and social discourtesies were being practiced and acceptable social standards were being disregarded. That's certainly the kind of context from which this passage springs.

Paul therefore starts out by saying, "Let a woman be silent." The word used for "silence" is the word used in 1 Timothy 2:2 in reference to "that we may live a quiet and peaceable life." That word "quiet" in that particular context doesn't mean that we never speak. It perhaps is bringing up a situation that evidently existed at Corinth, where Saint Paul said women should not speak in church but if they have any questions they can ask their husbands at home. The women sat on one side of the church and the men on the other. If a wife did not understand something that was being said at the church of Corinth she would call out across to her husband. That created chaos in the congregation, so Paul said they should be quiet.

The same kind of a thing is being enjoined here. We do know that prophetesses existed in the church, and that women could pray in public, as evidenced in 1 Corinthians as well. So this is not a Scripture on total quietness, but it is kind of a quiet likeness.

He further restricts teaching and authority of women in that Christian congregation. We see later, by looking at Timothy and Titus, that there was a teaching role in regards to younger children.

Paul indicates that he himself does not allow women to teach nor to have authority over men.

The word "authority," the only time it's used in the New Testament, is in this passage. It means to dictate or domineer over. Paul's rationale for this is based upon creation, that Eve was more

HOLY WOMEN

1 Timothy 2:9-15

trusting of the serpent so she was naturally beguiled by him. Therefore Paul is saying she demonstrates a greater susceptibility to doctrinal error.

When we look at the interpretation and application of this, we have to ask the question, “Is this teaching a traditional teaching related to the circumstances of the first-century church, or is it a cardinal teaching which is valid for all churches and all cultures for all times?” I think we have to understand, in looking at that particular question, there were some conditions evident among the women in the Ephesian church that are rather unique. We get glimpses of this from the letter itself.

In 1 Timothy 5:13 Paul talks about some of the women in the church who are idlers, going from house to house, not only idlers but gossips and busybodies. These are the same persons who were wanting to teach the Christian congregation. Also in 2 Timothy 3:6-7, Paul says there are some false prophets who make their way into households and capture weak women burdened with sins who will listen to anybody. There’s a particular problem going on within the church, susceptibility of women to gospel error. And a nonunderstanding of Christian truth.

The very fact that we need interpretation of this passage presupposes a fundamental thing that the Lord spoke in the church. And that is the office of teacher. If all of us through our own insights could totally understand and apply the Scripture, there would be no need of the office of the teacher. But it is only as we are taught that our individual place in the Scripture is informed and inspired. There certainly is in certain passages of Scripture a need for an understanding and interpretation.

For example, Genesis 3:16 indicates that the curse of woman from the fall is that she will bring forth children with pain in her childbearing process. Does this prohibit the use of anesthesia for a woman in labor inasmuch as that will help ease some of the pain promised?

HOLY WOMEN

1 Timothy 2:9-15

We come to 1 Corinthians 14:35 where Paul says, “Let a woman learn from her husband at home.” Is he in that passage prohibiting a woman from ever enrolling in a course in which she would have an education as a result of going through that course?

Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:8 that when men are in public in prayer they should lift hands in prayer. Does this mean therefore in our particular assemblies that one is not really pleasing God if his hands are not lifted?

In 1 Thessalonians 5:26 and other passages in the New Testament it speaks of the fact that we should greet one another with a holy kiss. Of course we interpret that by saying give a good handshake. Americans are a little leery of being that close with someone of the same sex. First Timothy 3:2 says that a bishop and later a deacon must be the husband of one wife. We interpret that to say does this mean that a pastor cannot be a deacon?

In 1 Timothy 5:3–10 we find the office of a widow, which was an office in the Early Church for those who were 60 years of age and older who met certain qualifications. The obvious intent is if they met the qualifications they could be on the “welfare” rolls of the church as well as have a valid ministry. As conditions of the society changed so the economic needs of a widow are met through other agencies, is there really need for the office of a widow?

In 1 Timothy 5:23 Saint Paul says don’t drink water but use a little wine for your stomach’s sake and infirmities. Is it ok if you have a good water supply, like we do and he didn’t, to drink water in plenteous amounts? Is it all right to take Anacin or Alka-Seltzer or whatever?

I think, in regard to the role of women, the church is facing today what some in the church were faced with nearly a century ago in regard to slavery. There are those who could look in certain passages in certain kinds of ways and use that as an argument for the perpetuation of slavery. But the question has to be asked, in looking at a particular text, is this Scripture given on a condition

HOLY WOMEN

1 Timothy 2:9-15

that prevailed in a particular society, in a particular period of time? Or is it an eternal issue that is unchanged and unmitigated over the years?

I think one clue might help us look at this. Paul himself demonstrates an adaptability to meet certain requirements as the social condition changes. For example, in 1 Corinthians 7 he urges widows not to remarry. But instead indicates to them that, “in my judgment they’d be happier if they remain single.” He says, “I think I have the Spirit of God.” Ten years later, however, in writing to Timothy (1 Timothy 5:14) he says, “I would have the younger widows marry and bear children.” What has changed his mind over that period of time? The conditions. Namely, that at Ephesus the younger women do not have employment that we have in our culture today.

