

IN LIGHT OF FALSE TEACHING

There's an old Chinese proverb that says **there's only one beautiful child in the entire world, and every mother has it.**

Mother's Day isn't a particularly Christian holiday, yet it's important to celebrate because we see something true and beautiful about the heart of God through the mothers in our lives.

There's something about the way a mother looks at her child with such unconditional, unbridled love that communicates to us a special understanding of God's great love for us before we've ever done anything to deserve it - indeed even after we've done much to deserve losing it.

Just like a mother, our God **LOVES, LONGS, PROTECTS, ADORES**, sometimes **RAGES** over our bad choices, and often **WEEPS** over our pain...and especially over our rejection.

I'd argue that it's this **loving, longing, protecting, nurturing** side of God's heart that we see so evident in mothers that is also at work behind much of we're reading in 1 Timothy.

This is our third week now into our series reflecting on Paul's letter to his protege Timothy as he's sent him to the church in Ephesus to try and safeguard against some threats of false teachings and distortions of the Gospel.

Paul is aching with God's heart for this young church plant. He cares about them, and so he's trying to give Timothy every resource and bit of advice necessary to get them on the right track.

As we read last week, he already had to get tough with Hymenaeus and Alexander to keep them from hurting themselves or the church any further. But now he's going to turn to give Timothy some more practical advice.

Turn with me to 1 Timothy chapter 2, verse 1

READING

1 Timothy 2:¹ I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. ³ This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time. ⁷ And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles.

⁸ Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.

⁹ 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, ¹⁰ but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

¹¹ A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴ And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. ¹⁵ But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

Let's Pray.

A cowboy told his grandson the secret to a long life - just sprinkle a little gunpowder on your oatmeal. If you do, you'll live a long life.

The young man took this to heart and did this everyday, religiously for the rest of his life. Sure enough, lived to the ripe old age of 96.

When he passed, he left behind 4 children, 8 grandchildren, 15 great-grandchildren...

...and a 16 foot hole in the wall of the crematorium.

Just goes to show you that some advice can be helpful for some, but down the road it can cause a pretty big headache for someone in a different situation.

I. GOD DESIRES THAT ALL PEOPLE BE SAVED (3-7).

Paul gives quite a bit of advice here to Timothy that will be immensely helpful as he wades into the tricky situation in Ephesus. **However**, much of it proves problematic when you try to make them into universal standards for church practice.

This is evident in and of itself as even Paul contradicts every single piece of advice he gives here at some point during his ministry.

1. **Paul says they ought to pray for leaders so they can lead godly and quiet lives...** but he's also literally arrested for stirring up trouble all over empire (**v2; Acts 24:5**). He's not exactly setting out to start riots, but he does have a tendency to push buttons so that he can get in front of the right audience.
2. **Paul says they should pray and worship together without anger or disputes...** but he had plenty of disputes with fellow apostles (**v8; acts 15:36-41**). Paul speaks a lot about unity, but he doesn't hesitate to speak his mind with force when he feels that he's right. ***In one particular example***, Paul and Barnabas end up parting ways because they just cannot agree upon whether or not to give their buddy John Mark and second chance after he'd deserted them in their ministry work in another area.
3. **Paul says that the women should dress modestly and focus on good deeds rather than expensive clothing...** but he had no problem being hosted by a woman named Lydia who made a living selling fancy fabric (**v9-10; Acts 16:14**). She was a business woman

who dealt in expensive textiles, which tend to be used for same kind of expensive clothes Paul spoke out against in verse 9.

4. **Finally, Paul tells Timothy that he wouldn't recommend permitting women to teach or have authority over men...** but during the course of his ministry, he personally names at least 3 women holding leadership positions in the early church - **Junia** (mentioned as apostle, **Rm 16:7**), **Phoebe** (commended as deacon, **Rm 16:1-2**), and **Priscilla** (coworker of Paul along with her husband Aquila - she's often mentioned first, **Acts 18:2,18,26; Rm 16:3; 1 Co 16:19; 2 Tm 4:19**). They may or may not have had teaching roles, but they certainly had some bearing of authority.

Now, this is not an example of Paul saying, **"Do as I say, not as I do."** Nor is Paul saying, **"Learn from my mistakes"** (he had good reasons behind what he did in each of those cases).

Paul isn't being hypocritical, he's just giving practical advice for ministry in a difficult situation.

And his advice all comes back to this one Gospel principle in v3-6: Christ came to give Himself as a ransom for **ALL** people, so that **ALL** might be saved and come to knowledge of the truth.

GOD DESIRES THAT ALL PEOPLE BE SAVED

THEREFORE, in everything we do - individually and corporately - we ought to keep in mind how our decisions affect Christ's mission of salvation for all people.

In Paul's other letters we get frequently get glimpses into the endgame reality of what that salvation looks like and how it ought to be brought to bear on our world.

