

Sound Doctrine #2 Older Women

Intro: The freedom and power that women enjoy in this country is quite different from the condition of women in other cultures and in other times. In many of them, women have been repressed and had little opportunity to participate in public life or to have the same privileges or property rights as men. The double standard in what has been allowed for men in moral areas as opposed to women in moral areas has been grossly hypocritical.

However, it is interesting to note that, in the NT Roman world women had greater freedom and rights than in the past history of the ancient world. Bruce Winter in his excellent book “Roman wives, Roman widows” gives a full discussion to the legal rights of Cretan women and then adds to it the influence of the first century Roman law:

“The coming of Roman values in no way diminished the gains Cretan women had secured. The change in Rome with married women able to hold property provide the inhabitants of the imperial capital with one of the powerful levers that secured for them greater financial independence from the late Republic onwards, and hence a measure of social freedom. It will be suggest that the emergence of the “new” Roman women in the first century could only fortify the long-established legal gains that already provided a measure of independence for the women of Roman Crete” (Winter, p. 144).

Cretan law gave women the right to own property and also gave them greater freedom through that ownership. However, this power and freedom was a two-edged sword. It created many temptations for women to conduct themselves in ways not proper. Thus, it was necessary for Paul to urge Titus to teach “sound doctrine” to the women as well as the men.

Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, (Titus 2:3-4)

Characteristics of older women

“Likewise” is a common term for Paul in showing that what is being commanded is comparable to what has already been suggested. Thus, the instructions to the women are also intended to show how women may be able to influence the world about them and give credibility to the gospel in a culture known for immorality.

Reverent in behavior

katastema meaning demeanor, describing a state of mind hieroprepes—related to the Greek word for temple and means “suited to a sacred character”. The word in some ancient texts referred to the consecration of priestesses. Thus, the idea is that

older women carry into daily life the demeanor of priestesses in a temple” (Guthrie, quoting Dibelius) That would suggest that she shows a mind-set of respect for her god.

Today older women need to conduct themselves in a manner that reveals her respect for the Lord in all she does.

Not slanderers or addicted to wine

In ancient times women had not been allowed to drink wine or attend banquets; banquets were reserved for men where they were often “entertained” by courtesans. Such was accepted in the ancient world as the normal course for men. However, by the Roman period, evidence points to the participation of women in the “after dinners” as they were called, involving themselves in the immorality of the occasion. The Cretan environment was known for the misuse of wine resulting in drunkenness, revelry, and immorality. Cretan women apparently were as involved in these activities as men and needed the special exhortation to avoid this behavior.

Didow—to be enslaved

Polus—much

Oinos--wine

Diabolos—a word reserved for the devil who is a slanderer of God to men and men to God

There seems to be a connection between the two activities, as if to suggest that overindulgence in wine would lead to carelessness in the discussion of others. Athenaeus in the “Learned Banquet” quotes Epicharmus who observed the problems of gossip or slander at dinner parties: “But after drinking comes mockery, and after mockery filthy insults, and after insults a lawsuit” (Deipnosophists, 2.36 quoted by Winter in Roman wives, Roman widows,, p. 154.) Thus, the godly woman was urged to avoid these sins.

Teach what is good

Translates a single noun “kalodidaskaloi” (good teachers)

“ina” in order that

“they may train the younger women” This phrase in the NASV, argues Winter, does not do justice to the general usage of the verb “sophronizo” which meant “to call one to his/her senses”. The force of the verb here is that it is easy to get caught up in the cultural madness of a society and thus need to be called back to a more sensible way of life.

Though women are not allowed to teach or exercise dominion over men (1 Tim. 2:12), they are urged to be “good teachers” of younger women. Thus, Paul shows two things:

Younger women need role models and guidance in the work of being a wife and mother.

Older women should seek out opportunity to help those who are younger by giving them the wisdom of experience

Applying Paul's message in our contemporary culture

Students of 20th century America surely can note the dramatic change in the role of women in society. In fact one could note throughout the whole century a movement for women's equality, the passage of the women's right vote gave her a voice in the political process. Later there was a significant cultural change during and after world war II when many women went into the public workplace. Many of us can remember the so-called "women liberation movement" and the discussion of the "equal rights amendment" that sought to give equal opportunity to women in society in terms of jobs. And obviously women occupy a different role in society than they did at the beginning of the century—more freedom, more economic power, very much like the situation in Crete.

But that alteration in the role of women has also brought some temptations.

Women and men who are not married are brought together in close working relationships that have fostered home discontent and affairs between married men and women.

In some cases, the woman's freedom and power in secular life has a carryover in spiritual life and in some places, women have been more assertive about occupying roles forbidden to them by God. Thus ordination of women preachers has become a feature of the spiritual landscape.

The obligations of work can take a heavy toll on the relationship of a woman with her husband and her children. And in some cases women can get carried away with material success and not fulfill her role as wife and mother.

Older women need to be especially aware of the dangers of too much time on their hands in mid-life. Many modern women have suffered from alcoholism in middle age due to the unhappinesses of the "empty nest" and the lack of meaningful activity. Others have busied themselves on the phone in unproductive and even destructive ways as they passed along gossip and slanderous reports on others. The godly older woman needs to be aware of these sins and avoid them.

Thus Paul's words are particularly relevant to both older and young women.

Older women need to set the pace for the younger women spiritually, showing them how to participate in the Lord's work meaningfully while respecting the leadership limitations God has placed upon them.

Older women need to become "good teachers". I regret that through the years that churches have not provided opportunities to train women to be teachers of other women. In many churches, women were never encouraged to teach or lead other women in worship for fear that they might want to extend their role beyond God's prescribed areas. (A movement several years ago to suppress "ladies days" because there was fear that a woman who became a good public speaker might want to fill the pulpit.) Consequently, women

have not always developed their own spiritual nature and talents, using them where they could do tremendous good. Older women may need at times to “call the younger women to their senses” when they get carried away and become unbalanced in their duties to family.

Conclusion: So then I urge the older women to hear Paul’s words and apply them. I will be eternally grateful for the older women who have had such a great influence in my life and in the kingdom of God as “good teachers” and godly examples. I hope that our older women will aspire to leave a legacy of good works for others to remember.