

Young Women



Paul's instruction in relation to the young women flies in the face of today's accepted western wisdom. Listen: "*older women ... are to ... train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled*" (Titus 2:4,5). That sort of instruction to young women strikes us as ridiculously laughable, outdated, even patronizing. Surely, this can't be God's will for young women in our modern, western society....

Actually, it is. Like usual, Paul's instruction did not come out of the blue, but was built on God's abiding revelation as first revealed in Paradise. Consider the following material:

Genesis 2 – Wife

The Lord God put the man He created in the Garden of Eden, with the mandate "to work it and keep it" (vs 15). The Lord observed the man-by-himself in the Garden, and determined that "it is not good that the man should be alone" (vs 18). On his lonesome the man could not image adequately what God's love and kindness and holiness and patience, etc, were like, for these qualities come out primarily in *relationships*.

To overcome the lack the Lord observed, He did not set beside Adam a penguin to be his companion, nor did He create a second male as a companion, but He fashioned a new being, a woman (vs 22). Paul in the New Testament explains the significance of this divine act: "woman [was created] for man" (1 Corinthians 11:9). More, God ordained the married state (Genesis 2:24), with the divine intent that the man be the head and leader, and the woman be 'helper' to her husband in his God-given task in daily life (see vs 15). The woman was not created to be a lone-ranger, living independent of man or for her self. To the degree that today's way of thinking encourages women to be independent of men (or, for that matter, men to be independent of women), today's thinking is simply not biblical.

The fall into sin, of course, complicated the task greatly, if only because selfishness has come to characterize every person (Ephesians 2:3). In fact, part of the curse upon the fallen woman was that she would attempt to dominate her husband (Genesis 3:16b), something distinctly contrary to the ordinance of the beginning and therefore not tolerable among God's people (see Ephesians 5:22ff).

Genesis 1 – Mothering

The Lord God created male & female to image what God was like. They were both also to be fruitful and place on Planet Earth more people who could image God (Genesis 1:27,28). The children that would be born to Adam and Eve in Paradise would, though, not know by instinct how to image God; they would need to be taught. In as much as Eve would give birth and nurse the child, she would invariably play a vital role in the child's early

formation. Mothering, we realize, is much more than nursing or feeding; mothering is first of all training the child how to live in God's world, how to image Him. Even in Paradise training on that level was not to start when the child was a toddler or of school age or became a teenager; had infants been born in Paradise, they would have needed concerted instruction from day one on how to image God's characteristics of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc.... (Note: though fathers certainly have a role here, I'm emphasizing the mother's role because of Titus' emphasis on young women, ie, mothering.) This much is clear, then: as Eve busied herself with her tasks beside Adam in the Garden, she was at the same time to be diligent to mold her children, speak to them of their Maker, show them what imaging Him was like in life's changing circumstances (cf Deuteronomy 6:7). Again, the fall into sin made the task so very much more difficult – if only because both the child and the mother were now inclined to any and every sort of evil (cf Genesis 6:5; Jeremiah 17:9). Even so, the task of the beginning remained. No mother in God's world was to permit evil, selfish attitudes to grow in the heart of her little one; from Day 1 mother is still to show what love is, kindness, patience, self-control, etc. In fact, exactly because of the sinfulness of the child's heart, the task is even more full on now than it would ever have been in Paradise. To say it in Moses words: "You shall teach [God's words] diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand..." (Deuteronomy 6:7f). Mothering is full time commitment.

Proverbs 31 – household

Proverbs 31 works out in practical terms this instruction from Genesis 1 & 2. The "excellent wife" (vs 10) is busy in so many things – buying, selling, importing, helping the poor, etc; she certainly doesn't have her hands ever in laundry suds. Yet all she does is driven not by self-fulfillment or a spirit of independence; her agenda instead revolves around her household: "the heart of her husband trusts in her.... She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life" (vss 11f) so that "her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land" (vs 23). More, she recognizes her role with her children so that "she looks well to the ways of her household.... Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her" (vss 27, 28). This woman is not the proverbial "super-mom", but simply a God-fearing woman (vs 30b) who takes the principle of Genesis 1 and 2 seriously, and works them out in the economic context of her day.

Crete

The gospel of Jesus Christ had come to Crete, and so Paul saw need to list for Titus the bits and pieces required to build up church life (Titus 1:5). Part of the apostle's inspired instruction concerned the "young women" of the congregation, instruction built what God had commanded in the Old Testament. The older women (see previous *Bit to Read*) were to train the young women to live in a particular way – and that training happens, of course, with the book of Genesis (and the rest of the Bible) laying open on the kitchen table: "young women [are] to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled" (Titus 2:4,5).

