

1 TIMOTHY 2:15
SAVED THROUGH CHILDBEARING

Long, long ago, when video games were hopelessly primitive compared to today, I remember playing an auto racing game.

There I was, speeding along the racetrack, with cars alongside and cars ahead. I had to maneuver from lane to lane, passing cars, pressing forward as fast as I could.

What is so hard about that? This: while I could see what my car was doing, I could not feel what my car was doing. I would turn the wheel left, and turn too hard and crash into the inside wall. Then I would overcorrect back to the right, then smash into the outside wall.

Left. Right. This extreme, that extreme.

In our culture, do we do this with women?

Here is one extreme: the extreme of “unfettered feminism.” Some say men and women are exactly alike. On the extreme of the extreme, certain people dismiss even our physical differences. Men and women are completely alike, so they should be treated the same way, in all ways.

Here is the other extreme: the extreme of “reactionary traditionalism.” Since unfettered feminism is wrong, we must react by returning to the “good old days.” Men rule. Women submit. That’s it. Let’s not worry about how this may demean and destroy women.

In First Timothy 2, as Paul instructs Timothy about the worship and the workings of the church, he writes about men and women. We all come today with perceptions and opinions about the Bible’s teachings on men and women.

In one sermon, I cannot begin to answer every question about this! But I will say this: a biblical view of women follows quite a different path from those two extremes. On this Mother’s Day, it is right to consider even one slice of this issue, for Jesus is Lord of all, and he is Lord of how we treat each other as men and women.

There is much here, and unless you have all day, we cannot think through everything about these words! Let’s see the big picture. Then, since we call this “Mother’s Day,” let’s think about Paul’s reference to “childbearing” in the last verse, and see how that changes our hearts and lives as we live together as men and women.

As I said, Paul is writing about the worship and working of the church, and in chapter 2, he seems especially concerned about the public gatherings of the Christians. In verses 9-14, Paul describes what women should be like, as they gather. Let’s sum up his words this way:

1 - Not great dress, but good deeds.

Christian women should adorn themselves in a way that draws attention to God - not their physical characteristics. In that day, and today, women may find all kinds of ways to attract attention to their outward beauty. But Paul urges Christian women to live less for looking good, and more for doing good.

2 - Not habits of leading, but hearts of learning.

In the church, the normal course is for the male spiritual leaders of the church to proclaim the central truths of the faith. There may be situations where women lead, but the emphasis for women, in public settings, should be upon learning in the fellowship, not leading of the fellowship.

Then we read in verse 15, “But women will be saved through childbearing, if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.”

What is Paul saying? Many people have many opinions! Let’s sort through what Paul does not mean, then what Paul may mean, and what that means for our lives.

What is Paul NOT saying?

To start with, he is not saying, “GOD WILL PROTECT WOMEN THROUGH CHILDBIRTH.”

Does God promise to protect every woman in the physical act of giving birth to a child? No.

Does God protect every woman in the physical act of giving birth to a child? No.

We pray for God’s grace when women are giving birth. But it always has been, and always will be, a painful and sometimes dangerous process. In this culture, we do not see it as much, but every day, women suffer and even die as they give birth.

As well, Paul is not saying, “GOD WILL SAVE WOMEN BECAUSE OF CHILDBIRTH.”

It sounds that way, doesn’t it? But there are (at least) two problems with believing that.

* First, Paul wrote countless times that we are not saved by anything we do, but only through faith in what Jesus Christ has done for us. Jesus lived without sin. Jesus died to secure the forgiveness of our sins. Not what our hands have done, can save our guilty souls.

* Second, if God saves women because of childbirth, what about women who don’t have babies? Some are physically unable to have children. Some never have children, because God calls them to singleness.

We could wade through many other interpretations like this. BUT instead, let’s try to think about what Paul could be saying.

First, I believe Paul is saying, **WOMEN ARE LIFE-GIVERS.**

Paul is writing about how women dress and learn. Then he writes in verse 14, “And Adam was not the one

deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.”

If you were reading that, what might you be thinking? You could think, “Paul is saying that women are worthless.” If not for Eve, everything just might have turned out all right with Adam and Eve.

Well, no. Adam sinned, too. And Paul is saying that even after the coming of sin into the world, women still have a wonderful role. They will receive the blessing of bearing children.

I know this is news to you, but think about it! Since the day Adam and Eve fell away from a good relationship with God, he has graciously returned people to that relationship, through the hope of Jesus, and through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Women are central to that plan! They alone will bear the children who will, by the grace of God, be called sons and daughters of God!

Is Paul saying, or am I saying, that women who do not have children are less than “real” women? No!

Is Paul saying, or am I saying, that women are just baby factories? No!

Is Paul saying, or am I saying, that men have no role in any of this? No!

I believe Paul is describing the wonderful truth that in God’s glorious plan, women are “life-givers.” That phrase comes from the study we are using now in our women’s Sunday School class. Women give life. In Jesus Christ, such a role receives great dignity, great value, and great honor.

Many Christian women give life in the creation of the next generation.

Most Christian women give life in the care of the next generation.

All Christian women give life in the communication of the truth about Jesus to the next generation.

But Paul is not just describing what is. He is proclaiming what should be. He seems to be saying that women are life-givers, and that **WOMEN MUST BE LIFE-GIVING**.

It is hard for us to make sense of this, because we usually think of being “saved” as a one-time event. “I was saved.”

