

Women Also

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Introduction.

- A. The past few weeks of Sunday-night sermons have been interesting to me from a preaching perspective. I try to make my sermons as relevant and useful as possible, but simply because we've been looking at ways that men can prepare themselves to become elders and deacons, I haven't been talking to the women who make up the majority of this congregation. Now, I know that none of you ladies have a problem with this. I know that many of you have been diligently trying to find ways to apply what I've been saying to your own lives, but the fact remains that the Scriptures I've been preaching on were not written primarily to you.
- B. I believe that it is necessary to examine this topic anyway, but I also believe that it would be a disservice to the women of this congregation to conclude this series without looking at what Paul says about the roles and positions that women are to fill in a local congregation. We recognize, of course, that there's one important difference between the roles of men and the roles of women. Elders and deacons have authority in the church, but women, no matter how godly, cannot, which is the point that Paul makes in 1 Timothy 2:12. It is simply not the responsibility of women to be leaders in the Lord's church.
- C. Even though this is true, there is nothing misogynistic or contemptuous about Paul's attitude toward women, and the rest of 1 Timothy reveals just how important they are. I have never known a church, brethren, that could survive without the dedication of its women to the Lord's work, and that includes this one. Ladies, you are critical to the health and growth of this congregation, and that makes it equally critical for us to examine what Paul says about the woman's role in the church. Let's look, then, at his words to women also.

I. Elders' and Deacons' Wives.

- A. The first set of instructions that we see along these lines appears in 1 Timothy 3:11. Now, it's not apparent from this translation, but there's actually some controversy about whom this verse is describing. Koine Greek, which is the language the Bible is written in, has no specific word for "wife." This text, then, literally reads "Women also," and on that basis, some argue that it describes the qualifications for female deacons.
- B. Scripturally speaking, however, there are several problems with this reading. First, the Scripture describes deacons as men who may well have authority over men, a role which women cannot fill. Second, the next verse down, 1 Timothy 3:12, says that a deacon must be the husband of one wife, which no woman can be. Finally, though, we need to pay attention to the content of this verse. Unlike the qualifications for elders and deacons, which are wide-ranging and general in scope, 1 Timothy 3:11 appears to focus on one major attribute of the godly woman—her discretion. The hypothetical woman who becomes a church leader would certainly need more than just discretion, but it makes perfect sense for Paul to focus in on discretion if he's discussing the wives of elders and deacons. For all these reasons, we should read this as applying to wives.
- C. Paul begins his discussion of these wives by noting that they must be **reverent**. The idea here seems to be more that the wife must be dignified and respectable, that there has to be something in her that people naturally look up to. We see the basis for this feminine dignity described in 1 Peter 3:3-4. There are plenty of women who can turn heads by just dressing up in showy, outrageous clothes and walking down the street. The Christian woman, though, shouldn't be looking to turn heads. She should be looking to turn hearts. Her objective should be, by her kindness, godliness, and serenity, to bring everyone who comes into contact with her closer to Christ. This kind of dignified Christian woman is invaluable to her husband in the Lord's work.
- D. Second, we learn from this text that women who wish to be elders' and deacons' wives must **not** be **slanderers**. This just tells us that she cannot be a gossipy, malicious woman. It should be obvious to all of us why this is necessary. After all, being married to a deacon, but especially an elder, would have to be a gossip's dream. Church leaders, as they deal with the problems of the congregation, are privy to all sorts of secrets and problems, the kind of juicy little tidbits that gossipy women love to repeat. However, if that is the inclination of the leader's wife, one of two things will happen. Either her husband will confide in her, and she'll spread somebody's dirty laundry through the entire congregation, or he will recognize that tendency in her and not be able to trust her, which will hinder his own work. Both of these things can cripple a church. Women who want to be the wives of leaders need to recognize this and stifle whatever tendency they have to gossip.
- E. Next, Paul informs us that wives of elders and deacons must be **temperate**. This is the same word, both in English and Greek, that we saw applied to elders up in 1 Timothy 3:2 a couple weeks ago. This is the word that describes someone who doesn't make bad decisions. In the context of the elder, this word was paired with "sober," which describes someone who makes good decisions. However, the second part of this word pair is absent here, and with good reason. The wife of the elder or the deacon is not called upon to make wise decisions that will guide the church. However, she is called on to avoid foolish ones that will undermine the efforts of everyone else. I know of a church that was split at least partially because of the intemperate actions

of an elder's wife. One of the men in the congregation came to her with questions about whether she was exercising too much authority in the work, but rather than dealing with him in a calm, conciliatory fashion, she sent him away with a bee in his ear, which ended up causing no end of trouble and grief for everyone involved, including her. That is precisely why wives must be temperate.