Basically, they were confined to the role of women or mothers or prostitutes in the city of Ephesus. Paul is indicating that they’re becoming gadabouts, and he says, “I would that the younger women would marry.” So conditions have brought about a change of Paul’s advice on the subject.

In this particular passage Paul in verses 13 and 14 appeals to the ruin of men and women in the fall. In Romans 5 we learn that man is equally as responsible for the fall as woman. Paul is setting up an appeal to the Ephesian church in 1 Timothy based upon something related to the ruin of mankind. It might also be suggested that it’s entirely possible for Paul’s writing to make a different appeal based not on the ruin of women but on the redemption of women through Jesus Christ.

If we start from the Cross and redemption rather than from creation and the Fall, we might reach different conclusions. Galatians 3:28 is the chief text on redemption: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Through the work, which Christ has brought into the world, He was born of a

HOLY WOMEN

1 Timothy 2:9-15

woman, it was to a Samaritan woman that He talked and revealed more of himself doctrinally than He ever did to the stuffed shirt Nicodemus. It was Mary who at His feet He encouraged to doctrinally remain there. It was Mary Magdalene and the other women to whom He first appeared after His resurrection. It is Joel who prophesied that on all flesh the Spirit would be outpoured, including sons and daughters, menservants and maidservants. It was the daughters of Phillip who were prophetesses. Other women were associated with Paul.

In short, there is another strand of truth emerging within the New Testament, which would suggest it is not conditioned by culture but it has an eternal focus. That is the basic equality in the sight of God and in the Christian church of men with women. As the changing focus that has existed for twenty centuries, the seed of the gospel is coming to a more full fruition. You see the opportunity for our society in the many roles of women within the context of our culture. We see also a re-examination within the Christian church and indeed even within this church on that subject.

I come from a Pentecostal background where sex is never an issue. We had the idea that the Holy Spirit would give us in due time the understanding of Scripture. It's kind of akin to what happened in Acts 10. If Peter had waited for a theology of whether or not Gentiles could be baptized in the Holy Spirit, he would have waited till kingdom come until he ever got his theology worked out. But he had the experience of going to Cornelius' home, and when he had the experience then he began to understand certain segments of the Scripture in new light he'd never seen before.

I think in regard to our experience we sense that fact of Joel that upon men and women God will pour out His Spirit. Therefore we began right from the inception of the Assemblies of God to ordain women and accept them in equal positions in full ministry of the church. Now that later

HOLY WOMEN

1 Timothy 2:9-15

generations have come along and begun to think through the Scripture in new ways, I think there's a wisdom seen to this policy. Certainly the eternal strand of the gospel is a position of equality. The only place, by the way, that subjection is called for on the part of women in Scripture, in the New Testament, is in regard to three things.

A. Subjection within the church. This is required of all of us. I am in subjection to you and you are in subjection to me. Both men and women.

B. Subjection is called for on the part of sons toward their parents.

C. Subjection is called for on the part of the wife toward her husband. This is kind of akin to the subjection of Jesus Christ, who is equal with God but voluntarily placed himself under the headship of the Father that the Father and the Son's purposes might be accomplished through that means. Therefore, starting from a position of equality when you are single, if you marry you voluntarily come into a position of submissiveness. Not a slavishness, but a submissiveness for the purposes of carrying on better the purposes of God for the family.

III. The Christian woman as mother.

There's a last verse, verse 15, which describes the Christian woman as mother. "Yet women will be saved through bearing children." If you're witnessing to a friend, you'd rather use John 3:16 than 1 Timothy 2:15. What is Paul saying? That the way to be saved eternally is to have children? We know that the meaning of a word is determined by its context. Salvation may be a term that is most often used in the New Testament to refer to eternal salvation. But it may also refer to being saved from something not related to salvation. In this case it appears to.

The word "childbearing" is used only twice in the New Testament. Both times in this Timothy section, 1 Timothy 2:15 and 1 Timothy 5:14, "would that younger widows marry and bear children." First Timothy 2 is a noun and in chapter 5 it's a verb. What is he saying? What is the

HOLY WOMEN

1 Timothy 2:9-15

salvation of woman that is in childbearing? I think it's evident of the text of 1 Timothy 5 itself. Mainly, that there were women in the Christian congregation who, because they did not have any employment after they became widows, were using their time idly and uselessly, gadding about, gossiping and being busybodies. Paul says they need to be saved from that. The solution is they bear children and bring them up rightly so that they might meaningfully be involved as persons. Paul recognizes "yet women will be saved through bearing children," recognizes that that's not sufficient. If a person is a gadabout widow and she remarries and she's kind of flaky, her salvation is not simply in bearing children because the kids will be as flaky as she is. So what he says, "she'll be saved by bearing children" and then that great condition, "if she continues in faith, love and sanctification."

