God's High Calling for Women, Part 1
Scripture: 1 Timothy 2:9
Code: 54-14

INTRODUCTION

A. The Situation Today

The debate over the role of women in the church has reached massive proportions. The feminist movement has penetrated almost every area of our society, and has recently made inroads into the church. I am amazed at how many evangelical churches, colleges, and seminaries are abandoning biblical truths they have held for all their existence. Books have been written affirming new truth regarding the role of women in the church. Scripture teaching the traditional roles of men and women are being reinterpreted. Some say they should be ignored because they merely reflect Paul's anti-female bias. Others are saying those passages were added by later editors and do not reflect the intent of the original authors. The church, the bastion of the truth of God, is falling fast to the march of the feminist army.

The effort to overthrow the design of God for men and women is not ultimately a human effort. It is the effort of the archenemy of God, Satan, who uses sinful human agents to attain his goals. That's why the controversy over the role of women in the church is so tragic: the church is being deceived by the lies of Satan and actually becoming a part of his attack on the plan of God. God has specific roles for men and women in society, the family, and the church that are very clear in Scripture, and we need to reaffirm them.

In approaching this subject, I could take a lot of time demonstrating how far-reaching the feminist movement is. I could give you many quotes, and we could look at all kinds of incidents. We could discuss at length the schools, seminaries, and books that illustrate how pervasive the feminist movement's influence on the church has been. However we're all aware of that, so it seems to me most needful to simply look at the Word of God. If we understand what the Bible says, we will be able to deal with any error we might face. There is no passage more direct, helpful, and comprehensive in addressing the role of women in the church than 1 Timothy 2:9-15.

B. The Situation at Ephesus

1. The occasion of Paul's writing

First Timothy is a letter from the apostle Paul to his son in the faith, his dear friend and co-laborer, Timothy. They met several years before the writing of this epistle during Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 16:1-5). When this letter was written Paul had concluded his three missionary journeys, and had just been released from his first imprisonment in Rome. After leaving prison, he met Timothy in Ephesus. Timothy was pastor of the church there. Apparently word had reached Paul that things in Ephesus were not as they should be. The church at Ephesus was close to his heart. He had spent three years of his ministry there, and had poured his soul into that church. In Acts 20 Paul said to the Ephesian elders that he had not failed to declare the entire word of God to the church, but had warned them night and day for three years that error would come from the outside and evil would rise from the inside (vv. 27-31). Unfortunately his worst fears had come to pass: the church at Ephesus had fallen into doctrinal error and ungodly patterns of living. Most significantly of all, the leadership had been corrupted. They needed to be replaced with godly leaders.

Paul met Timothy in Ephesus and personally dealt with two of the corrupt leaders, Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim. 1:20). Then Paul had to leave to go West for further ministry, but he left Timothy behind at Ephesus to straighten out the rest of the problems in the church. Paul had been gone only a few weeks when he wrote this letter to Timothy to encourage him and give him directions for his ministry. First Timothy 3:14-15 gives us the overall intent of the letter: "These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly; but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. " First Timothy was written to set the church in order.

2. The purposes of Paul's writing

a) The topic of women

One of the problem areas in the church at Ephesus was the role of women. Since the leaders of the church had fallen into doctrinal and moral error, it's not surprising that would have a negative impact on the women in the church as well as the men. First Timothy 5:6 tells us that some women had abandoned their purity, and were living only for pleasure. Some younger widows had made promises to Christ to remain single, but they were in danger of violating them because of lusts, thus bringing condemnation upon themselves (vv. 11-12). Some had become idle, wandering around from house to house. They were talebearers and busybodies (v. 13). Some had already turned aside to follow Satan (v. 15). In 2 Timothy 3:6 Paul refers to silly women laden with lusts who are easy prey for false teachers.

b) The topic of worship

First Timothy 2 focuses in on another problem involving women. Under the pretense of coming to worship God, they were flaunting themselves and desecrating the worship service. Their dress and demeanor betrayed an evil intent rather than a heart of worship.

Worship is central to the church, so it is not surprising that Paul discussed it early in his letter. In fact, it was the second topic he dealt with in chapter 2, which is where he began discussing problems in the church. The worship services at Ephesus were being polluted by women who saw in them an opportunity to flaunt their wealth and beauty. Their sexual allure was drawing the men's focus away from the worship service. From his discussion of the problems women were causing in the worship services, Paul branches out into a discussion of the biblical role of women.

