

Sound Doctrine for Younger Women

Intro: In our study of the role of the various people in the church we have stressed the idea of evidence before information. Maybe we could equally stress the importance of evidence after information. If living a godly life gives us credibility in teaching others, it also creates respect for the message that makes us what we are. On the other hand, when we neglect to live the life we preach, the message itself may be disparaged. Paul in instructing the older women put it this way:

that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored. (Titus 2:4-5)

Cultural background

Bruce Winter in his book, "Roman wives, Roman widows" points out a number of evidences to suggest that a "new type of woman emerged in certain circles in Rome."

"Both in ostensibly factual texts and in imaginative writing a new kind of woman appears precisely at the time of Cicero and Caesar: a woman in high position, who nevertheless claims for herself the indulgence in sexuality of a woman of pleasure".

Lucius Seneca's letter from exile to his mother reveals the sharp contrast between the traditional woman and this new woman of Rome:

"Unlike the great majority of women you never succumbed to immorality, the worst evil of our time; jewels and pearls have not moved you; you never thought of wealth as the greatest gift to the human race; you have not been perverted by the imitation of the worse women who lead ever the virtuous into pitfalls; you have never blushed for the number of children, as if it taunted you with your years; never have you, in the manner of other women whose only recommendation lies in their beauty, tried to conceal your pregnancy as though it were indecent; you have not crushed the hope of children that were being nurtured in your body; you have not defiled your face with paints and cosmetics; never have you fancied the kind of dress that exposed no greater nakedness by being removed. Your only ornament, the kind of beauty that time does not tarnish, is the great honor of modesty". (Seneca, ad Helviam, 16:3-4).

As we pointed out in an earlier study, women on the island of Crete were not immune from the influences of this new woman. Typically younger women were more likely to embrace these values as the new way to live as opposed to the "old fashioned" or "traditional" values of their mothers and grandmothers. Therefore, Paul frames the remarks to the younger women in the context of the older women's role to "call them back to their senses". In other words, it is a call for them to resist the cultural influences to be like Rome's "leading ladies" and instead model behavior that would not cause

the word of God to be spoken against. What are the features of that behavior?

Exhortations to the younger women

Love their husbands and their children

The Greek term combines the word for love, “philos” with its objects creating the compound term. The noun itself is often translated “friend” and its kindred verb seems to express the idea of expressing affection for someone.

It would appear that any wife or mother would naturally possess affection toward her husband and children; but sometimes what might be naturally manifested is crowded out by the obligations of other pursuits.

Perhaps the stress is upon the objects themselves, i.e. that the younger woman is to concentrate on her relationship to her husband and children rather than upon others.

To be sensible and pure

The first word is the same word found in the section on older men meaning “temperate”. The idea again is that of self-control or moderation, the opposite of self-indulgence. For the woman, this word was something of the epitomizing virtue in the ancient world. It meant that she was modest in her behavior and dress.

The second word is “hagnos” meaning chaste or pure. This word used in connection with the earlier one reveals an inward heart of purity that would keep her from immoral activities.

Workers at home

There is some debate on whether the term should be akourous or akourgous (the one meaning keepers at home, the other meaning workers at home)

Strabo wrote that on the island of Crete that husbands “did not take their girls whom they married to their own homes immediately, but as soon as the girls were qualified to manage the affairs of the house”. Tacitus, the Roman historian, looked back to the good old days when “every child born to a respectable mother was brought up not in the room of a hired wet-nurse but at his mother’s knee. A mother could not know higher praise than that she managed her house and gave herself to her children...with piety and modesty she regulated not only the serious task of her youthful charges, but supervised no only the boy’s studies but also their recreation and games” (Winter, p. 161) On another occasion he observed, “our children are handed over at birth to some silly little Greek servant maid...The parents themselves make no effort to train their little ones in goodness and self-control; they grow up in an atmosphere of laxity...they come to lose all sense of shame, and all respect both for themselves and for other people” . The young woman was to be encouraged to domestic pursuits, devoted to her family.

Kind

Translate “agathos” which ordinarily means “good” is often used in terms of relationships as “kind”.

Perhaps the application would be not only to her family but to the household servants who could often be treated harshly and unfairly.

Subject to their own husbands

Translates “hupotasso” which Paul commonly uses in marriage texts to convey the idea of submission to the husband’s leadership and in this context may also suggest loyalty to her marriage bed rather than be immoral like many Roman women were.

Applying Paul’s word in our culture

Clearly there is nothing new under the sun. These quotes from ancient times sound quite suited to the times we live in. That means that the Scriptures still offer “sound” advice to all ages.

There is in today’s society a woman whose primary interests are elsewhere than her home. She is more interested in other women’s husbands than in her own and more interested in social activities than domestic activities. She is more interested in the material advancement and career achievement than having a spiritual impact upon her children. She is hardened by the business world rather than possessing the kindness of Christ. She is excited by the attention of her fellow-workers and dresses provocatively for her own gratification and promotion. She would resort to abortion if it were to get in the way of a rising career. Children are a sideline in the more important business of self-fulfillment and time with them is minimal. Such a woman knows her “sexual” clout and will not neglect to use it if it can get her ahead in business. Such a woman is not a home-maker, but a home wrecker. A Christian woman who aspires to be like her would bring reproach upon the gospel and the Lord’s people.

A significant question in this study is, are these exhortations an attempt to urge women to merely keep cultural norms? Was Paul simply a “social conservative” who wanted women to simply resist more liberal attitudes prevalent in society, or are they rooted in the divine order? I believe it is the latter.

Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.” (Genesis 2:18)

To the woman He said, “I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you shall bring forth children; yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”

Then to Adam He said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat from it’; Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. “Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field; By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to

the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, And to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3:16-19)

There is in the woman’s created role as helper to her husband and in her biological function as the birth parent an implied expectation that her primary work and activity would center on her husband and children.

It is not easy for a woman to manage the multiple contradictory expectations of our culture. She has to do it all! Like the “Enjolie” women, “bring home the bacon, fry it up in the pan and never, never let you forget you’re a man”. That image creates a “superwoman” mentality that causes many women to work themselves to exhaustion and live with constant anxiety about who is being neglected. This is madness!

Let the older women talk with the younger women about the importance of domestic priorities, managing a house that is peaceful and happy, raising children that are well-adjusted and spiritual, even if that means not having as nice a car or house or the latest household furnishings.

Let the older women talk with the younger women about what brings ultimate satisfaction. When you look back upon your days, you will not say I wish I spent more time in sales or at the office. You’ll cherish those special moments along life’s way when you were a wife and a mother.

Conclusion: Today there is also a great need for the young women to take to heart the words of sound doctrine. And, it is encouraging to see Christian women who must come to terms with the challenges of this culture, trying hard to keep their priorities right. I’ve taken heart by the counter-cultural realization that the “liberated” woman was not all that it was cracked up to be and many women now aspire to live in more traditional roles where they can find more satisfaction and accomplish more lasting good.