

Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse – October 1st 2006

1 Timothy 2 v 8-15

A letter read on the Internet written by an important roman man in AD41 talked about his mother who he saw as a woman in high society but who had avoided the pitfalls of life at that time. Un-chastity was avoided, jewels not perverted, pregnancy not hidden, face not defiled with cosmetics – her only ornament was modesty.

This helps us understand the context of the passage. At that time (AD41) abortion was used as a form of contraception in high society – things have not changed in all the years that have passed. History shows that at that time there was a new principle for women, for instance women had sexual freedom with a dowry and had the ability to terminate the marriage and get the dowry back. There were women of independent means; promiscuity and looseness abounded. The saying “you are what you wear” applied.

These historical facts help us understand the context of what Paul wrote so strongly – note he does not say that frumpiness is a virtue. In Ephesus braided hair, jewellery, and expensive clothes were associated with a “new” woman and her looseness. We now live in quite a different culture so do Paul’s words still apply?

We don’t want to go back 30 years – women have made great gains such as in employment and that is good. However from these advances do we have a situation now where we have moved from fashion we accept to fashion that is immodest? Even some churches have gone too far such that immodest dress is cited as resulting from freedom in the Spirit. Appearances should be about modesty and humility, a brazen appearance says something. Girl power aggressiveness results in the hatred of men. Young women should be aware that Christian men don’t want brazenness and immodesty.

Wendy Shalit in her book “Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue” makes powerful statements from one who is only 24 years old - “exposing modesty leads to women’s vulnerability”, “we want feminine mystique back”, a man should be gentle around a woman”. Strong recommendation to read the book.

Paul says that if we leave things unchecked in the Church the problems will occur. Verses 11-15 have been the source of huge controversy; we cannot accept the view of the conservatives on women’s ministry. The Old and New Testaments both affirm women’s responsibility to be involved in ministry. Examples are found in Romans 16, 1 Corinthians 11, Galatians 3v28 and Luke 10. So why is Paul saying what he is saying – he certainly doesn’t mean that women should only make tea and coffee! For instance women are learners – when they learn they should do this as a follower of Jesus Christ i.e. a quiet and humble demeanour in full submission. Men are not to be grumpy and loud, they are to lift hands without anger or disputing – v8. A woman should not usurp authority; rather she should be like Jesus. In Adam and Eve it was the woman who usurped Gods authority.

In 1 Timothy 5v11 the final counsel is that (young) women should stop their sensuality and brazenness; stop going from house to house gossiping and being busybodies. They should marry and have children and through this find Jesus Christ. However there are 3 other interpretations of the verse.

Conclusion

The world has lost its sense of all boundaries. Modesty, honour, dignity, sense of wonder, fellowship in Christ between men and women is what should be found in the Church (GBC).