

## LESSONS FOR THE SISTERS

### Lesson 9

#### **The Normal Life of the Sisters in the Church— Adorning Themselves with Modesty and Sobriety**

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 2:9-15

#### **I. We need to see the normal life of the sisters in the church—1 Tim. 2:9-15:<sup>1</sup>**

- A. Adorning themselves—“Similarly, that women adorn themselves in proper clothing with modesty and sobriety, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, what befits women professing godly reverence, by good works”—vv. 9-10:<sup>2</sup>
1. The sisters should clothe and cover their body in a proper way; proper clothing denotes what is fitting to the sisters’ nature and position as saints of God.
  2. In Greek the word for clothing implies deportment, demeanor; a sister’s demeanor, of which clothing is the main sign, must befit her saintly position.
  3. The Greek word rendered modesty literally is shamefastness, that is, bound or made fast by an honorable shame (Vincent), implying not forward or overbold, but moderate, observing the proprieties of a woman.
  4. Sobriety denotes sober-mindedness, self-restraint; it means to restrict oneself soberly and discreetly; the sisters in a local assembly should clothe themselves with these two virtues—shamefastness and self-restraint—as their demeanor.
- B. Learning—“Let a woman learn in quietness in all subjection; but I do not permit a woman to teach or to assert authority over a man, but to be in quietness. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived; but the woman, having been quite deceived, has fallen into transgression”—vv. 11-14:<sup>3</sup>
1. Quietness means silence; for a sister to learn in silence and in all subjection is to realize her position as a woman; this safeguards the sisters from the presumption of overstepping their position in the local assembly.
  2. Eve was deceived by the serpent (Gen. 3:1-6) because she did not remain in subjection under the headship of Adam, but overstepped her position to contact the evil tempter directly without her head being covered.
  3. This is the strong ground for the apostle not to permit the sisters in a local assembly to teach with authority or to exercise authority over men, but to learn in silence and remain in all subjection; man’s headship is woman’s protection.
- C. Their salvation—“But she will be saved through her childbearing, if they remain in faith and love and holiness with sobriety”—v. 15:<sup>4</sup>
1. Childbearing is a suffering; suffering restricts and protects the fallen one from transgression.
  2. In verse 15 Paul also mentions faith, love, and holiness:
    - a. Faith is to receive the Lord (John 1:12), love is to enjoy Him (John 14:21, 23), and holiness is to express Him through sanctification.
    - b. By faith we please God (Heb. 11:6), by love we keep the Lord’s word (John 14:23), and by holiness we see Him (Heb. 12:14).

#### **II. The two virtues of modesty and sobriety are of great importance in the church life:<sup>5</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Life-study of 1 Timothy, Message 4, title “The Normal Life of the ... Sisters in the Church Life.”

<sup>2</sup> Life-study of 1 Timothy, Message 4, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> Life-study of 1 Timothy, Message 4, pp. 36-37.

<sup>4</sup> Life-study of 1 Timothy, Message 4, pp. 37-38.

- A. In this [lesson] we are especially burdened concerning modesty, the leading female virtue.<sup>6</sup>
- B. In some families there is not adequate stress on modesty; rather, both boys and girls are brought up and instructed in the same way.
- C. Modesty is a virtue which emphasizes the difference between male and female; as we have pointed out, the Greek word rendered “modesty” in 2:9 is literally shamefastness, that is, bound and made fast by an honorable shame:
1. A word related to the virtue of modesty is shamefacedness; to be shamefaced is to be modest and have a sense of shame and know how to show shame.
  2. When a sister speaks in a church meeting, she should do so with modesty, with a certain amount of shamefacedness.
  3. Modesty is a great safeguard and protection to a female; it is a mistake to teach girls in the same way as boys.
  4. Boys may expose themselves in certain situations; girls, however, should not; otherwise, they will be without protection; this lack of protection can open the way for fornication.
  5. If the women working in an office have the virtue of modesty, they will be free from any improper involvement with the men who work there; the proper covering, the necessary modesty, shamefacedness, causes them to keep a proper distance.
- D. All the sisters in the church life should have the virtue of modesty:<sup>7</sup>
1. The sisters should dress according to the principle of modesty; this principle does not allow the exposure of one’s body.
  2. For a woman to expose her body is to go against the principle of modesty.
  3. A sister needs to have a head covering, not only physically, but also psychologically, ethically, morally, and spiritually; this is the modesty spoken of in the Bible.
  4. To be modest simply means that a female is fully covered in every way.
- E. The sisters should never forget that they are females; this must be true especially of young unmarried sisters:<sup>8</sup>
1. They should be careful not to allow any evil thing to defile their holy body, which has been separated unto God and which is the temple of the Holy Spirit—1 Cor. 6:18-19.
  2. For a young woman to preserve her body in this way requires modesty.
  3. All the young sisters need to wear a heavenly cloak to cover themselves from the influence of this evil age; then they will be preserved for God’s purpose.
- F. Along with modesty, the sisters need sobriety; as a sister is practicing modesty, she needs to be sober—1 Tim. 2:9:<sup>9</sup>
1. Far from being foolish, she should be sober-minded and discreet; she should be clear about things and have a keen discernment—cf. Prov. 11:22.
  2. A sister should be quiet, but she should not be without sobriety and discernment—1 Tim. 2:11.
  3. The sisters should attend the church meetings in order to gain the full knowledge of the truth; this knowledge will cause them to be sober in their understanding; then, along with their modesty, they will have what Paul calls “holiness with sobriety”—v. 15.
  4. They will not be holy in a foolish way, in a way devoid of knowledge; on the contrary, they will be holy in a way that is full of knowledge, understanding, and discernment.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Life-study of 1 Timothy, Message 4, pp. 40.