LESSON

I. THE APPEARANCE OF WOMEN (v. 9a, c)

"In like manner, also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel . . . not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array"

"In like manner" refers back to verse 8. It introduces a new subject, but one related to the previous subject. Paul now moves to a new topic within the overall subject of how men and women should conduct themselves in the worship service. "In like manner" often serves as a transition between different topics within a broader discussion. It is used in 1 Timothy 3:8 to make a transition between the topic of elders to the topic of deacons, and in verse 11 between deacons and deaconesses--all within the general subject of church leaders. Paul now moves from discussing the attitude of men in the worship service (v. 8) to that of women (vv. 9-15).

A. The General Pattern

1. The meaning of "will"

The Greek word translated "will" in verse 8 (boulomai) refers to intent, purpose, determination, or command, in contrast to thelo, which indicates a wish. It could be translated "I command. " It carries apostolic intent and divine authority. Paul is commanding men to pray and women to adorn themselves in a proper manner.

2. The meaning of "adorn"

The Greek word kosme[ma]o means "to arrange" or "to put in order. " Paul is saying women should prepare themselves for worship. The Greek word translated "modest" (kosmios), the adjectival form

of kosme[ma]o, means "well-ordered," or "well- arranged. "

3. The meaning of "apparel"

The Greek word translated "apparel" in the King James Version does not refer only to clothing, but can mean "demeanor" or "attitude. " It encompasses a woman's total preparation for worship, involving both the attitude of the heart and proper adornment on the outside. Her clothing should reflect a heart focused on God.

B. The Specific Problems

Paul not only gives a general exhortation about women's appearance, but also deals with some specific issues that were problems in Ephesus.

1. Imitating their culture

Several ancient writers have described what women were dressed like in the Roman culture of Paul's day, which no doubt influenced the church at Ephesus:

a) Juvenal

The writings of this first-century Roman satirical poet picture everyday life in the Roman Empire. In his sixth satire he described women who were preoccupied with their appearance: "There is nothing that a woman will not permit herself to do, nothing that she deems shameful, and when she encircles her neck with green emeralds and fastens huge pearls to her elongated ears, so important is the business of beautification; so numerous are the tiers and stories piled one another on her head! In the meantime she pays no attention to her husband!"

b) Philo

Philo was a Jewish Hellenistic philosopher of the first century. In his work The Sacrifices of Cain and Abel, he described a prostitute bedecked with a multitude of gold chains and bracelets as having her hair dressed in elaborate braids, her eyes marked with pencil lines, her eyebrows smothered in paint, and her expensive clothes embroidered lavishly with flowers (19-21).

c) Pliny the Elder

This first-century Roman historian told of Lollia Paulina, one-time wife of the Roman Emperor Caligula, who had a dress worth more than one million dollars by today's standards. It was covered from head to food with emeralds and pearls, and she carried with her the receipts proving its value (Natural History ix, 58).

In contrast to Roman society, the mystery religions of Greece had very stringent rules about the appearance of women. One inscription that has been discovered illustrates their concern: "A consecrated woman shall not have gold ornaments, nor rouge, nor face whitening, nor a head-band, nor braided hair, nor shoes, except those made of felt or of the skins of sacrificed animals" (cited in William Barclay's The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, rev. ed. [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975], pp. 67-68).

Both Paul and Timothy were concerned that the Ephesian church be a godly testimony to society. For the women of the church to imitate the gaudy clothing styles of pagan women, to call attention to themselves, or to dress to lure men into illicit sexual relationships was to blaspheme the intent of the worship service.

2. Flaunting their wealth

In the first-century, poverty was widespread. A wealthy person could dress in a style that was impossible for a poor person to match, in contrast to today, where good clothing is relatively affordable for a large segment of Western society. A costly dress worn by a wealthy woman could cost up to 7,000 denarii (one denarius was a day's wage for the average laborer). When a wealthy woman entered the worship service wearing an expensive dress, she caused a sensation that would disrupt the entire service.