- In **Galatians 3:28**, Paul speaks of the radical equality of God's Kingdom - "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."
- In **Galatians 5:12**, Paul speaks so adamantly against those who say Gentiles must be circumcised in order to receive full salvation that he says anyone who insists upon it should just castrate themselves.

YET when Timothy, who has a Jewish mother and Gentile father, joins Paul's crew - guess what Paul has him do? **Acts 16:3** says that Paul had Timothy circumcised because it was going to be such a distracting issue for the Jews in the area that it could hinder their mission.

In Christ's atoning work on the cross, a completely new salvation reality has been brought to bear upon a broken world.

God desires that ALL people hear that good news and be transformed from the inside out. And the wisdom that Paul shows us is that in order for that good news to be heard, we have to meet people where they're at - making momentary concessions where we can, but refusing to compromise the essentials of the Gospel.

In other words: If God desires ALL people receive the Gospel and be saved, yet our world is darkened in its understanding of the truth, then we're going to have to live IN THE WORLD, NOT OF IT - bringing truth while avoiding unnecessary offense, and protecting against beliefs and behaviors that can lead others into harmful distortions of the truth.

(Anyone feeling how weighty and important this is yet?)

Paul's advice to Timothy can be viewed in light of these 2 concerns, and when we see how Paul is speaking into that context, it helps us get some footholds for how we ought to respond today.

First, WITNESS IN A WAY OTHERS CAN UNDERSTAND

II. WITNESS IN A WAY OTHERS UNDERSTAND (1-3, 8-12).

How you communicate yourself to the outside world matters.

I recently heard a story about when KFC first entered the Chinese market, to their horror they discovered that their slogan "finger lickin' good" came out as "eat your fingers off." Needless to say they've since changed that.

In Paul and Timothy's day, the Christian movement was still relatively small and unknown. People on the outside heard all sorts of rumors about this new sect among the Jewish people and some were a bit skeptical.

There were some Jews afraid that the emerging church would endanger the special privileges that Judaism had under the empire.

Likewise, there were others in the imperial cult who viewed Christianity as a direct threat to worship of the Roman gods and goddesses, not-to-mention allegiance to caesar himself.

Sensitive to all these pressures from different cultures and people groups, Paul adopted a very flexible posture in order to try and focus on only the central tenets of the Gospel and minimize anything that would be a distraction.

This is why in **1 Corinthians 9:19**, Paul says, ¹⁹ **THOUGH I AM FREE AND BELONG TO NO ONE, I HAVE MADE MYSELF A SLAVE TO EVERYONE, TO WIN AS MANY AS POSSIBLE.** ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. **I HAVE BECOME ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE SO THAT BY ALL POSSIBLE MEANS I MIGHT SAVE SOME.** ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

There are times to challenge the status quo, times to fight about the things that matter, times to care about individuality and self-expression, and definitely times to fight for equal representation in leadership.

But Paul's main concern when talking to Timothy is that the Gospel thrive and flourish in the hostile environment of Ephesus and the Roman Empire.

1. Pray for a peaceful society where the gospel can flourish.
2. Pray with other believers, especially those you disagree with. Don't quarrel. Infighting only hinders the Gospel. Talk through the disagreements that matter, but do so in love.
3. Avoid ostentatious living. Instead, clothe yourselves in righteousness. Having wealth isn't bad in and of itself, but be careful about how your appearance affects your witness.
4. Let women learn but not teach. In Paul's day, it was unheard of for women to speak or lead both in the Roman and the Jewish world. It would have been distracting to the Gospel message being received by the outside world if preached by a woman.

In light of all that, I'd argue that the principles remain the same today, but our own practical outworking might look different in our context.

1. We ALSO live in a society that, although Christianity was once the norm, is increasingly hostile to Christians. Much of that is the enemy - but unfortunately we've also given the devil plenty of ammo through our own failings as the Church. **We would do well to pray for peace in our society, and wisdom and peace for ALL our leaders, Republican, Democrat or otherwise, so that we can get beyond all the partisan political shows and simply allow the Gospel to thrive.**
2. **Similarly, we can also acknowledge that fighting with other Christians doesn't do ANYTHING to help us.** We can disagree and debate about things that matter, but let's do so first and foremost with a commitment to pray for one another and submit in worship together to Christ.
3. The specifics of Paul's comments to women about braided hair, jewelry, and specific kinds of clothing aren't as relevant anymore, because cultural attitudes about fashion tend to change. **HOWEVER, it is good advice for us to consider whether our clothing is speaking louder than our character.** I actually read an interesting opinion piece from someone reflecting on how long skirts and bonnets repelled them because it made them think the person was strange and likely pretty judgey. You can't control everyone's perceptions, but you CAN be aware.
4. **Finally, on the note of women in leadership, the situation is almost exactly the reverse of what it was in Paul's day.** At that point in both Roman and Jewish circles it was completely unheard of for a woman to lead and speak. Women generally had no education and their reliability as witnesses was often questioned. **TODAY, it's a stumbling block to the rest of the world when the Church denies a voice to completely capable, gifted, and spirit-filled female leaders.**

III. GUARD AGAINST FALSE TEACHING (12-15).

But hold up now, Paul doesn't just say women shouldn't teach because people will be distracted...

