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1 Timothy 2:9-15

Sixth Message

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RESTORING A WOMAN'S INFLUENCE

SERIES: HOW TO RESTORE A CHURCH

On this, the first Sunday of Advent, as we anticipate the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to earth, our attention focuses on the lives of two obscure women who are the objects of divine favor and miraculous birth. It's utterly amazing to think that our Lord, the Creator of the universe, would risk himself, giving up his equality with God and humbly taking residence in the womb of a teenaged girl. As a virgin, Mary will have to risk her reputation to receive the divine gift, but in that moment the kingdom of heaven will come to earth:

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me according to your word." (Luke 1:34-38 TNIV)

Mary's willing obedience makes her the archetypical Christian, who mysteriously discovers the Holy Spirit coming upon them and then Christ being formed in them through intentional and glorious submission. In our text today from 1 Timothy 2, Paul's instructions to women should cause us to reflect on the privileged role that women play in the kingdom of God.

The title of our sermon is "Restoring a Woman's Influence." As most of you know, this passage has given rise to no little controversy over the role of women in the church. Some view Paul's directives to women as backward and misguided at best, or blindly chauvinistic at worst, falling far short of Jesus' liberating actions toward women. Others interpret them as culturally conditioned, a compromise for the times, with no enduring applicability. Still others take the directives at face value and apply them with such singular force, neglecting the larger context and other positive teachings about women, that they are robbed of their dignity.

The current controversy and contention caused by Paul's instructions are not only unfortunate but ironic. His purpose in writing the letter was to silence the theological controversies of the false teachers precisely because of the strife they were causing between men and women. His directives are not punitive but redemptive. They are intended to restore God's original design for men and women, set out in the Garden. In Paul's mind, this is vital to God's mission to the world, because healthy relationships are the natural outworking of the gospel and its authentication to the world. Therefore it is critical that we get it right, especially today when there is so much confusion regarding sexual roles. Before we examine Paul's corrective words, therefore, let us review the foundational truths regarding male and female roles, from the creation narrative.

Introduction: Man and Woman in the Garden of God

A. The equality of men and women

In the first creation account, both the man and the woman are created in God's image (Gen 1:26-28), and are thereby crowned as co-regents to rule over his entire creation. In the second account, after a lengthy and lonely assignment in God's zoo, God puts the man to sleep; then he forms the woman and brings her to the man. The moment Adam lays his eyes on her, his words spill out in a spontaneous, jubilant poem of praise:

"This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called 'woman,'
for she was taken out of man." (Gen 2:23)

James Trott writes "As far as titles go, Adam might have named it 'Successful Surgery,' but it seems more appropriate to call it 'Wow!' or 'Bonedeep Beautiful Baby.'"¹ Though she stands opposite him, unique in her sexuality, every line in the poem celebrates her equality with the resounding clarity of a church bell. It is significant that the only recorded words prior to the fall are a man's praise celebrating his wife's equality. (I won't hesitate to add that God designed men to be poets.)

Adam's words of appreciation stand in stark contrast to the second poem in the Bible. This gives voice to Lamech, the descendent of Cain, who murdered his brother Abel:

Lamech said to his wives,
"Adah and Zillah, listen to me;
wives of Lamech, hear my words.
I have killed a man for wounding me,
a young man for injuring me.
If Cain is avenged seven times,
then Lamech seventy-seven times." Gen 4:22-24

Instead of speaking to God in praise for a wife, Lamech speaks to his two wives (apparently one was not enough) in praise of his vindictive and vengeful actions. Adah and Zillah do not function with the dignity of equals standing opposite him, but merely as enlisted witnesses to support his wounded ego and vicious crime. To Lamech, their worth is found only in relation to him. This man is a user and an abuser. The legacy he leaves is a city terrorized by violent revenge over the weak and helpless. Taken together, these two poems represent two humanities and affirm that how men treat and value women will, in very large part, shape their destiny. This is confirmed by Peter, who warns husbands that if they do not honor their wives as "equal heirs of the grace of life," their prayers will be hindered. Bruce Waltke, in his superb *Old Testament Theology*, summarizes how a woman's equality is celebrated throughout the rest of Scripture:

The rest of the Old Testament reinforces women's equality in being and in dignity with men...Mothers stand on equal footing with fathers in teaching their children (Prov 31:26)...women are called to be "prophetesses" on an equal footing with prophets... Huldah is a most remarkable prophetess... when Josiah's workmen find the Book of the Law while they are repairing the temple, Josiah directs five leaders to inquire of *I AM* about the book. Instead of going to Jeremiah

and Zephaniah, they go to their contemporary, Huldah, to verify the book (2 Kings 22:8-20). Clarence Vos...says,