In addition to expensive dresses, rich women would also display their wealth through elaborate hairdos with expensive jewelry woven into them. (That's what "braided hair" [v. 9] was to Paul.) They would also wear gold rings and earrings, and hang gold on their sandals and dresses.

It should be noted that the Bible does not forbid women to wear simple braids or to own gold, pearls, and fine clothes. Both the bride of Solomon (Song of Sol. 1:10) and the woman described in Proverbs 31:22 owned expensive apparel. However the Bible does forbid wearing those things for wrong motives.

Seductresses in the Church

After a sermon a while ago I walked out the door of the sanctuary, and was approached by a woman who was overly dressed and not appropriately attired for church. She handed me an expensive piece of jewelry, a gold chain, and a note soliciting me. That was overt, but there are much more subtle solicitations that go on all the time in the church. Anyone who doesn't realize that has their head in the sand--just look how many pastors fall prey to sexual sin, and how many churches have to deal with immorality. That is one of the reasons for Paul's strong words in 1 Timothy 2:9-10.

Bringing Down the Curtain on the Fashion Show in the Church

John Chrysostom, the fourth-century church father, wrote this in his homily on 1 Timothy 2:8-10 concerning the importance of women dressing modestly for the worship service: "What is this 'modest apparel'? Such attire as covers them completely, and decently, and not with superfluous ornaments for the one is becoming, the other is not. What? Dost thou approach God to pray with broidered hair and ornaments of gold? Art thou come to a dance? to a marriage? to a gay procession? There such . . . costly garments, had been seasonable; here not one of them is wanted. Thou art come to pray, to supplicate for pardon of thy sins, to plead for thine offenses, beseeching the Lord, and hoping to render Him propitious to thee. . . . Away with such hypocrisy!

The church is to be a place where worship happens, not where people put on a show. It bothers me when I see people who claim to be Christians display a consuming preoccupation with their appearance. Whenever self- centered women take advantage of the worship service to call attention to themselves, it will bring great tragedy to the church.

C. The Proper Motives

1. Of married women

A Christian wife should seek to attract attention to her godly character, not her clothing. She should show by her dress and demeanor her love and devotion to her own husband. She should demonstrate a humble heart committed to worshiping God.

2. Of single women

Single women need to realize that the worship service isn't the place to try to attract men. They too should understand it is more important that someone be attracted to their godly character rather than their outward appearance.

How can both married and single women know if they are dressed properly for the worship service? By examining their motives. Ask yourself, Why am I dressed the way I am? What is my goal? Am I trying to draw attention to God or to myself? Will what I'm wearing stand out or will it be considered appropriate for the occasion?

First Peter 3:3-4 is a parallel passage to 1 Timothy 2:9-10. Peter writes, "Whose adorning, let it not be that outward adorning of braiding the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel, but let it be the hidden man of the heart in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and

quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. " Like Paul, Peter emphasizes that a woman is not to be preoccupied with what she wears, but who she is.

II. THE ATTITUDE OF WOMEN (v. 9b)

"With godly fear and sobriety"

A. Godly Fear

The Greek word translated "godly fear" (aid[ma]os) refers to modesty mixed with humility. It connotes a sense of shame--not shame in being a woman, but in any way inciting lust or distracting others from a proper worship of God. A woman with a proper sense of shame will dress in such a way as not to be a source of temptation. Aid[ma]os implies morally rejecting anything dishonorable to God. This is the woman who would be so grieved over the possibility of offending God that she would never do anything that could cause anyone to stumble.

B. Self-Control

"Sobriety" (Gk. , s[ma]ophrosun[ma]e) is better translated "self- control. " It has a sexual connotation in extrabiblical literature, where it speaks of totally controlling one's passions and desires. In The Republic Plato said it is one of the four cardinal virtues.

1. The danger of failing to exercise self-control

a) To the leaders

In 1 Timothy 3 Paul says that both elders and deacons in the church must be "the husband of one wife" (vv. 2, 12). That phrase can be literally translated as "a one-woman man. " A man in a leadership role in the church must be totally devoted to his wife. I believe one of the major problems at Ephesus was that the leaders were not faithful to their wives. Satan attacked the church by bringing alluring women into the church to seduce the leadership. He does the same thing today.

b) To the congregations

(1) At Ephesus

In 1 Timothy 5:14 Paul stressed the importance of younger widows remarrying. He knew that a large number of single women with strong desire for marriage was a potential danger to the purity of the church. And that's true in our day too.

