

The title for today is] “Equality, Marriage and Submission”. That as a topic for a sermon] is of course an impossible task all by itself. Then I have 19 slides to accomplish in 25 minutes. We will see what we can get done. If you were here last week, our study in I Timothy 2:8-15 ended abruptly. I was far from finished with the prepared text for the day. I want to take up our study again today at v. 9. This is what Paul writes:

“...likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.”

At the outset of last week’s message I indicated that whereas in verses 1-7 Paul dealt with what we are to pray for, in verses 8-15 his concern is with who we are when we pray. That is the difference in the focus of those two sections. Again at verse 12 Paul shifts his focus to speak of a woman’s role in the assembly. That is the unfolding of this brief passage.

Paul mentions three positive things regarding women in I Timothy 2:9-10. What are those three positive things that he mentions? He says that they should be characterized by modesty. He says they should be characterized by self-control. He says they should be characterized by good works. I doubt that anyone would object to any one of the three of those qualities. They are outstanding attributes, desirable under all circumstances. We go on and in I Timothy 5:9-13 we have a fuller statement of Paul’s instruction for the women of this day and his reasons for that instruction. Beginning therefore at v. 9, this is what Paul says.

“Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work. But refuse to enroll younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith. Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not. So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander.”

I am sure that all of us in this room know that to take up the topic of what the church is to teach regarding women is to engage in one of the hottest fronts of the culture war in our day. The culture war in which we are engaged is one in which equality has adopted the nature of an absolute, a moral absolute. Hopefully clear thinking can alleviate some of thinking and discussing of the matter. When reading Paul we should keep in mind that when he was in Philippi (Acts 16) it was a rather wealthy business woman named Lydia who took him into her home and presumably she housed the first church in the city as well. Paul did not voice either surprise or disapproval. Further amongst Paul’s closest associates in the ministry outside of his traveling evangelistic and church planting team was a married couple. That married couple was Aquila and Priscilla, of whom in Acts 18:3 we read, *“...because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tent-makers by trade.”* Priscilla is listed as a partner equally engaged as a tent-maker with her husband, Aquila. As with Lydia we hear no note of surprise let alone of disapproval by Paul when realizing that Priscilla was engaged with her husband in the tent-making business. Consequently when we read Paul’s exhortation that women are to work in the home, bear children and engage in good works, which he then lists as caring for the saints in one way or another, it is in the nature not of a law but of a rule of thumb. We are simply wrong to conclude that he means to say that women should do anything other than clean house, fix food and raise children. It is the wrong conclusion to draw. We should recognize that in that day as in this the majority of women raise children, work in their homes and especially if they are Christians they engage in hospitality and the care of the saints. Paul and Peter commend this. Their words commend and encourage Christian women to do these sorts of things intentionally as a part of their faith and witness for the Lord.

They are commending to them this in order to avoid a couple of danger of unemployed or underemployed hearts and minds. What happens when the heart and mind under employed? There is idleness and idleness leads to further dangers, the dangers of gossip and meddling in other peoples' business. What you do not find in the Bible at any point is anything that demean domestic life and the nurturing of children and exalting work outside the home as the only sort of work that honors a woman's identity. So Scripture is clear in its emphasis, saying what needs to happen is women need to recognize they have a primary role and commitment and they need to accept that from God.

Let us go on a little bit further. The Bible rejects altogether the idea that we are valuable as persons according to what we do or according to what we produce. Neither what we make nor what we possess determines our worth. Rather our worth is determined by the love of God for us, and He in love has called us to be a people of prayer. When you come that far in your reflections the action point is first of all to say, “Am I a person of prayer? Is that what I am? If my neighbors were to talk about me, if other members of my family were to talk about, if those who remember me from my past were to talk about me, would the first thing that came out of their mouth “Well so and so is certainly a person of prayer. This person loves the Lord. This person entrusts their hopes and their fears and desires to God. This person seeks to know the will of God in all things. This is a person of prayer!” Is that what would come first of all? For that is the emphasis that flows to us from the Word of God.

There are of course other [aspects] emphasized and we recognize them. Paul ends his instruction in this passage with a strong emphasis on women being mothers. When reading this emphasis we need to remember that before the modern era with its almost miraculous technology especially in medical developments that the death rate amongst childbearing women and children was very high. As a matter of fact, Nini and I, my wife and I, both would not have survived childhood had we been born before the modern era. Not only was the death rate high amongst women giving birth and children young, but people died all the time from all manner of illness and infections, famines and plagues and diseases. So there was a very basic fact of life in all civilizations before the modern one, and that was that women can have babies and men can't. So if a nation, a community, a tribe was going to survive, something had to happen. What had to happen? Women had to have babies. It was as simple as that; there wasn't any other alternative. And by the way, there isn't much of any alternative today either.

