

Dear friends and family,

Keep God's sovereign plan in mind this week because in our text, Paul gives Timothy instructions for women in his congregation. In this day and age, the Apostle Paul has received some undue criticism, due to his "apparent" mis-treatment of women in his writings. There are a few important factors to remember when thinking critically about a writer of scripture. First, the writers of scripture, while human, were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Any criticism of a writer of scripture is, in fact, a criticism of the Holy Spirit. Second, context is always relevant! The culture during Paul's time is essential to understanding context. According to the University of Washington, women in the first century Roman Empire would have been expected to live up to the following three virtues.

The virtues that would have stood, larger than life, for all women to observe and respect can be summarized in three Roman terms: pietas, pudicitia, and concordia. Pietas, meaning piety, was expected of all Roman citizens but was particularly important for women. ... Pudicitia can be considered the cardinal virtue of a woman in Rome and is slightly more complex than piety. Pudicitia was a mix of chastity, modesty, sexual fidelity and most importantly fertility. This virtue was inextricably tied to a woman's role as wife and mother, her true place in Roman society, and was therefore of utmost significance in determining how she was viewed. Also related to the woman's position in the home as mother and wife was the virtue concordia which explicated the expectation of harmony between husband and wife. One of the most unique aspects of women's lives in Rome (compared to the lives of women in other societies of antiquity) was that mutual respect and affection was the norm in Roman marriages. Particularly following 100 BCE, when women had the right to own their own property, harmonious equality became the rule in Roman households.

The virtue of *Concordia* plays a key role in understanding 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. The fact that Paul even addresses women in his writing is of utmost importance. During this time in history, women were considered secondary citizens even if they upheld all of these virtues, and at worst mere possessions if they did not. To address them in Scriptural writings sets the tone that women are important to God, are noticed by God, and are equal to men but different. Women, just like men, need instruction, teaching and guidance in their role in the church body.

So while it may be tempting to be offended at the focus in these passages, remember that God, in his wisdom, clearly identified that women DO have significance and, as is often overlooked, also issued important instructions for men in these very same passages.

Pastor's Point of View

The big question this week:

As a church, what should be our attitude toward modesty and teaching?

Day 1 – READ 1 Timothy 2:8

1. What is Paul's instruction to all men here?
2. Men are naturally prone to anger, what does it mean to be without wrath and dissension?
3. Notice the order of these commands. Why is it important that Paul's command to men came prior to his instructions for women?
4. In our own lives, we deal with anger. How should we biblically respond to anger?

Day 2 – READ 1 Timothy 2:9-10

Modesty is in short supply in our culture today. Likewise, in the first century, promiscuity and rampant immorality was the norm. The virtues discussed above would have marked the epitome of a woman's conduct. A woman born as a citizen of Rome would have been raised up and schooled in these virtues. However, the mass of the population at the time would not have been citizens nor would they have had the means to afford schooling for their daughters. Living an educated and virtuous life was difficult and time consuming. Women would more often turn to quicker means of success, acting improperly and dressing immodestly to gain attention and recognition.

1. What does it mean to be modest?
2. What would be the cultural equivalent today of braided hair and gold or pearls? Paul is not talking about appropriate jewelry or adornments but those things which are improper or immodest.
3. Why is this command important in the church setting? What is the purpose of the gathering of the body of Christ? (Consider these passages: Heb. 3:1, Matt. 5:13-20, 2 Cor. 7:1)
4. How do these verses make sense in context with the purpose of the church and God's desire for our holiness?
5. What good works could you be doing in the church today?

Day 3 – READ 1 Timothy 2:11-12

These verses are difficult to interpret but are very important for us to understand. Remember that Paul is writing to Timothy, the Pastor of the church at Ephesus. Specifically, Paul is speaking about an office in the church. The best interpreter of scripture is scripture. Refer to Titus 1:5-9. With careful study of scripture, compare these passages. We read that the only office of the church which God designs solely for a man to hold is that of elder/overseer (which includes Pastor - more on this next week).

1. Reading Titus and this passage in Timothy, what role does Paul identify that is solely for a man to hold?
2. God is a God of boundaries. He placed a boundary on the sea so that it doesn't encroach upon the land, separated the night from day, and created men different from women.

Men have unique roles. Women have unique roles. What roles are identified for men in this passage? Why would God put a boundary around this role to be exclusively for a man to fill?

3. What do you see pertaining to a woman's ability to teach a Bible study or Sunday School class?
4. We know that God desires for all believers, men AND women, to be active, contributing members in a church setting. Biblically, what are some roles women have held throughout Scripture? (Ruth, Esther, Deborah, Mary, Phoebe, Lydia)

Day 4 – READ 1 Timothy 2:13-15 and Genesis 3:16

When God created man and woman, He created a natural order. God, in His infinite wisdom, created two genders, equally endowed with His image, yet beautifully different. Man and woman are complementary not competitive. When sin entered the picture however, everything changed. Today, men and women are confused about gender and gender roles. They are no longer content with complementarianism and are in constant competition with one another.

1. What was God's response to Eve's sin in Genesis 3?

The original text of 1 Tim. 2:15 says "but she". The context reveals clearly that this passage does not mean that women are saved through childbearing. Instead, Paul is speaking with a view of Christ, that while women will have pain in child bearing due to the first sin, it is through child bearing that salvation eventually would come. Remember that Jesus the Messiah, savior of the world, was born of a virgin woman. What a wonderful truth.

2. How can you serve the Lord today?
3. Reflect on a few ways you continue in faith and love. What changes do you need to make to live a more holy life full of self-restraint?
4. Who do you need to share this message with who has maybe thought inappropriately about women, maybe even because of scriptures like this?

Each man must acknowledge the importance of godly women. We are so blessed by God to have women in our lives as mothers, grandmothers, wives, and sisters. Paul, even though he wrote of the importance to his ministry that he remain unmarried, acknowledged the importance of godly women (Acts 16:13-16; Phil. 4:3; Romans 16:1).

This passage of scripture should be taken for exactly what it is, instructions to men and women, which directly pertain to their own personal struggles. Men struggle with wrath and anger and dissension. Women struggle with materialism and their desire for prominence. God wants both men and women to put Him first, put our differences aside, and work in complementary unison for the gospel.

That we all will continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint!

-Pastor Matt

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*Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us **RUN** with endurance the race that is set before us -- Hebrews 12:1*

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