

“Church Behavior”
1 Timothy 2:8-15
September 20, 2009

INTRODUCTION:

Our passage this morning is about the kind of behavior God requires when the church gathers for corporate worship. People have widely varying opinions about what constitutes proper church behavior. My parents were old school about this. In the church my family attended when I was a young child, children went straight from the nursery into the regular worship service when they were about three years old. My parents believed that lack of years was no excuse for indecorous behavior in church. If we squirmed too much, we would receive a pinch from my mom or dad. Momma’s pinches were the worst. She didn’t just squeeze a little flesh between her fingers. She would grab a good portion of skin between the thumb and forefinger, lift it away from the underlying muscle, and rotate it as far as her wrist would allow, which was close to 180 degrees. In addition, they had some pinch limit in mind each Sunday, and if one of us exceeded that limit, we would be rewarded with a spanking when we got home.

The behavior expected at church has changed during the past fifty years. I remember attending church with my parents a few years ago, right after their church began a contemporary service. I found the service uncomfortably informal, more like a sporting event than a worship service. Dress was very casual, shorts and T-shirts being the norm. People were drinking and snacking freely during the service, and there was almost constant movement in and out of the room during the entire service, some of it undoubtedly the call of nature after consuming as much coffee as people were drinking. I wanted to pinch my parents for their altered standards of acceptable worship behavior since I was a squirming three-year-old.

The church in Ephesus was in a sad state, and Paul had put Timothy in charge of straightening things out. We saw last week how Timothy was told to make sure the church was praying. In this week’s passage, Paul gives some instruction about proper behavior while the church is gathered for corporate public worship. He names three problem areas in worship. As we look at these, let me remind you that this is more than an academic discussion about acceptable worship. Like this Ephesian church, we sometimes fall into disorder in our lives too. Order can be restored only as we learn to worship God. Let’s look then at these three problem areas. Note how all three of them have their roots in a worship that is centered around man instead of God.

I. Anger

Paul instructed the men of the church about anger and quarreling because it was likely that they had a problem with this. As we have already seen from chapter 1, false teaching had entered the church (1:3), and one of the outcomes of this was to increase the amount of quarreling that was taking place in the church. With an increase of quarreling came an increase of anger. And when a person is angry, true and genuine prayer is impossible. The church in Ephesus, particularly its men, was neglecting prayer because of this angry quarreling with one another.

Several years ago, I read about two ranchers in Alberta, Canada whose ranches were adjacent to one another for a stretch of about a half mile. As the number of cows on both ranches grew, the need arose to build a fence to separate the two ranches so their cows didn't get mixed up with one another. One of the ranchers, Paul, approached his neighbor, Oscar, with a proposal to split the cost of the fence. But Oscar refused to contribute, in hopes that Paul would build it anyway and pay for it in full. That's exactly what happened. After the fence was completed, Oscar said to Paul, "I see we have a fence." "What do you mean 'we'?" Paul replied. "I got the property line surveyed and built the fence two feet into my land. That means some of my land is outside the fence. And if any of your cows set foot on my land, I'll shoot them." Oscar knew Paul wasn't joking, so when he eventually decided to use the land adjoining Paul's for pasture, he was forced to build another fence, two feet away. Now there are two parallel fences two feet apart running for a half mile, standing as a monument to the foolishness of anger and quarreling.

Such angry quarreling does not belong in the church, whether the quarrels are about theology, politics, or the paint colors chosen for the church's educational building. Why is anger so common among people, and why is it incompatible with worship? Sinful anger (because there is a righteous anger) is rooted in wanting to be right. We get angry because someone challenges us in a way that threatens something very deep within. We want to be right simply because we find our identity in being right. And when it becomes an issue of identity, we will fight to preserve that. So if your identity gets wrapped up in some political perspective and someone challenges that, there is too much at stake not to fight back. The same can be said for theology or even inconsequential things like a favorite football team. This is so incompatible with worship because it is self-centered rather than God-centered. Our identity means so much to us because God means so little. When we come face-to-face with the greatness of God, and when we come to know that this great God has loved us and cares for us even now, then we are delivered from elevating self to the highest value. Then God comes to have the highest value in our lives. This is why Paul brings up anger in the context of the corporate public worship of the church. Anger is a true indicator of the elevation of self; prayer without anger is an indication of the elevation of God.

II. Ostentation

The transitional word of verse 9, **“likewise”**, lets us know that Paul is still addressing the topic that’s been before us this entire chapter, corporate public worship. Just as worship is hurt by angry, quarreling men, so it is also hurt by women who dress in an ostentatious way. **“Likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works.”** These words have sometimes been misunderstood to mean that women should avoid all forms of physical adornment and instead should dress as plainly as possible. In response, it needs to be noted that Paul’s basic commandment is just the opposite. If you take away all the qualifying adjectives and adverbs, the basic sentence reads, **“Women should adorn themselves.”** To adorn oneself means to dress in a way that enhances one’s beauty. It is not more spiritual when a woman dresses plainly. On the contrary, it is more spiritual when she gives consideration to ways to enhance her beauty by the way she dresses and by the way she prepares her hair and makeup.

The emphasis of the passage, however, is on the ostentatious display of beauty that takes this too far. James Hurley helps us here by explaining something of Paul’s cultural context.

