

Don't Be the Stereotype

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The letters of Paul are often considered antiquated and controversial. This is primarily due to his explanations for gender roles. One example of this can be found in 1 Timothy chapter two. In this passage, Paul wrote about God's purpose to save all people. Regardless of the attributes that make us different, everyone needs to be saved. For this reason, Paul exhorted that prayers be made for all men, even kings: "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time" (1 Tim. 2:3-6).

In the eyes of God, humanity is viewed with equality. As Christians, our earthly status does not influence our heavenly status in the family of God. For example, Paul wrote, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:27-28). There are not varying degrees of salvation determined by earthly status. The people of Paul's time would have considered this teaching liberating on one hand and provocative on the other. Sound familiar?

When men and women are saved by God through Jesus, they can fulfill the purpose for which each was created. Christians are to bring glory to God in the bodies He has given them. Just as God did when He created male and female, Paul acknowledges the difference between the two and describes how they are to glorify God.

Regrettably, the world perceives masculinity and femininity differently than God. There are stereotypes the world creates and promotes for both genders. Sadly, these stereotypes only contribute to the dehumanization of men and women. Of course, this is caused by sin.

The goal of the Gospel, however, is to transform us into the image-bearers of our Creator. This is the purpose for which we were created. Fulfilling this purpose can only be accomplished by renewing our understanding of true masculinity and femininity. Only the Gospel can break the world's stereotypes. In 1 Timothy chapter two, Paul gives instructions about how we can do this.

The Stereotypical Male

"I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling" (1 Tim. 2:8).

The stereotype for men in the ancient world was much as it is today. Men were expected to be strong-willed, violent, and egotistical. The world was theirs for the taking. Such character was and is antithetical to Christ-like behavior.

Paul warns against men being given to anger and fighting. This is the stereotype. This is not how men were to behave then or now. Instead, Paul wrote that men need to learn how to pray. Why did Paul use prayer as an example of true masculinity?

Prayer is an act of humility; an acknowledgment of our dependence on God. Praying men are not “self-made men.” Also, prayer encourages gratitude. Prayer is a representation of the character of one’s heart. Prayer symbolizes everything that is the opposite of pride, anger, and violence. Praying men make better husbands and fathers. Praying men make better citizens. Praying men make better servants of God. If men want to be saved and bring glory to God, then they must learn how to pray.

The Stereotypical Female

“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” (1 Tim. 2:9-10).

The stereotype for women in the ancient world was much as it is today. Mainly, appearance is what mattered most. Today, our society puts an enormous amount of pressure on the appearance of women. Young girls learn very quickly that they need to look a certain way to be accepted. The world teaches women that self-worth is determined by the way they look. This is sad. In this passage, Paul attempts to change this twisted way of thinking.

Paul states that women are not to obsess over appearance. He attempts to encourage women to know that God does not determine their value by how they look. Their value is determined by what is in their heart (1 Sam. 16:7). This is true for both men and women. Rather than obsessing over appearance, women are to focus on their hearts. Godliness in the heart will be reflected in both appearance and behavior.

Rather than being self-absorbed, women are to learn how to devote their lives to good works. Doing good works is the vocation of everyone who has been transformed by the Gospel of Christ (Eph. 2:10). Serving is how the love of God is shown to others.

Conclusion

The world has a stereotype of how men and women are to look and behave. Worldly models of masculinity and femininity will not lead to contentment. These ungodly expectations only lead to brokenness. Thankfully, the Gospel can heal and transform us. The Gospel can renew our minds and re-purpose our lives.

As people who are seeking to glorify God, we must refuse to conform to worldly stereotypes (Rom. 12:2). We need to seek the acceptance and approval of God rather than society (Acts 5:29; Rom. 2:28-29). Let us look deeply into our hearts and determine who we are pleasing. Don’t be the stereotype!