Seems like Paul is saying they shouldn't teach because they're easily deceived, just like Eve was. THEY'RE SINNERS! And the only way they can be saved is by having babies, right?

These last several verses are among some of the thorniest and confusing verses we have to deal with in the NT.

The 2 options that people generally choose with this passage are to either **(1)** say that even if we don't understand it, we have to trust that God meant what he said through Paul here and women are inferior to men, OR **(2)** say that Paul must have been wrong and this is just another example of how God's Word isn't completely reliable.

I think we have to REJECT both of these options, though, because neither are faithful to the Gospel.

The **first option** fails to reconcile Paul's teaching here with his insistence elsewhere that Christ has instituted a new and equal status between men and women.

The **second option** obviously fails because it fails to recognize the inspired authority of God's Word.

But there's a **third option** available that makes a lot more sense of this text in light of the Gospel, and it essentially says that Paul means exactly what He says here and it is a response to the false teachings threatening the Ephesian church.

Some decisions we make about our actions (corporately and individually) must be to **GUARD AGAINST FALSE TEACHING**

In the rest of this letter as well as the content about Ephesus in Acts 19, we're given information that these false teachings deal with myths and speculations, devaluing of the material world, promoting false or secret strains of knowledge, along with general temptations toward idol worship with the goddess of Artemis.

A church father named Irenaeus who had a good deal of interaction with the church in Ephesus about 80 or so years after Paul often butted heads with a group called the Gnostics, which he believed Paul to be talking about during this letter to Timothy.

The Gnostics as it turn out had some pretty funky beliefs that are very relevant to this passage - namely, they believed that Eve was the first and preferred created human (*they often referred to her as Sophia, which means wisdom, or Zoe, which means life*). She was exalted as a seeker of wisdom, NOT as one capable of being deceived and drawn into sin.

In addition to that, the prevalence of the Artemis cult would have offered the specific temptation for Ephesian women who have converted to Christianity but are now split between relying on Christ through the ordeal of pregnancy and their past reliance on the goddess of fertility and childbirth.

Understanding that context makes Paul's words read a bit differently.

Instead of saying women shouldn't teach or lead because they're all easily tricked like Eve, Paul seems to be saying **it's not a good idea to put women in leadership here because they are particularly vulnerable to this strain of false teaching.**

Because of the deep influence of Gnosticism and the Artemis cult upon female believers in Ephesus, I advise that women not be permitted to teach there at this time.

For ADAM was created first, not Eve like they suggest; Eve WAS deceived, she was not a model seeker of secret knowledge; Eve DID sin.

And the Artemis cult is also wrong and dangerous: you do not need to hold on to worship of Artemis, Christ will provide for you in your time of need at childbirth - just continue holding on to faith, love, holiness, and purity.

We have got to GUARD AGAINST FALSE TEACHING, not just because we want to make sure everyone is believing the same thing, but because there are SOME teachings which will lead us into spiritual, emotional, and physical ruin by causing us to reject Christ.

The false teaching isn't dangerous because it makes TOO MUCH of women, asking them to take authority where they shouldn't;

It's dangerous because it makes TOO LITTLE of them by distorting the way women view God, view themselves, and the way they rely upon God in the arduous and beautiful miracle of childbirth.

Here's the GOOD NEWS this text has to offer... **Women in the room, hear this:**

You are valued and loved by God as you are, no greater and no less.

You are sinners, just like the rest of us.

You are saved by Christ, just like the rest of us.

And in particular, you can know that God is with you in all the particular beauty and pain that is part and parcel of that glorious wonder of childbirth

The monthly pain that comes with bearing the potential of life.

The arduous pain that comes with carrying and delivering a new life into the world.

The heart-wrenching pain that comes with infertility or the loss of a child.

Even through the happy pain that comes with watching as your heart walks around outside your chest.

God will save you through it all, so you must hold fast in faith, love, holiness, and self-control.

You aren't saved because you give birth to a child. We're ALL saved because one woman named Mary gave birth to THE Child. The one who saved us all.

CONCLUSION

So here's the question we all face this morning - Jesus has come to seek and save the lost, and He's saved us, and called us into the wonderful mission of spreading this good news to others.

How are you living your life in response?

How are you sharing the Gospel with others?

How are your words, relationships, actions, and even the way you dress communicating the Good News of Jesus to the world? Are you making a good impression? Or are you unnecessarily offending people on behalf of Jesus?

And what about what you believe? Do you have a hunger and a thirst for the truth that will lead to righteousness? Or are you content to live in doubt, ignorance, and complacency?

God's not asking you to have all the answers, but God IS asking you to trust Him and to seek Him with all your heart.

What is your response to Him today?

Let's pray.