**Directions for worship- the role of women** 7/7/24 dkm md am

Read: Genesis 2:15-25, 1Timothy 2

Text: 1Timothy 2:8-15

Psalms: 63:1-8, 24:1-7, 127, 134a

In the beginning ‘God created man in his own image… male and female he created them’ (Gen 1:27). In a more detailed description of this aspect of God’s creation, we are told that the Lord God took a rib from Adam’s side and made this into a woman, and brought her to the man (Gen 2:21,22). Adam called her ‘woman’ because she was taken out of man. Adam was alone and needed a helper comparable to him (Gen 2:18,23). This is a ‘strange’ explanation for the origin of the two sexes, but who has a better one! Moreover, can you deny the existence of men and women and their differences? Can you deny the fact that women, not men, give birth to babies, and this by man being joined to his wife in one flesh (Gen 2:24)?

We live in a society where these fundamental truths are being challenged. We live in a society of sinful and rebellious men and women, a society that is perverse and confused because of this rebellion against God. It was just a generation ago that marriage started to be undermined and discarded by many. Of course, the entrance of sin into the world brought sexual immorality and infidelity in marriages. The apostle Paul had seen the ways in which the people of Ephesus worshipped their goddess, Diana. Silver idols of her were made and sold (Acts 19:24). Worship of this goddess, like that of the goddess Aphrodite in Corinth, and like most pagan worship, was highly sexualised.

Paul was well aware of the entrance of sin into the world, and the effect this had not only on our relationship to God but our relationships with one another, particularly the relationship between a man and a woman in marriage. Sinful human beings want nothing to do with God and his created order. They want to make their own order, order for their own lives, and order for society. Attempts to do this have resulted in horrendous and harmful divisions in society such that thousands of laws have be made and millions of dollars have been spent in the effort to heal broken relationships.

These efforts continue today because they are ineffective and will remain so while God’s created order is deliberately denied. Our prayer is that the church at least will understand, will obey and will teach the order in which God created man and woman, and the dominion he gave mankind over the rest of creation. Jesus of Nazareth showed us the right way to live in this world, and by grace through faith he enables us to live uprightly in an upside-down world.

In writing to Timothy, who he left in charge of the church at Ephesus, the apostle Paul gives directions regarding public worship. The church at least should be the place where the commands of Christ are followed, to the praise and glory of his holy name. Of first importance in worship is prayer, and Paul has given instructions regarding the nature of prayer and who should be prayed for; the simple answer is ‘everyone’, because God wants all to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (2:4). His next focus regarding worship is the role of women in the church. By way of transition, he says his desire is for men to pray. He then says that women should learn in silent submission, and his third point is, ‘Women will be saved in childbearing’ (2:15).

**1.Men in prayer**

Prayer is an important part of public worship. In keeping with practices in synagogue worship, as known to Paul and Jewish converts, and probably adopted to a large extent by the church, men led in prayer. This prayer involved thanksgiving, intercession and supplication or making requests to God (2:1). Nothing is said about prayers being read; we do not encourage set prayers beyond the Lord’s prayer because these are written by men, and will not necessarily be prayed from the heart.

Prayer must be offered without anger or disputing (2:8). Prayers are hindered by broken relationships with other people, and with God of course! Prayers may not be heard at all if we hold onto sin (Ps 66:18, 1Peter 3:7). We must try to settle all differences with other people before we pray and not let anger hinder our prayers. We must pray with faith in God and with pure hearts, and according to God’s will. In public prayer we are mindful that other people are listening, although being mindful that God is listening is of first importance.

Paul says men are to pray everywhere, meaning wherever believers gather to worship the Lord. And they are to lift up holy hands in prayer (2:8). The Bible is not definite with regard to posture in prayer, but this does not mean posture is not important. Prayer is part of worship, and worship is to be reverent because God is holy. Paul refers to ‘lifting up holy hands’, ‘holy’ meaning clean hands and a pure heart (Ps 24:4, Heb 10:22). Your heart is more important than your posture, but even so, lifting up holy hands is a sign of reverence and indeed pleading with God. When Moses lifted up his hands the Israelites prevailed, and when he let them down the Amalekites prevailed (Exod 17:11). But kneeling is also a sign of reverence. Jesus knelt down and prayed (Luke 22:41). We also read of standing with bowed head or eyes lifted to heaven (Mark 11:25). Posture that points to humility and reverence should be adopted, along with holy hands and a pure heart.

**2.Women in silent submission**

Paul envisions, indeed urges, that men, as in males, pray in worship; the word ‘men’ in verse 8 means ‘male’, and he now speaks of women. Some argue that ‘In like manner also’ means women can also pray but the apostle does not say, ‘In like manner pray’ but speaks of other conduct by women in worship. He sees them joining men in worship; something not seen in pagan worship. Maybe the women converts did not know how to dress and behave when they came to church with their husbands.

The apostles first concern is that women dress modestly (2:9). He goes into some detail probably because some women were overly focused on outward adornment, a feature of women in that society. Dress was an indicator of social status, especially for women. Expensive clothes and lots of jewellery pointed to a woman of high status- or a prostitute! The apostle was aware of this as he urged women in the church to dress modestly, and not according to social norms or fashions. Women of social status flaunted their wealth and their bodies in expensive clothes and jewellery, and also in ‘braided hair’ (2:9). They probably spent a long time and lots of money in getting their hair done- which is okay for a wedding but not weekly worship where the focus is on the Lord.