<sup>6</sup> Life-study of 1 Timothy, Message 4, pp. 38.

<sup>7</sup> Life-study of 1 Timothy, Message 4, pp. 38.

<sup>8</sup> Life-study of 1 Timothy, Message 4, pp. 39.

<sup>9</sup> Life-study of 1 Timothy, Message 4, pp. 39.

<sup>10</sup> Life-study of 1 Timothy, Message 4, pp. 40.



## **Excerpts from the Ministry:**

### **THE SISTERS**

In verse 9, Paul turns to the sisters. He begins this verse with the word “similarly.” This refers to “I will” in verse 8. It may also indicate that Paul’s word about praying in every place applies to the sisters as well as to the brothers.

#### **Adorning Themselves**

Verse 9 says, “Similarly, that women adorn themselves in proper clothing with modesty and sobriety, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly clothing.” Proper clothing denotes what is fitting to the sisters’ nature and position as saints of God. Clothing in Greek implies deportment, demeanor. Clothing is the main sign of a sister’s demeanor, and it must befit her saintly position.

The Greek word rendered modesty literally is shamefastness, that is, bound or made fast by an honorable shame (Vincent), implying not forward or overbold, but moderate, observing the proprieties of a woman.

Sobriety denotes sober-mindedness, self-restraint. It means to restrict oneself soberly and discreetly. The sisters in a local assembly should clothe themselves with these two virtues—shamefastness and self-restraint—as their demeanor.

In verse 10 Paul continues, “But, what befits women professing godly reverence, by good works.” Godly reverence is reverence toward God; it is the revering and honoring of God as those who worship Him should. (*Life-study of 1 Timothy*, msg. 4, p. 38)

#### **Their Salvation**

In this message I am especially burdened concerning modesty, the leading female virtue. In some families there is not adequate stress on modesty. Rather, both boys and girls are brought up and instructed in the same way. Modesty is a virtue which emphasizes the difference between male and female. As we have pointed out, the Greek word rendered “modesty” in 2:9 is literally shamefastness, that is, bound and made fast by an honorable shame.

A word related to the virtue of modesty is shamefacedness. To be shamefaced is to be modest and have a sense of shame and know how to show shame. When a sister speaks in a church meeting, she should do so with modesty, with a certain amount of shamefacedness.

Modesty is a great safeguard and protection to a female. It is a mistake to teach girls in the same way as boys. Boys may expose themselves in certain situations; girls, however, should not. Otherwise, they will be without protection. This lack of protection can open the way for fornication. If the women working in an office have the virtue of modesty, they will be free from any improper involvement with the men who work there. A woman working in an office may easily become involved with a man if she does not have the proper covering, the necessary modesty, shamefacedness, which causes her to keep a proper distance.

All the sisters in the church life should have the virtue of modesty. The sisters should dress according to the principle of modesty. This principle does not allow the exposure of one’s body. For a woman to expose her body is to go against the principle of modesty. A sister needs to have a head covering, not only physically, but also psychologically, ethically, morally, and spiritually. This is the modesty spoken of in the Bible. To be modest simply means that a female is fully covered in every way.

In the church life the brothers and sisters have quite a lot of contact with one another in fellowship. In such fellowship it is necessary for the sisters to wear a moral, ethical, and spiritual covering known as modesty. In all their contact with the brothers, the sisters should be covered with an “overcoat” of modesty. This is a great safeguard and protection.

The sisters should never forget that they are females. This must be true especially of young unmarried sisters. They should be careful not to allow any evil thing to defile their holy body, which has been separated unto God and which is the temple of the Holy Spirit. For a young woman to preserve her body in this way requires modesty. I advise all the young sisters to wear a heavenly cloak to cover themselves from the influence of this evil age. Then they will be preserved for God's purpose. At the time appointed by God, He will arrange for the right brother to marry a young sister as a virgin. Again and again I would remind the sisters to wear a cloak of modesty. The sisters must always remember that they are females. As females it is necessary for them to be covered. This is modesty.