There are some things that we have to recognize. We live in a day when the weight of that necessity is greatly lessened. We also live in an illusion. Every now and then if you read the media carefully even from such liberal institutions as the United Nations, you will hear that there is a major demographic change about to occur. What is that change? That change is the depopulation of the world. The replacement rate of babies being born in virtually every single nation outside of the Islamic nations of the world is below replacement [level]. If we did not have an in-flood of immigrants into this nation we would already have a population decline as is every single nation in Europe. Oh! I have already spoken to my children; they will grow up in a very different world. Already in Japan this effect has begun to take place: the rapid of the aged, the rapid decrease of those strong enough to support them. China has already begun to revise its “One Child” policy. How do you run an economy with a shrinking population? In 20 or 30 years we will have more people in the 60s and 70s than in their 20s or 30s.

It is I think therefore somewhat ironic before the face of this reality that our nation has committed itself to endure same-sex marriage. This is part, of course, of the liberal social ideal of establishing the autonomy of the individual such that they can do as they wish and incur no lasting or personally limiting commitments. This is how the secular liberal appears to define freedom. Meanwhile in addition to the issues of procreation, study after study indicates that for the great majority of children growing up without mom and dad and with the relational stability that then give to them, they suffer they suffer a significant loss on all levels as regards their quality of life, their acquisition of life skills, their stable identity, the inner poise and drive to take on the challenges of life. So we face the prospect of a declining number of young people who are also increasingly incapable of carrying the burden that

will be placed upon them. By the way do you know who will actually have that burden placed upon them? [It will be] the children of Christian parents. Do you want them to? Yes! Yes! Yes! Every Christian parent should be deliberately raising their children to become the servants of the larger number of people in our nation who will be incapable of caring for themselves. Sound good? No one said the path of salvation was easy! As I [have] said, we have been living in a dream.

It takes little imagination to see that this will have an almost incalculable consequence for society at large. The traditional family is unequalled for raising children who go on to be productive, self-supporting, creative and generally content adults. Sociological study after study affirms this.

In I Timothy 2:8-15 we are primarily dealing with Paul’s instruction for Christian women in worship and prayer. He also gives instruction for men, but the instructions given for men are far briefer and much less restrictive than for women. This disproportion points to the fundamental difficulty we have with Paul’s teaching which I have not yet addressed, and that is that Paul does not treat men and women equally. The intense difficulty which many Christians, even sincerely evangelical Christians have with the Bible’s teaching on the role of women derives from the conjunction of various long-term changes in Western culture, only two of which will I mention, one having primarily to do with the church the other having to do with the culture in general. Let me deal with the church first. Since the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century the church has gradually allowed the world to determine how it understands and applies the Bible’s teaching or simply doesn’t apply it all. This became apparent in the 1950’s with two developments, one seemingly trivial the other not. The trivial concerns women in hats. How many grew up in churches where all the ladies wore hats? Yeah, me too! [And that was] by the way in the Southern California, bastion of conservative behavior! Almost universally women wore hats in church. This was not a fashion statement; it was a compliance statement. I Corinthians 11:4 reads this way, *“Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven.”* At issue here was not so much that our practice changed as that it was considered unnecessary to defend the change on Biblical grounds. People just decided to ignore what Paul wrote, not defending it. What this amounts to is the evaporation of authority. It just disappeared.

That was the trivial matter. In and of itself, whether or not you have a hat upon your head, seemed like a pretty insignificant matter. But if you observed the context of Paul’s teaching, it is not so trivial. The context has to do with the order which God has ordained between God and mankind which is replicated between husbands and wives. Paul states this in I Corinthians 11:3, *“I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband and the head of Christ is God.”* In the event it is one thing to replace the sign or symbol of the reality, the sign being long haired covered with or by a hat, and the reality being the submission of wives to husbands, men to Christ, and Christ to the Father. It is quite another thing to replace or simply ignore the reality. What is the reality that is being ignored? As Christ submits to the Father in the salvation of souls, so the company of the redeemed, the church, is to submit to Christ as its head, and wives are to submit to their husbands as the great illustration of the relation of Christ to the church in the world. Is that trivial? Is that trivial? No, that is not trivial. That is profound. That is a description of the most basic reality that we deal with, that is our relationship with God. It is in Ephesians 5 that Paul makes this equation between marriage and the church. What we see in these writings is that submission is the governing value for both men and women, a truth reinforced in the almost universally ignored verses with which Paul leads into his description of marriage. You will find them in Ephesians 5:20-21. Paul writes, *“Give thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”* Submitting to whom? [Submitting] to one another. Then he says, husbands and wives. So who should submit to one another? [It is] husbands and wives. Men submit to their wives by loving them as Jesus loved the church. And how did He do that? He became the servant and He died.

At this point I think it is certainly fair to recognize that the deepest most fundamental problem is not that women need to submit to their husbands, but that men need to submit to God! How: by loving their wives the way Jesus loved the church. So what we do is we come back around to what was fundamental throughout the entirety of the New Testament, and that is, leadership is found in submission to the rule of God. It just won't do to have a bunch of men puffing up their chests declaring that their wives need to submit to them. What we need are a bunch of men who look at their check books and schedules and ask themselves, “What am I doing with the time and the resources that God has entrusted to me to ensure that my wife is magnificent? How sacrificially do I pray for her? How sacrificially do I give to her? How sacrificially do I wait upon her needs? How sacrificially do I desire to see her prosper and grow as a human being? But puffing out our chests and saying, “I am the boss!” is in the eyes of God, ugly! It is ugly. Because it is the assertion of pride where humility is what is required.