The apostle Paul was not a misogynist. It was not long ago that I first heard this word, but now I hear it almost every day; such is the perversity of our society. In our society men no longer know their place and neither do women. Oh that the teaching of the Bible was heard and heeded! Paul, like Jesus, had great regard for women, a regard not seen in pagan society. Men are urged to love their wives as Christ loved the church, and give honour to their wives as being heirs together of the grace of life (Eph 6:25, 1Peter 3:7). Women are urged to demonstrate godliness in what they do and say, as well as in what they wear (2:10). Remember, God looks on the heart, and godly people should do the same.

In the church, at least in public worship, women should ‘learn in silence with all submission’ (2:11); some translate ‘quietness’ rather than ‘silence’ but it makes no real difference. With the rise in feminism in society and in the church, many have erased these words from the Bible. Scholars keep trying to get around the clear teaching of the apostle, an endeavour that began with the rise of feminism in the sixties. The fact that this effort began at this time points to society impacting the church, when the Lord wants the church to be impacting society. When these truths are ‘watered down’ as a dear sister said the other day, all the teaching of the Bible is questioned, and we lose our voice in society.

Submission is almost a banned word in our society and in the church. But we are to submit to one another in the fear of God, with wives submitting to their husbands as to the Lord (Eph 5:21,22). Submission is not a ‘dirty’ word or concept; it is a beautiful truth, and we will be blessed when we submit out of love and reverence for the Lord.

Women have a place alongside men as being fellow believers and heirs or children of God (Gal 3:28). But equality does not mean identity; this is a big lie of the devil being perpetrated in our society and in some churches. Some women want to do everything men do, but ironically men cannot do everything a woman does, such a bear children! The creation order is that man was made first and was given authority within the first family. ‘The head of every man is Christ, and the head of every woman is man’ (1Cor 11:3). This creation order applies to the church, and for this reason the apostle does not allow women to teach or have authority over men within the church. To have a woman submitting to her husband at home but ruling over him in the church would be perverse. Paul is not talking about a business or club; he is talking about families worshipping in the house of God. That men need to be ruling their own house well is the next question dealt with by the apostle.

I don’t think Paul was thinking of our day when he wrote this letter, but the Lord who inspired him was; how else do we account for the timeless reasoning behind this command for women to learn in silent submission? Going back to the created order stops scholars from using the ‘culture of Paul’s day’ argument. The apostle was not influenced by his society; he was influenced by the word of God.

He reasoned firstly that, ‘Adam was formed first, then Eve’ (2:13). We have referred to this order of creation, creation before it was corrupted by sin. In his good and perfect creation, God made woman as man’s helper, as his partner in life-long marriage, who will bear children to fill the earth, according to God’s command. But then sin entered the world, and here Paul notes that it was the woman who was deceived not Adam (2:14). Both sinned in the end and were cast out of the garden, but behind this sin was a disregard for the created order. The woman listened to Satan and acted without consulting or submitting to her husband; and her husband was negligent in exercising his God-given authority.

Obviously marriages are in disarray in our sinful world, and here is the reason. In the church, as in the home, the creation order is to be maintained and the ‘weakness’ of the woman avoided (1Peter 3:7). This had nothing to do with the fact that many women are more knowledgeable and more godly than men in the church. It is about authority and teaching in the church, which is the house of God (2:12).

**3.Women will be saved in childbearing**

‘Nevertheless’, writes Paul, ‘she will be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control’ (2:15). ‘The path that leads to salvation is ever that of obedience to God’s ordinances’ writes Hendriksen. As just mentioned, women of faith, love, and holiness abound in the church, to the glory of God. May there be more men demonstrating these virtues, with self-control! But some women are not happy in their God-given and God-blessed role and crave positions of authority in the church. Years ago, we were staying in an Anglican seminary, next to the principal. One day we saw the principal coming in our back gate to get to his house because he was avoiding a picket of women at his front door!

What does Paul mean by, ‘She will be saved in childbearing’? It is not easy for us to understand. He does not mean women will be saved from pain or even death in childbirth, although pain in childbirth was a curse put upon the woman. Nor does he mean women will be automatically saved in the spiritual sense of sins being forgiven and getting eternal life in childbearing. Some think Paul is referring to Mary and the incarnation, but his reference is more general. Mary was of course blessed for her obedience to God in bearing his only begotten Son.

The ‘saved’ refers not to justification but to sanctification, as the following words indicate- ‘continue in faith, love and holiness, with self-control’. Women who submit to God’s will and accept their primary role in bearing children and raising them in the fear and nurture of the Lord, will be blessed. Why do women want to fight in the army when they can be bearing and raising children to the glory of God, a most blessed task. It is women who bring new life into this world, life that is precious to God. Bearing and raising children is a very big job- is this why some see life in the army as being easy!

As a father and now grandfather, I have been blessed in raising children, in teaching them the fear of God and how to live in this world. But mothers and grandmothers play a greater role and receive greater blessing during the precious formative years in the life of a child. It is godly mothers not women grasping for ‘power’ that are a blessing to the church, and through the church to the whole world. Look behind every godly man and what do you find? A godly mother!