Husband lovers

The first thing the older women are to press upon the younger is the need to "love their husband". It's striking: Paul's opening instruction is not that the younger wives are to *submit* to husbands, serve them; it's instead the command to *love*. The term the apostle uses has nothing to do with erotic love, but everything to do with the love of the gospel. The

same word appears in John 3:16, “for God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son....” It’s the same word the Spirit uses to describe Jesus’ work on the cross; Jesus “loved them to the end” (John 13:1), and that’s to say that He –who was with the Father in glory from eternity– laid down His life for His own – though He knew that they would desert Him and deny Him.

The good news of Jesus’ self-emptying for sinners had come to Crete and *for that reason* the believers of Crete were expected to act in a certain manner (Titus 2:11). Specifically, *because* the gospel of Jesus Christ had come to Crete, the pious were to “renounce ungodliness and worldly passions” (2:12) – and that includes that they were to love the neighbor as themselves. The closest neighbor God gave to the “young women” was obviously ones husband, the man with whom she was “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Younger women, then, were *duty-bound* to love their husbands as Christ had loved them; how else could they image what God was like?!

Christ laid down His life for the ungodly (Romans 5:8); that was the depth and color of His love. Since it’s for his people to do the same Paul does not mention whether these young women’s husbands are deserving of love or not; the young women are simply to do to their husbands as Christ has done to them. To fail to love in that self-emptying manner is to send a signal into the community that prompts the community to speak ill of God’s word – and the apostle won’t have that (vs 5b).

Children lovers

The people next closest to the young women are the children the Lord has entrusted to their care. It’s not surprising, then, that the apostle next instructs the women to love those children. Again, the point is not that these mothers are to be nice to their children or to feel emotional about them; the point is that they empty themselves for their children’s benefit as Jesus Christ emptied Himself for these women. Again, that self-emptying for the children’s benefit images what the Lord God is like.

The young women of Crete were undoubtedly as affected by the fall into sin as anyone else. In their midst will have been mothers who would have preferred to be in the workforce, who felt more fulfilled by an office job, who loathed housework, who didn’t have a ‘feel’ for children. But Paul’s word is categorical; they were to empty themselves as Christ emptied Himself, and so show *love* for their children. Paul wasn’t so much encouraging particular feelings for the children as *actions*; they children should see from Mom what Jesus’ love looked like.

Attitude

The next two terms Paul used to describe what the younger women were to be appear in our translations as “self-controlled” and “pure” (NIV and ESV). The first of these terms appears elsewhere in Scripture to mean “being in one’s right mind” (Luke 8:35) or exercising “sober judgment” (Romans 12:3). Right-minded and sober judgment implies that one include all necessary facts in ones decision making process. That includes the facts mentioned in 2:11: “the grace of God has appeared” in Christ’s birth, death and resurrection, “bringing salvation for all people.” The “young women” of the church are to factor that good news into their decisions as they set about loving their husbands and children. Including the gospel in ones decision-making processes is being ‘right-minded’, thinking with ‘sober judgment’.

The term “pure” is used in pagan literature to describe the need to be chaste, pure when you enter the temple of your idol. The term, then, echoes the instruction of vs 3, where Paul told the older women to act in a fashion ‘befitting a temple’ (again, see previous *Bit to Read*). The younger women have also received the Holy Spirit, and so are temples of the Lord God;

they demonstrate that reality by loving their husbands and children as the Lord of the temple loved them.

Working at home

With the underlying attitudes made clear, the apostle again comes back to what outward conduct Genesis 1 and 2 requires of New Testament women. He uses a phrase that translates well as “working at home”. The point of the phrase is not that these younger women always have their hands in the sink; that a devilish caricature not at all in agreement with God’s intent. The Lord intent for the younger women is laid out in Genesis 1 and 2, and is drawn out clearly in passages of Old Testament Scripture as Proverbs 31. As mentioned above, everything that mother does (whether at home or at the market or in the office) is geared to what’s good for her household, be it first her husband and then her children. That’s taking the principles of Genesis 1 and 2, and working them out in the economic realities of the day. That’s ‘homeworking’, where all her activity is directed to what’s good for her family. The point is again: not selfishness, but service to the family as Christ served you.

The next term Paul uses dovetails neatly with the instruction to be “working at home”. In her ‘kindness’ or ‘goodness’, she images God’s goodness and kindness to His children in Jesus Christ. So she “looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness” (Proverbs 31:27).