Along with modesty, the sisters need sobriety (2:9). As a sister is practicing modesty, she needs to be sober. Far from being foolish, she should be sober-minded and discreet. She should be clear about things and have a keen discernment. A sister should be quiet, but she should not be without sobriety and discernment. A sister should be quiet soberly, not foolishly. As a sister exercises herself to be quiet and not to overstep her position, she needs a keen discernment within. Her spiritual sky should be clear, without clouds or smog. Then she will be clear, careful, and discreet.

The two virtues of modesty and sobriety are of great importance in the church life. The sisters should attend the church meetings in order to gain the full knowledge of the truth. This knowledge will cause them to be sober in their understanding. Then, along with their modesty, they will have what Paul calls "holiness with sobriety" (2:15). They will not be holy in a foolish way, in a way devoid of knowledge. On the contrary, they will be holy in a way that is full of knowledge, understanding, and discernment. (*Life-study of 1 Timothy*, msg. 4, pp. 35-40)

The sisters should clothe and cover their body in a proper way. First Timothy 2:9 charges the sisters to "adorn themselves in proper clothing with modesty and sobriety, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly clothing." The word proper denotes fitting to the sisters' nature and position as saints of God. In Greek the word for clothing implies deportment, demeanor. A sister's demeanor, of which clothing is the main sign, must befit her saintly position. The word modesty means, literally, "shamefastness," denoting being bound or made fast by an honorable shame (Vincent), implying not forward or overbold but moderate, observing the proprieties of womanhood. The word sobriety means "sobermindedness, self-restraint; the restricting of oneself soberly and discreetly." The sisters in a local church should clothe themselves with these two virtues—shamefastness and self-restraint—as their demeanor. (*Life-study of Joshua, Judges and Ruth*, msg. 23, p. 46)

### **Proper Clothing with Modesty and Sobriety**

Let us look at 1 Timothy 2:9-11: "Similarly, that women adorn themselves in proper clothing with modesty and sobriety, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, what befits women professing godly reverence, by good works. Let a woman learn in quietness in all subjection."

One of God's basic requirements for the sister is modesty. It is good to feel modest and to be conscious of shame. This is a natural protection for the sisters. Sisters who are conscious of shame and who are modest are protected naturally. Do not wear dresses which are contrary to your sense of shame. You must exercise sobriety. Do not wear immodest clothes. Immodesty is contrary to sobriety. Always wear "proper clothing." Every sister knows what is proper in her particular community. We should always wear clothes which are considered proper by those around us. A Christian should not wear clothes which provide an opportunity for heathens to say, "Do Christians wear such things too?" Our standard must never be lower than that of the heathens. We must learn to have modesty and sobriety and must know what constitutes "proper clothing."

Verse 9 continues: “Not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly clothing.” This particularly refers to the curling of hair. Peter was referring to the many fashions that women apply to their hair. Curling the hair means making many curls like clusters of vines. Women were already concerned with fashion two thousand years ago. Today many think that it is fashionable to curl their hair into clusters. Actually, this is something very ancient; it was being done two thousand years ago. Costly clothing is spoken of here as well. Some dresses have the same value but are priced differently. We should not wear the costly ones or spend extra money on them.

Sisters must take care of propriety in their clothing. We have no intention, nor did Paul or Peter, to ask a sister to be careless, loose, or unconcerned about her attire. Neither should we set our mind on fancy dresses and costly clothing. Sisters should wear proper clothing; they should learn to manage their wardrobe properly. They should set their wardrobe in proper order, using ordinary material at reasonable cost. No sister should be unconcerned about the way she attires herself.

Some sisters spend too much time on their clothing. They pay too much attention to fancy clothes and costly dresses. Other sisters do not care for the tidiness and the cleanliness of their attire; they are very careless about their clothing. This shows that they are sloppy. A woman’s dress is a true reflection of her character. If one does not pay attention to personal grooming and cleanliness, such a person is loose, sloppy, and careless. Our clothing must be proper, neat, and clean. It must be simple, but clean. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 50, *Messages for Building Up New Believers*, vol. 3, pp. 610-611)

**Study Questions:**

1. What is modesty or shamefastness as referred to by Paul in 1 Tim. 2:9 and how is such modesty a protection to the sisters?
2. How is such modesty particularly related to the sisters' adornment?
3. Explain how the sisters also need sobriety in their practice of modesty?

**References and Further Reading:**

1. *Life-study of 1 Timothy*, msg. 4
2. *Life-study of Joshua, Judges and Ruth*, msg. 23
3. *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, vol. 50*, Messages for Building Up New Believers, volume 3, ch. 37.