That was the trivial issue. The not so trivial matter was divorce. By the end of the fifties in America very few churches any longer held to the biblical criteria for divorce. Although considerable efforts were made to justify on biblical grounds a less restrictive approach to divorce – and I think some of those grounds were wisely found – the reality in practice was simply to set aside biblical guidelines. This was, by the way, a part of the larger and very powerful cultural change in the understanding of the nature and purpose of marriage. When I read that statement about the Evangelicals, this is our complicity and the sad loss of bearing. The Bible is not unclear or ambiguous about the nature of marriage or its purpose. Marriage is first of all for the propagation and nurture of children. We are to multiply and fill the earth. That command is repeated over and over and over again.

Recognizing that a Christian marriage is intended by God to be an illustration of the relationship between Jesus Christ and the church we are right to conclude that the core purpose of marriage is to cultivate and then demonstrate the excellencies of salvation, that is, the character of Christ lived out in the practical realities of daily life, both as between husband and wife and parents and children. The family under this understanding becomes a nurturing ground for decency and dignity and excellence of human character. Those are the primary objectives for which a family is formed. Unquestionably such a marriage will lead to the happiness and fulfillment of all concerned, but this does not happen because those concerned pursue happiness and fulfillment. The fruit of a good marriage is found in the changing perception by both husband and wife as to what brings happiness and fulfillment, moving from “What's good”, [as in] “What's a good show?” or “What's a good restaurant?”, “What's a good this or that” to “What's good for me?” and then to “What's good for us and the kids?” and then finally going to “What is good for our family as part of the larger family of God?” Those four statements can become a measure almost infallible of what happens to the children of a marriage involved. If a couple will never get beyond “What's good for me?” or “What's good for us?” or “What's good us and the kids?” most of those kids will end up leaving the Lord. A couple can be as selfish as an individual and a family can be as selfish as a couple. You have to know that.

This is a journey of personal and spiritual growth. But that journey is short-circuited when those involved turn away from submission and put the self ahead of others. That predominantly is what happens when divorce is taken as the best solution for the difficulties of domestic life. If I get married in order that I will be happy, what happens if my wife doesn't make me happy? I have lost my reason for being married. But if I get married in order to be obedient before God and to have children and to raise those children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord so that they reflect the character of Christ, what happens if my wife doesn't make me happy? I go to work to see why that is the case and I work hard to make sure the situation changes. I will submit myself to what her needs are, I will alter my pursuits in order to match her interests and weaknesses and I will say that above all other things whether I am happy or not my home is stable, my children are going to be nurture and manner that understand the reality of personal sacrifice for the good of others. Oh my! Truly beloved, submission is the most unnatural thing you can imagine, it is exceedingly hard work, but it is also richly fulfilling.

The redefining of marriage in terms of personal happiness and fulfillment was a sociological move filled with danger, dangers few even thought of. A true marriage was gradually idealized—think about the obsessive concern with weddings in our culture—marriage was redefined as the fulfillment of a romantic love and romantic love increasingly has been seen as intense emotional engagement with intense sexual pleasure. Right? At the same time with the steady de-emphasis on children marriage has come to be seen as a private matter for those who are in love with one another. In this definition of marriage children are optional regardless of what the Bible says. Furthermore, submission is an almost foreign concept and certainly uneven in practice regardless of what the Bible says. Furthermore today we are confronted with the not-so-surprising assertion that gender difference is also optional regardless of what the Bible says. Do we understand the progression that has been made? That progression is a progression that has been imposed upon us by our culture. Are you surprised that the Supreme Court would decide that same-sex couple should get married? They fulfill every single criteria established by our culture for a good marriage. Is that an ugly statement? It is shocking. Where does the shock lie? It lies in the weird description and expectation of marriage. Christians are complicit; we have participated in the decline. Once you start editing things out of God’s word, once we give ourselves permission to ignore what doesn’t fit our preference – this is difference, by the way, than choosing to do what is wrong, for in that case we still acknowledge that it is wrong and therefor the Word has authority; but if we say that it is not wrong, that it is up to me, I can do what I want, nobody can tell me what to do. . . . When we give ourselves permission to decide for ourselves what is right and justifiable, then we have simply abandoned the biblical principle and the cardinal ruling of the value of submission. We are on our own. The United States today is on its own. We happen to be the body of Christ inside the nation that is now totally on its own. That may not be a very pleasant journey.

Please pray with me: our heavenly Father, we talk about repenting and renewal and revival. I am not sure that we always know very clearly what we are talking about. We are a people who love our freedoms and we love our pleasures, we love our autonomy. But that is not what You have called us as Christians to do. Those who understand, Father, what revival means, it means first of all repentance, repentance that comes from the clear light of Your word revealing the errors in our thinking, believing and acting. Heavenly Father, grant to us the courage to be honest with You and to submit and thereby find life anew in Christ. We ask for His name sake and for the good of our nation. Amen.