He refers instead to the elaborate hair-styles which were then fashionable among the wealthy and also to the styles worn by courtesans. The sculpture and literature of the period make it clear that women often wore their hair in enormously elaborate arrangements with braids and curls interwoven or piled high like towers and decorated with gems and/or gold and/or pearls. The courtesans wore their hair in numerous small pendant braids with gold droplets or pearls or gems every inch or so, making a shimmering screen of their locks... When Paul wrote ‘braided hair *and* gold *or* pearls’ he probably meant ‘braided hair decorated with gold or with pearls.’ (*Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*, p. 199)

What Paul is forbidding to Christian women is an extravagant devotion to physical beauty. Precisely what this looks like changes from culture to culture. In our own culture, it would be wearing clothes that display ostentatiously a woman’s body or her wealth. I think it refers to any style of dress where the goal is the narcissistic one of seeking to be the center of attention.

What he urges instead is the enhancement of a woman’s beauty by the pursuit of godly character. I think many women underestimate the power of this adornment. A woman’s beauty is significantly enhanced by her growth in godliness. The Bible in many places joins together the physical and spiritual, and this is yet one more example of that. I like what John Stott says about this aspect of a woman’s beauty.

Paul is reminding women that there are two kinds of feminine beauty, physical and moral, beauty of body and beauty of character. The church should be a veritable beauty parlour, because it encourages its women members to adorn themselves with

good deeds. Women need to remember that if nature has made them plain, grace can make them beautiful, and if nature has made them beautiful, good deeds can add to their beauty. Moreover, men can facilitate this process by recognizing and applauding in women the beauty of Christlikeness (*The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus*, pp. 84-85).

Remember that this passage is in the context of public worship. It is improper for a woman (or a man either for that matter) to come to public worship with the chief concern of eliciting praise for her beauty, because the proper concern is to elicit praise for God. Ironically, the way for a woman to increase her beauty is by the godliness that occurs when she learns to make God the center of her life instead of herself.

III. Gender Role Confusion

Entire books have been written in an attempt to understand this passage. Let me begin by giving you my conclusions on its meaning. I believe this passage teaches that authority within the church, expressed through its ordained officers, is reserved to men. I believe it's helpful in understanding this passage to grasp its historical context. In his theology of the New Testament, Frank Thielman links the false teaching Paul is so concerned about with this problem of gender confusion.

The false teaching has started to spread like gangrene (2 Tim. 2:17), and its success has apparently arisen from the clever efforts of its teachers to target Christian households where the male head of the household is either absent or derelict in his familial duties. Thus Paul says that the false teachers are 'ruining whole households' (Titus 1:11). They apparently do this by insinuating themselves into homes and convincing already corrupt women of their false teaching (2 Tim. 3:6).... Wealthy women in Ephesus may have been paying the false teachers to tutor them and then conveying the false teaching they learned to the churches that met in their houses (p. 412).

So church authority, expressed through its ordained officers, is limited to men. Several qualifications are necessary. First, this does not mean that women are to be viewed as inferior or second class in any way. The Bible is very clear on this point. In Christ, **“there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”** (Gal. 3:28). As a matter of fact, the very fact that Paul found it necessary to address this topic illustrates the power of the gospel to elevate the status of women. In the Judaism of this day, women were not allowed to prophesy or even read the Torah. They were confined to the outer court of the temple. Greek women experienced even more limiting conditions. So the fact that Paul even had to address this is a kind of indirect evidence of the improvement of the position of women in Christianity. A second qualification is that this restriction applies to the exercise of authority in the church, not outside the church. The Bible doesn't ban women from all authority, just authority in the church. There is nothing unbiblical about women having authority in the workplace or the political

arena. Third, male authority is expressed in ordained offices, leaving women free to do anything in the church that an unordained man can do.

One of the significant issues in this passage that needs to be cleared up is the issue of what is cultural and therefore limited to Paul's day, and what is perpetually binding upon all cultures. Some want to say that this is all cultural, with none of it binding upon us. Others want to say that none of it is cultural, with the result that all is binding upon us. I believe there is a mixture of the cultural and the binding in all three sections. So in verse 8, where Paul commands men to pray without anger, the prayer without anger is binding, while the lifting of hands is cultural. Our cultural expression of prayer is the bowing of the head and closing of the eyes. In the next two verses about adornment, the binding command is for women to avoid ostentation and to adorn themselves with good works. The cultural element is the braiding of the hair and the wearing of gold and pearls. In the third section about the role of women in the church, the binding part is Paul's command to forbid women from exercising authority in the church. The cultural, non-binding part is the silence and teaching restriction. In any case, we know that not all of this is a matter of culture, because Paul bases his conclusion on creation and the fall.

Paul teaches that the pattern of creation instructs us about the role of headship and authority given to man. His statement about this is that the man was formed first. He is making reference to a well-known Old Testament law called primogeniture, which is the law of the firstborn. The firstborn son had authority not accorded to those born later. Adam, of course, wasn't first born, since he wasn't born. But he was first-formed. As a result, he had the authority of the firstborn.

Then Paul brings up the fall, saying that Eve was deceived and not Adam. He doesn't mean that women can't lead because they have shown themselves to be more gullible than men. If anything, this makes man guiltier than the woman. His point, rather, is that in the fall Adam and Eve both reversed the proper roles, Eve by taking the initiative of leadership and Adam by abandoning it.

CONCLUSION:

Paul's concluding verse makes the same point that we have pointed out three times already. In our corporate worship, as well as in our lives, everything falls into its proper place when Jesus becomes the center rather than self being at the center. Angry men and ostentatiously dressed women both make themselves the center. Paul says in verse 15 that women will be saved through childbearing. There is actually a definite article before the word "childbearing." Paul is reminding women that their salvation is found in *the* childbearing, a reference to the first promise given Eve that she will be mother of all living because of the promise of the Messiah. It is as we center our lives on him that everything takes its proper place.