But here, as he does elsewhere, Paul may be writing of the lifestyle of a person who is saved. It’s like in the book of Philippians, where Paul tells those Christians to “work out their salvation with fear and trembling.”

He is not only describing the “life-giving” role of women, but he is urging women to live out the life of salvation, by giving life. As they give life, they are doing and being what Jesus wants them to do and to be, as they live for him. Through this, they will live out the life of saved people.

Notice these words: “faith”, “love”, “holiness”, “propriety.”

As women live in faith, they give the life of faith to others.

As women live in love, they give the life of love to others.

As women live in holiness, they give the life of holiness to others.

As women live with propriety (or modesty), they give the life of modesty to others.

They give physical life in childbirth, and they are called to give spiritual life, as they live out these qualities.

They will do this in all shapes, all sizes, and all situations. Women are like snowflakes. No two are exactly alike.

Paul is not saying, “All women have to have lots of babies.”

Paul is not saying, “Women should not (or should) work outside the home.”

Paul is saying, “Women are life-givers. As they work out their salvation by joyfully embracing their life-giving role, they are blessed!” Yes, Eve was deceived, and she became a sinner. But in his grace, God continues to bless women with being life-givers, and he calls women in Jesus to give that life to the next generation, as they create, care and communicate, with faith, love, holiness and propriety.

As Pastor Dan Doriani writes, “God blesses and preserves women as they accept the roles he gives them.”

SO...it is Mother’s Day. How do these words touch our lives?

We have to do better than shallow romanticism. It’s nice to celebrate mothers on Mother’s Day, but our response must touch every day.

We also have to do better than strict rules. In our culture, we do lurch to the extremes:

* Unfettered feminism rejects all rules, and robs women of the dignity they possess as life-givers.

* Reactionary traditionalism responds with many rules, and runs women into corners, with requirements that come more from culture, than Scripture.

So what do we do with these words? I hope God will stir your hearts, and your lives, with a few words to all of us, to men, and to women.

TO ALL OF US...may we PRAISE LIFE-GIVING.

In our culture, women have many choices, including the choice to destroy physical life in the womb. When women choose to give life through childbirth, we are called to praise them for it.

Think of the young woman, who did what should have waited for marriage. But now she chooses to carry the baby to term, and to give it up for adoption or raise it herself. Praise her, and praise God!

Think of the not-as-young woman, who sees on the ultrasound, that her child will not be well. But still she chooses to give birth, and to give care - against the advice of her doctor and family. Praise her, and praise God!

Think of people like the women at Birthright, or a crisis pregnancy center. Think of how every day, women enter

these places, with the right to abortion, yet they choose life. Praise them, and praise God!

We are weary of the political and judicial issue of abortion. But we must never grow weary of praising life-giving, as we pray for, support, and give our talents for, people who help women choose life-giving.

Now a word TO MEN...may we HONOR LIFE-GIVING.

Men, how do we do that? How do you do that? How do I do that?

The heart of this is how we treat the women who are closest to us. I speak as a married man, with a wife who has given physical life three times, and who gives spiritual life every day.

How do I think about her?

Do I think of her daily labors as somehow unimportant, or trivial? Nice, but not like the “real” work I do?

Or do I honor her in my heart, as I think of how her life, poured out for her children and others, uniquely gives life in a world of death?

How do I speak to her?

I know how to criticize, but do I ever affirm and encourage her? Do I ever tell her how well she carries burdens, and creates blessings, while she seeks to give life?

How do I help her?

Maybe I just think, “That’s woman’s work,” and I let her do it all.

Or maybe, I will realize that when I honor someone, I honor them as I help them. I do not do this because she is a helpless, weak, pathetic “little woman”. I do this to bless her, as she gives the blessing of life.

I may not do this, as you do this. You may not do this, as I do this. Just as no two women are alike, no two men are alike. But if I honor life-giving, I will help in that life-giving. Wherever. Whatever. I help, for I honor her.

Then, finally, TO WOMEN...may you REJOICE IN LIFE-GIVING.

Two weeks ago, I told this story to the women in Sunday School. It is a story of a preacher in our day, who preached on Mother’s Day.

After the service, a woman came up to him, and said she had turned from her sin, and given her life to Jesus as Savior and Lord, because of his sermon.

The pastor was puzzled, because that sermon had not been “evangelistic.” The woman explained to him, “I realized today that God values women in a far greater way than our society ever will.”

Women, do you know that Jesus Christ values you? Yes, he values you enough to die for your sins and reconcile you to God forever.

But even more, he values you, for you are his means of giving life - in the creation of the next generation, in the care of the next generation, and when you join in communicating the truth to the next generation.

You are made for this. You are gifted for this. You honor the Lord who bought you with the blood of his Son, as you do this.

Yes, the giving of life includes the giving of birth.

But the giving of life includes the encouragement, prayers and support of those who have given birth, even if you cannot.

The giving of life includes caring for young children, and correcting older children, and counseling young adults, and giving the truth to whoever Jesus puts in your path.

The giving of life includes words you offer, and the example you set, and the service you give, for the building of life and spiritual life in others.

Your life is more than that! But your life is no less than this, as you give life, through your faith, love, holiness, and modesty.

As you go from this place, be certain you know this: life-giving, gives glory to the God who gives new life in Jesus.

Maybe you are disheartened. Maybe you feel unappreciated. Maybe you sense that your culture values little your life-giving ministry.

Turn your heart, not to the extremes, but to Jesus. Rejoice that he values your life-giving ministry.

And carry on, with his help, in faith, love, holiness, and modesty.