‘That officials from the royal court went to a prophetess relatively unknown with so important a matter is strong indication that in this period of Israel’s history there is little if any prejudice against a woman’s offering of prophecy.’²

Covenant women pray directly to God without the priestly mediation of their husbands...Women sing and dance in worship, expressions of the acme of life...in the New Testament...Luke takes pains to stress the important role that women play on Paul’s second missionary journey...The apostle has a vision of a man of Macedonia begging him to come and help him (16:9), and when he arrives he finds women in prayer who become his first converts in Europe (vv.11-15). Women engage in church authorized ministries: Phoebe, Prisc(illa), Euodia, and Syntyche are celebrated as “ministers/couriers” (*diakonos*) or “coworkers” (*synergos*)...Their equality before God in their nature, spiritual gifts, and prayer is found in both testaments.³

B. Complimentary in function

But it is important to note that *equality in person* does not imply *identical in function*. The fact that Adam was created first, and the woman was made to be a “helper suitable to him,” demonstrates that the man functions as her head, and Adam demonstrated his headship by “naming” her. “In ancient times the authority to name implied authority to govern (Gen 1:5; 2:19).”⁴ Biblical headship does not imply domination, but loving leadership that nurtures, guides and protects so that those under their care can develop and grow to their full potential.

The fall of man destroyed the intimacy between the man and his wife, replacing their vulnerability and trust with the desire to dominate and subjugate one another (Gen 3:16). Redemption does not remove our sexual distinctions, but rather restores them to the proper attitudes of love and mutual trust that were manifest in Eden. As redeemed males and females play out the dignity of their equality in complimentary roles they mirror the mystery of the Godhead, in which the three persons are one and equal, yet the Son willingly submits to the Father, and the Spirit obeys both.⁵ Equality and subordination, rather than being in opposition to one another, find their holy harmony in the very person of Jesus,

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant...” (Phil 2:6-7)

The biblical model celebrates the equality of women in the dignity of their personhood, while glorying in their complimentary role to men. The apostle’s instructions that follow are aimed at restoring this model.

I. Influence in the Realm of Adornment (1 Tim 2:9-10)

I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. (2:9-10)

A. Adornment in dress: Simplicity and purity

Paul’s first directive answers the perennial question that plagues every woman when she is invited out to a public gathering: “What shall I wear?” Clothing, as we all know, signifies more than covering for, as the fashion designers are wont to say, “Everyone wants to make a statement.” In the ancient world, a woman’s outer adornment was a reflection of her morality, and specifically for a wife, the public expression of her fidelity to her husband:

A particular dress code was in effect because, with her outer dress, the woman would signal either modesty and dignity or promiscuous availability. At this time the widely approved apparel of the wife was the *stola*, a robe-like garment made of much cloth. As a sign of marital fidelity and respectability, the *stola* presented an intentional contrast with the often more revealing and colorful clothing (*toga*) of the prostitute, designed to signify her shame but frequently used instead to advertise her wares.⁶

The contrasting apparel between the faithful wife and the immoral woman reached its height each March and April during the great annual processions to the female goddess, Artemis, whose seven-story temple dominated the skyline of Ephesus. Thousands of tourists flocked to the city for these ceremonies. There they were welcomed by drummers, acrobats, flute players, bankers, and seductively dressed priestesses called *hierodules*, who engaged in sacred prostitution. Flouting acceptable dress codes was not just the practice of priestesses, it was also taking hold among wealthy Roman women, who were exercising many more freedoms in public life. Apparently this “sexual revolution” was making itself felt within the church – a grave concern to Paul due to what it communicated to outsiders. Because “Christian worship, carried out in the reception room or atrium of a house, was essentially a ‘public’ activity,”⁷ a woman’s dress was not only seen in the church, but also by public passersby.

Instead of dressing provocatively, Paul instructs women to adorn themselves with “decency and propriety.” The latter term was “the central cardinal virtue applied to wives, setting them apart as most able to honor their husbands.”⁸ A woman’s modesty and self-control enhanced her beauty far more than seductive clothing.

Secondly, women should avoid ostentation in dress. Paul describes the coveted wardrobe of the wealthy woman, from her head and neck to her designer jeans. It was fashionable for rich women to display their wealth by elaborate hairstyles, with intricate braids interwoven with gold plaiting. As gold was rare, in this way rich husbands could draw attention to their wives, together with donning them with expensive pearls. But in Paul’s mind this public display of wealth did more harm than good.

First, it damaged a woman’s reputation, as these flashy symbols of success became associated with the dress of well-paid prostitutes. Second, for a woman to draw attention to herself with expensive clothing not only exposed her insecurity, it also caused the majority of the women in church, who were relatively poor, to feel envious and inconsequential. And finally, the entire practice was a waste of time, because a woman’s true beauty was not to be found in what she wore.