Paul is saying it's not enough to bear children, one must also bring them up. In our day, when women may find fulfillment in many different fields, the tendency perhaps is that a person who elected to be wife and mother was somehow choosing a lesser role. Not at all. That is a legitimate, divinely honored, approved role. If you don't believe that, ask yourself how you got here. We all need mothers. God ordained that the role of mother is the one that is filled with the deepest kind of intense fulfillment and meaning possible.

Therefore, Saint Paul says, successful motherhood is based on these words—faith and love and sanctification with modesty. What's he mean? When we use the terms "faith, love, holiness" we're in general terms. It's always difficult when we use a general term to make concrete application. I've thought what person in Scripture best epitomizes those words—faith and love and sanctification. It didn't take me but a minute to locate someone who fulfills all of those admirably. It is Mary, the mother of our Lord. She demonstrates in her own life these three words tremendously. When the angel appears to her and brings to her the promise of the Christ

HOLY WOMEN

1 Timothy 2:9-15

child that she is to conceive, then she responds with faith, “So be it unto me.” She has faith in the Lord’s work. She demonstrates her faith through her recitation of Scripture when she comes to Elizabeth and gives her Magnificat to God. She not only demonstrates faith in the Lord but she demonstrates also faith in her Son. That is demonstrated all the way to the Cross, when she is there at the Cross when Jesus died.

There is a kind of faith intrinsic in motherhood, if it’s the right kind of motherhood, that believes deeply and has faith in the Lord and believes deeply also in one’s family. Believes deeply in one’s children. One thing I have never doubted and that is my mother’s faith in me. Never for a moment have I not believed that Mother didn’t believe that certain things could not happen in my life. She was always that encourager to me.

That’s what Paul is saying of mothers here. Have faith. Faith in the Lord. And if you have faith in the Lord, you’re going to have faith in others. You’re going to have faith in your children, in your husband, and you’re going to live out that faith.

What about love? Love here is agape. It is the kind of looking at the best interests of another person. It’s not so much on the emotional plain as the truly servant plain. It’s emotional, but it’s more than that. It’s looking out for the other person’s welfare. The love of Mary is demonstrated in her being willing to literally uproot herself for the sake of her children. To go into Egypt if necessary. To live with ridicule if necessary. But to love her Son! And to love the Lord.

And not only that, but to continue with sanctification. This word “sanctification” or holiness, which means to set apart, sometimes is mistakenly understood to mean that a person must dot every “I” and cross every “T.” There is no room for failure as a mother. Mary, as a mother, was a holy mother, but she also had an occasion when she blew it. Recall the time in the Gospel where she brought her other children and tried to get Jesus away from the crowd because He appeared

HOLY WOMEN

1 Timothy 2:9-15

to be a real embarrassment to the family and He seemed to go off a little on the lunatic edge and she was concerned about reputation. They said, “Lord, Your mother is calling for You.” She wanted to take Him home. She made a mistake. Did that mistake cause her not to be holy? No. She was designated as special. She was set apart as mother of the Lord. She was set apart to serve the Lord. The mistake would be covered up because love indeed does cover a multitude of sins.

What God is asking for today in mothers is great faith and great love and great holiness. Personal standards. I think the word “wholeness” better translates “holiness.” A wholeness. A kind of personality and life that really inspires other people to be like you.

All of this with modesty. Verse 15. Sometimes translators confuse us. In verse 9 we also have the word “modesty,” but it’s not the same word as in verse 15. Instead it’s the same word as “sensibly,” which means self-controlled or good judgment.

Paul is saying that Christian mothers have faith and love and holiness—all of this with good judgment and self-control. As a result of that, the family and the world will be blessed. Isn’t it fascinating to look through this text and be able to ascertain within those eternal values, which are unchangeable—faith, love and holiness? Those other things which may be conditioned in the particular culture and the particular understanding but, as the Holy Spirit continues to give light and revelation to the church, they become more and more obvious as the years go by. Because of the seed of the gospel in Galatians 3:28, eventually we see the full flowering of Christian maturity in the world today where there’s such a beautiful opportunity for the woman to participate in the life of the church and the life of the world as God has ordained.

Closing Prayer

HOLY WOMEN
1 Timothy 2:9-15

Lord, we thank You for the counsel of Your Word, which is ever light to our path. We confess our limitation of understanding that at times there are those circumstances at Cornelius' house that because of an event we are made to reexamine Scripture. We recognize, Lord, that there is a need in our lives for the continual searching through the Word that we might have a clear and good understanding of what You're asking of us. And Holy Spirit, beyond understanding Your Word we want to be persons who are filled with Your life and Your love and Your joy. Especially we pray today for mothers who are here that with grace and mercy You would minister to them. May this day be a wonderful day for each. A day which they may have some time to receive the tribute and honor that is due them on this day. We give You praise. In Christ's name. Amen.