(2) At Crete

In Titus 2:4-5 Paul instructs Titus that older women are to teach young women "to be sober minded, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the Word of God be not blasphemed. " Instead of doing good, some women were causing problems in the congregation.

(3) At Corinth

In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul rebukes the Corinthians for tolerating a situation involving sexual sin. In fact, it was a form of sexual sin that was repulsive even to pagans: a man was having an affair with his father's wife (his stepmother). That was a form of incest. What was worse, instead of mourning over that sin, the Corinthians oddly enough were boasting about it (v. 2)! According to 1 Corinthians 6:13 they attempted to justify sexual sin by quoting what was perhaps a common Greek proverb: "Foods for the body and the body for foods. " That is to say sex, like eating, is merely a biological function, so why get upset about it? But Paul warned the Corinthians to flee from sexual sin (v. 18). There is little doubt in my mind that the problem concerning women with improper motives plagued the church at Corinth as well as the churches in Ephesus and Crete.

2. The judgment for failing to exercise self-control

In Isaiah 3:16-26 God pronounces judgment on women who dressed to draw attention to themselves: "The Lord saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet; therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will uncover their secret parts. In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling anklets, and their headbands, and their crescents like the moon, the pendants, and the bracelets, and the veils, the headdresses, and the armlets, and the sashes, and the perfume boxes, and the amulets, the rings, and nose rings, the festival robes, and the mantles, and the cloaks, and the handbags, the hand mirrors, and the linen wrappers, and the turbans, and the veils. And it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet fragrance there shall be rottenness; and instead of a girdle, a rope; and instead of well set hair, baldness; and instead of a robe, a girding of sackcloth; and branding instead of beauty. Thy men shall fall by the sword, and thy mighty in the war. And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she being desolate shall sit upon the ground. " To wear jewelry or expensive clothes is not evil, but to wear them for evil purposes is. Clothing that reflects impure motives has no place in the church.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Who is behind the attack on the God-designed roles for men and women?

2. Describe the circumstances that prompted Paul to write 1 Timothy.

3. What was Paul's main purpose in writing 1 Timothy (3:14-15)?

4. What were some of the problems involving the women in the Ephesian church?

5. What is the significance of the phrase "in like manner" in verse 9 ?

6. Describe the cultural setting in which the Ephesian church found itself regarding women's clothing.

7. True or False: According to the Bible, it is always wrong for women to wear expensive jewelry and fancy clothes.

8. How can a woman know if she is properly dressed to attend the worship service?

9. A woman is not to be preoccupied with _____ _____ _____, but _____ _____ _____ .

10. What should a woman's attitude be toward distracting someone from worshiping God?

11. Why might Paul have included "husband of one wife" as one of the qualifications for church leaders?

12. How did the Corinthians defend their toleration of sexual sin (cf. 1 Cor. 6:13)?

13. What is Paul's counsel on how to avoid sexual sin (cf. 1 Cor. 6:18)?

Pondering the Principles

1. First Timothy 2:9 stresses the importance of preparing for the worship service. When you go to church, the issue is not just how well prepared the preacher or choir is, but how well you are prepared to worship God. As you prepare yourself for the worship service, ask yourself these questions: Am I sincere? Is my attention focused on God? Am I coming to worship God knowing His acceptance of me is based solely on what Christ has done for me? Am I coming with a pure heart, having dealt with any sin in my life? Am I coming to be a spectator, or a participant?

2. While First Timothy 2:9 teaches the importance of a woman's attitude and dress in preventing sexual sin, men also have a responsibility. In 2 Timothy 2:22 Paul instructs Timothy (and us) to flee

from lust. Men, when you see a provocatively dressed woman (in or out of the worship service), what's your reaction? Do you stare, or can you say with Job "I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman?" (Job 31:1, NKJV) Are you obeying Paul's command to flee from sexual sin, or are you courting it by reading books, looking at magazines, or watching TV programs and movies you know are wrong? Memorize Job 31:1, 1 Corinthians 6:18, and 2 Timothy 2:22: then put their teaching into practice by making yourself accountable to a spiritually mature brother in Christ for your thought life, reading, and viewing habits.

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