B. Adornment in character

What truly adorns a woman is “good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.” True beauty is not found in what a woman puts on, but rather in what she gives out from a sacrificial spirit.

Recall the story of how Abraham’s servant was sent on a mission to secure a bride for his son Isaac. The servant prayed that God would lead him to just the right girl for Isaac to marry. The test he devised to select the bride was not a beauty contest, however, but a test of hospitality. The narrator records his prayer:

“See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. May it be that when I say to a girl, ‘Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,’ and she says, ‘Drink, and I’ll water your camels too’—let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master.” (Gen 24:13-14)

This was a stiff test. Because a camel drank so much (some estimates say up to forty gallons), men usually drew their water, while women

would water the rest of the herd. Drawing water for ten camels would be a near supernatural feat. Before he can even finish his prayer, the servant catches sight of Rebekah, whose beauty was heightened by her purity: "The girl was very beautiful, a virgin; no man had ever slept with her" (v. 16). When the servant asks for a drink, she responds with an immediate yes, but says nothing about the waiting camels. Then she carefully lowers the large jar on her shoulder, pours water into her hand and gives the servant a refreshing drink. After quenching his thirst, the long awaited moment arrives: the young girl offers to water his camels. So swift are her actions, the servant can hardly speak as she runs back to the well to draw water for ten thirsty camels. Now that is a bride fit for a family that is the paragon of hospitality.

Next, Paul turns his attention to correcting the way a number of women were inappropriately seizing influence over men (or their husbands).

II. Influence in Relation to Men (1 Tim 2:11-14)

A. Quiet submission instead of angry disruption (2:11-12)

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. 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. (2:11-12)

At first glance these words might lead us to think that Paul does not permit women to have speaking roles in church. The problem with this interpretation, however, is that in his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle gives specific directives to women on how to pray and prophesy (1 Cor 11:2-6) in the context of the worshipping assembly. Paul's command may be addressing a situation similar to that in Corinth. In the early church, everyone was invited to share their spiritual gifts in the assembly for the purpose of building up the good of the body. When those with the gift of prophecy gave a revelation, the other prophets present, both male and female, would pass judgment on what was said to discern its validity. But a problem arose when a wife passed judgment on her husband's revelations, dishonoring his headship in the home. Something similar may have been occurring in Ephesus.

Another possibility was that there was an angry and domineering spirit brewing among a significant number of the women that was disrespectful to the male leadership and disruptive of the worship services. This was certainly characteristic of the scores of young women who served in the temple of Artemis where "The focus ... was a goddess whose worship was controlled by virgins who shared leadership with males only if they were castrated."⁹

It is important to note that Paul does not dismiss these women, but rather invites them to continue to worship if they will change their attitude. For if they will choose to continue to "learn in quietness and full submission," such an attitude would relieve the tension present in Ephesus. In contrast to the synagogue, where only men are engaged in learning, in the church, women are to have equal opportunity to learn alongside men. In our intern program we are delighted that we often have an equal or greater number of women being trained as men.

Paul's next directive that he "does not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man" has been the source of debate among scholars. Part of the problem is that the verb "assume authority" (*authentein*) is used nowhere else in the New Testament. Kenneth Bailey, whom I highly respect as a leading scholar in the Middle Eastern cultural background of the New Testament, concludes from his research of this term in secular literature that, "It is a very strong word and can also be translated 'to commit murder' or 'assert absolute sway' ... I would submit that the overtones of this rare, very strong word, make clear the author's

meaning. In Ephesus some women had acquired absolute authority over the men in the church and were verbally brutalizing them."

His suggested expanded translation would be: "I do not allow these ignorant women to batter the men. They are to stop shouting and calm down."¹⁰

Other scholars, like George Knight, disagree. He finds that "the use of the word shows no inherent negative sense of grasping or usurping authority or of exercising it in a harsh or authoritative way, but simply means 'to have or exercise authority.'"¹¹ Waltke also questions the validity of limiting the application to false teachers: "Are they all to learn in submission and not teach men because some women are spreading false doctrine? Would the Apostle have silenced the gifted, older women who could have been so helpful to protect the younger women against false teachers?"¹²

I'm not a scholar, but I sense there is a normative principle and broader application in Paul's commands than some would admit. In the early church, preaching and teaching the gospel always integrated the truth of gospel story, with its ethical implications for holy living, that were authoritatively applied both to men and women. For this reason Paul would not place a woman in a role in the church where she would be required to publicly exhort, correct, or rebuke men. That is just not appropriate.