- F. Finally, Paul tells us that they must be **faithful**. Much of the time, we read this and conclude that it teaches that the wife of an elder or deacon must herself be a Christian. Now, I certainly agree that an elder or deacon ought to have a Christian wife. I think it's necessarily implied throughout all of 1 Timothy 3. However, we need to read this particular word here more in the sense of "reliable" or "trustworthy," not in the sense of "believing." It fits much more neatly into the context that way, instead of coming in out of left field. Just as the elder's wife should not be a gossip, just as she should not be someone who behaves intemperately, so too she should be someone who is generally dependable and stable. She needs to be someone her husband can lean on as he wrestles with the difficulties of leadership, not someone who is a nuisance and distraction.

II. Widows Indeed.

- A. All of this is of great use to women who are the wives of church leaders or who wish to be in that position one day, but what about everybody else? What about the women who know they will never assume that role? Paul helps us here with his words in 1 Timothy 5:9-10. In the specific context, Paul is addressing what a woman must be like to be put on the widows' list and supported by the church, but when considered more generally, they describe a character to which all Christian women should aspire. Let's look at this now.
- B. The first thing this reveals is that Christian women should be **well reported for good works**. Both in the church and in the community, they should have the reputation of being loving people who are eager to help. Now, this doesn't mean that women should be publicity-seekers, but we see what it does mean in the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:16. Women need to live in a way that inspires others to glorify God.
- C. Next, Paul insists that these widows, and women generally, should have **brought up children**. Sadly, just as fatherhood has become a lost art in this country, so too has motherhood. Too many women today think of motherhood as a nine-month interruption in their careers, after which they pawn the child off on some day-care center while they get back to doing something that interests and challenges them. Friends, bringing up children requires far more than just that. I understand that sometimes mothers are put in difficult positions. I understand that sometimes they have to work just to see that their families are provided for. However, that decision needs to be the result of necessity, not choice. It is possible to be a good mother while working. It is possible to bring up good children while working, but the added pressure of a career makes an already difficult task even more difficult. Women need to make their children, not their ambitions, their first priority.
- D. Third, Paul points out that worthy women should have **lodged strangers**. Interestingly enough, just like the previous qualification, this echoes one of the qualifications of the elder. Just like the man who aspires to be an overseer, so too the woman who wants to be godly needs to show hospitality to those who need it.
- E. Next, Paul comments that women should also aspire to have **washed the saints' feet**. This is not a reference to some religious ritual; instead, it describes a cultural practice. The peoples of the Mediterranean in the time of Christ habitually wore not shoes, but sandals, and as they went wandering around the dusty, muddy city streets, their feet naturally became filthy. As a result, many households had slaves, usually the lowliest slave in the household, whose responsibility it was to wash off the feet of the master and his guests. When it says that these widows were to have washed the feet of the saints, it's actually a comment on the widow's heart. It says that she is a woman who is willing to take on even the humblest of tasks for the Lord and His people if those are tasks that need to get done. We don't need to have our feet washed today, but in every congregation there are tasks that bring no glory and may even be dirty or messy, but still need to get done. Women are to be willing to follow the example of Jesus and do those things for the reward of heaven.
- F. After this, Paul points out that the godly woman is to have **relieved the afflicted**. She is to look for those who are enduring some kind of suffering or deprivation and then do what she can to alleviate it. She's supposed to help the hurting. There are many opportunities that the women of this congregation have to do this, but one that is always with us is the opportunity to serve provided by our shut-ins. They are always grateful for any time and attention we can provide, and we need to make the effort to help.
- G. Finally, Paul instructs women that they are to have **diligently followed every good work**. This is a summary statement for everything that he has already said. Women aren't to regard the good works described in this section as a hobby, something to dabble in occasionally when they feel guilty. Instead, they need to be a lifestyle. They need to be something that she follows diligently as part of her service to God.
- H. We see an example of a woman who diligently followed every good work in the story of Dorcas. Look at how she's described in Acts 9:36, 39. We learn about the character of Dorcas not just from the description of her life in v. 36, but from the description of her death in v. 39. One of the two greatest commandments of Christianity is that we should love our neighbor, and there are few better gauges of our success in this than how much people will miss us when we're gone. They wept for Dorcas. Will they weep for us?

Conclusion. If you haven't been diligent for good works, now is the time to begin by serving God.