Submission

The last instruction the apostle gives to the young women of the congregation is caught in the phrase “submissive to their own husbands.” We realize that here is again a distinct and clear echo of God’s instruction in Genesis 2. Though the fall into sin has made submission so infinitely more difficult than it was for Eve in Paradise, this posture has remained the will of God despite the fall. It’s God who once placed a particular woman beside a particular man, and it’s now His will that the woman in faith accept the head God has placed over her and submit to him. After all, “the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people” (2:11); in life’s multiple brokenness there is salvation from the torment of sin through the blood of Jesus Christ. So we’re made able to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions (2:12) – including the desire deep within the woman to resist submission (Genesis 3:16b). But the woman who takes the victory of Jesus Christ for real demonstrate her conviction by submitting –in obedience to God’s ordinance– to the man God gave her. She knows: the victory of Christ Jesus includes that He poured out His Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost so that Joel’s prophesy was fulfilled: “I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy...” (Acts 2:17). As a temple of the Spirit she has been made able to obey – and know herself safe in the hands of her faithful God and Savior.

Reviled

Our modern western culture scoffs at the apostle’s instruction to younger women; it’s so archaic, so demeaning, so sexist. We’re inclined to say: it’s precisely instruction as this that makes God’s Word ridiculous. If we could get rid of this throwback to an outdated culture, the gospel of Jesus Christ would be more acceptable to modern people....

In response we need to note two things. The first is that the cry for female freedom is not so new; cultured folk of Paul’s day called for the same. I mention this because Paul was definitely aware of the thinking of his time, and so very aware too that his instruction in Titus 2 was distinctly out of step with the finer tastes of society’s movers and shakers. Yet he dared to write what he wrote – and the reason is simply that He unpacked for his modern time God’s unchanging Word as first revealed in Paradise.

In second place, we need to note how the apostle concludes his instruction concerning the young women. They are to behave in the way he describes, he says, “that the word of God may not be reviled” (2:5b). It’s a statement we’re surprised at. Isn’t it precisely those instructions of Scripture that have a young women work at home, submitting to husband and devoting herself to her children, that make the Word of God look silly?? How, then, can Paul say that obedience is necessary lest the Word of God be reviled?!

The point here is simply that anyone, whether godly or pagan, who reads the Word of God beginning at Genesis 1 can figure out for himself that the woman was created for the man, that her husband is her head, that she has responsibility for her children, and that her place is in the home. Any honest reader of Scripture can figure out that Paul’s instruction in Titus 2:4,5 is not new material, but simply summarizes what God had earlier revealed. If these Bible readers, then, see that you, a Christian who claims to treasure the Word of God, ignore God’s instruction in relation to younger women, then *you* give the unbelieving reader of Scripture reason not to take the rest of God’s Word seriously either. If you, then, insist with Titus 2:11 that “the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,” and if you encourage the people you meet to believe in the good news of Christ crucified for sin, you shoot yourself in the foot by your decision *not* to take Genesis 1 & 2 seriously. For if you don’t take God’s instruction in Genesis 1 & 2 about the place of women seriously, why should you expect somebody else to take seriously other passages of Scripture that describe Christ’s death for sin and His resurrection from the dead? If you don’t take Titus 2:4,5 seriously, on what grounds can you still take Titus 2:11 seriously? Result: the word of God is reviled.... If any word of God is to be taken seriously, it must all be taken seriously.

Value

To tie it all up: Paul had left Titus on Crete with the mandate to “put in order” details of church life on the island (1:5). The fact that he in that context included instruction about “young women” can only mean that these sisters have an invaluable role to play in church life.

Come to think of it, that makes good sense. Their husbands, after all, have a leadership role to play in society (Genesis 2:15), and to fulfill that task they need a helper (Genesis 2:18). As the adage has it: “behind every successful man is a good woman”. Similarly, their children are tomorrow’s parents and leaders; “the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.”

Young women, then, are not to think of marriage, mothering, and working at home as drudgery. I do not deny that the task is distinctly a challenge in our fallen world. But the fact that it’s a challenge is no reason to flee from the task. Instead, younger women, redeemed as they are in Jesus’ blood and renewed by His Spirit, are to lift their eyes above the snotty noses and the piles of laundry, above their tired husband and their own preferences, and fix their attention on what God is doing: He intends wives and husbands in relation together to image Him, and train the next generation to do the same. To be allowed to be involved in His church gathering work is such a privilege! That church gathering work happens first of all in the home, where the young woman receives such a critical role. Not money or business makes the world go round, and not education either; rather, the home is where it’s at. How privileged the position of the young godly woman!

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