This does not mean that men cannot learn from women or be corrected by them. Just visit my home and you'll see that in action! David was instructed how to pray by Hannah, whose prayer becomes the theological key to the books of Samuel. Abigail's bold initiative and wise counsel disarmed the angry king and saved him from shedding innocent blood. In the book of Acts, Priscilla takes the lead along with her husband Aquila to enlighten the gifted teacher Apollos. After hearing him teach, they invited him home for lunch and spoke to him in a sensitive and godly way, teaching him the whole gospel (Acts 18:26). Correction is fine, but it must be done in the right arena and in an appropriate manner.

Paul gave women complete freedom to express their spiritual gifts, including teaching and leading within the church, as long as it did not dishonor the men in leadership. The apostle gives the theological basis for a woman's submission from the creation story.

B. The theological basis for submission (2:13-14)

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. (2:13-14)

First, submission is taught by virtue of creation: "For it was Adam who was first created, *and* then Eve." Secondly, the damage resulting from reversing the divine order is illustrated by the fall. By tempting the woman, the devil succeeded in getting Adam to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Once he had successfully "deceived" her, "She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it" (Gen 3:6). The man bears greater culpability because he stood by in silence and did nothing to confront the lies posed to his wife by the devil. The devil was using the same strategy in Ephesus, as the false teachers were infiltrating the church through "gullible women," as the male leaders, like Adam, stood by in passive silence.

But lest women feel slighted that they were prevented from serving in some offices of leadership alongside men, Paul concludes by describing the complimentary and unique role God gave to women in life and ministry.

III. Unparalleled Influence in Relation to the Next Generation (1 Tim 2:15)

But women [lit. “she”] will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety. (2:15)

The false teachers were saying that women should not get married, and thus, naturally, not have children. But Paul, by contrast, reminds women of their privilege in giving birth and the vital role which motherhood played in salvation history. Immediately following the fall of mankind, God announced to the serpent,

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel.” (Gen 3:15)

God promised that from the woman would come a seed that would crush the head of the serpent. Following the birth of her firstborn, Eve exclaims, “With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man.” In the process of giving birth, she feels a special kinship with the Lord because she, like him, had created a man. She uses the term “man,” a mature male rather than the expected “baby” or “son.” Whereas the first woman originated from a man, the second man originates from a woman, revealing how the sexes are interrelated and mutually dependent. Why compete with a man when you can create a man?

But with the promise of joy also comes pain. God continued,

“I will make your pains in childbearing very severe;
with pain you will give birth to children.” (Gen 3:16)

We know what happened, Eve lost both of her sons. One was a murderer, the other a victim, as “Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him” (Gen 4:8). And then the murderer became a wanderer. Talk about labor pains.

But the story doesn’t end there. Eve continued in faith. The *they* in verse 15 refers not to the children, but to the women. The women will find salvation “if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.” Even in the face of the death of her two sons, Eve continued to believe that God would be true to his promise and use her womb to bring salvation to the world. So she started all over again.

Adam made love to his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, “God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him.” Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to call on the name of the LORD. (Gen 4:25-26)

Despite the pain, Eve’s continued faith that God would keep his promise brought forth a new seed, Seth (“Seth,” *shet*, a pun on the Hebrew word “granted,” *shat*). From Seth came a new line of humanity who could articulate “weakness” (Enosh), and in their weakness they turned to God in prayer and praise. Why compete with a man when you can leave a legacy of generations of godly men?

With the advent of Christ and the birth of the New Covenant, Isaiah cries out,

“Sing, barren woman,
you who never bore a child, burst into song,
shout for joy, you who were never in labor;
because more are the children of the desolate woman
than of her who has a husband,”
says the LORD. (Isa 54:1)

In the age of the New Covenant, even the unmarried and barren women can have spiritual sons and daughters, and their fertility will be greater than the married women. This new life will break out in the very area where they are barren and desolate, just as it did for the Samaritan woman (John 4), who gave birth to an entire city in a day. May God so anoint the women among us that, whether single, married or widowed, they can give glorious praise to the One who grants them undying influence for countless generations.

And Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.” (Luke 1:46-50)

1 James H. Trott ed., *A Sacrifice of Praise* (Nashville: Cumberland House, 1999), xxii.

2 Clarence J. Vos, *Woman in Old Testament Worship* (Delft: Judels & Brinkman, 1968), 168.

3 Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology, An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 239-241.

4 Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 89.

5 Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 243.

6 Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 205-206.

7 Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 191.

8 Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 206.

9 Kenneth E. Bailey, “Women in the New Testament: A Middle Eastern View,” *Theology Matters* (2000): 7.

10 Bailey, “Women in the New Testament: A Middle Eastern View,” 8-9.

11 George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles, A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 141.

12 Bruce K. Waltke, “1 Timothy 2:8-15: Unique or Normative?” *Crux* 28, no. 1 (March 1992): 22-27.