

Woman in Ministry?

You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.

One of the great doctrinal divisions within the Christian Community is over the question of whether or not women should be allowed to preach or teach in the churches. There are those who advocate that women in ministry is overwhelmingly supported throughout the New Testament. However, many of those same people have difficulty reconciling their position when confronted with three portions of scripture which are commonly quoted to support the prohibition.

I believe what follows will allow women to pursue the calling of God on their life without the condemnation that often arises from the inability to embrace all that is written. Because the truth of the matter has been obscured through a combination of poor translation and a lack of understanding, many good and Godly women have been kept captive by a combination of religiosity and ignorance. I've got good news for you. The truth shall set you free. Warning! What follows will be toxic to religious bigots and misogynistic males.

Okay, grab your Bible and a pen to make notes and let's get into this important study, beginning with a look at the verses in question along with their context for clarity.

1 Timothy 2:8-15 NKJV

I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; 9 in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, 10 but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. 11 Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. 12 And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. 15 Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.

Titus 2:1-5 NKJV

But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: 2 that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; 3 the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things— 4 that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.

1 Corinthians 14:26-39 NKJV

How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. 28 But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. 30 But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. 32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. 33 For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

34 Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. 35 And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.

36 Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? 37 If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. 38 But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant.

39 Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues.

When we observe the context of the above passages, the portion from the letter to the Corinthians is the only one that is directly speaking about a gathering of the saints. In the quotes from Titus and Timothy, the context is more concerned with the general behavior of men and women, so we will put these two passages aside for the time being and deal with them later and focus on these two verses from Corinthians that are directly instructing women not to speak in church:

34 Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. 35 And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.

In the midst of this most definitive statement we find the support for this declaration is contained in the words **“as the law also says.”** That appeal to the authority of the law is thought to settle the matter, and therefore anyone who would argue about it is only being contentious. Nevertheless, it seems that there are still some that want to know why it is that a thorough search through the Torah leaves us bereft of any such law. Nowhere in the entire five books written by Moses can anything be found that would lend support to the idea that women cannot speak or teach in the congregation. There just isn't any such instruction to be found in the Law. Nevertheless, the editors of most Bibles that have a centre column reference, give credence to their rendering of this verse by citing Genesis 3:16:

Genesis 3:16 NKJV

To the woman He said: “I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”

Eve is told the consequences of her action: sorrow, pain and problems with her husband. It is somewhat difficult to make these details into a prohibition on teaching in the church without adding to God's Word. “He shall rule over you” becomes, “It's shameful to speak in church so shut up.”

But if it were true, that there is an instruction in the law that a woman should not teach, how is it that Moses declares that Miriam was a prophetess (Exodus 15:20)? And if it was in the heart of God to exclude women from any leadership or teaching role, how is it we have Deborah the prophetess judging all Israel (Judges 4:4-5)? The prophets and prophetesses taught the people the way of the Lord. Other women of God in the role of prophetess include Isaiah's wife (Isaiah 8:3), and Huldah (2 Kings 22:14) and I could almost guarantee you had no idea of Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14). In the gospels we have Anna (Luke 2:36-38) and in the book of Acts we have four virgin daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9) and many more examples to many to list throughout the New Testament.

We may have exceptions to our rules in the English language, but God never contradicts his commands. So the prohibition of women in ministry has some difficulty too when it comes to reconciling the above.

As mentioned above, the statement “as the law also says” is an appeal to authority on which the instruction stands or falls. If we can find the law, we can identify the authority. Without a doubt, it cannot be found in the Law of God, nor from any examples or teachings from the writings of the prophets. Nor can we find anything like it anywhere in the New Testament. However, if we look at contemporary Jewish writings from the apostolic age we find exactly that which corresponds. “Let your women keep silence in the churches” was definitely a Jewish ordinance.

From the sayings of Rabbi Eliezer, as found in the Midrash Rabba (Bamidbar 9.204) we find this declaration: “Let the words of the law be burned, rather than that they should be delivered to women.” This certainly expresses the idea of it being shameful for a women to have anything to do with proclaiming the Word of God. As we explore Jewish literature we find that women were certainly not permitted to teach or even to ask questions in the synagogues. To the rabbis “a woman should know nothing but the use of her distaff.” It is in this Rabbinical Law that we find the authority that was appealed to, an authority that is found to be completely unscriptural.

With this in mind, let us go back to the passage in Corinthians and take another look at the context and take note of the phrases that are now highlighted

1 Corinthians 14:31-39

For **you can all prophesy** one by one, **that all may learn** and **all may be encouraged**. 32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. 33 For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

34 Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. 35 And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.

36 Or **did the word of God come originally from you?** Or was it you only that it reached? 37 If **anyone thinks himself to be a prophet** or spiritual, let him acknowledge that **the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord**. 38 But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant.

39 **Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy**, and do not forbid to speak with tongues.

Paul is writing to the church and he declares that they can **all prophesy** and that in so doing, they may **all learn** (v31). This alerts us to the fact that prophesying includes teaching and encouragement. Then Paul quotes this 'law of the Jews' that was being proclaimed among the Corinthians (v34-35). There are no punctuation marks in ancient Greek to indicate a quote, but the recipients of the letter would have known precisely who was being quoted. (I've now put quote marks in my Bible.) After giving the quote, Paul immediately responds to the prohibition with these words:

36 **Or** did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? 37 If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.

"Or" is the literal translation of the Greek word *E* and is oftentimes rendered as the exclamation "What!" It indicates a contrast between what is going to follow with what has gone before. In other words, what Paul is about to write is a **rebuttal of the quote** he has just mentioned. Grammatically speaking, it's a logical disjunctive, a presentation of an argument that has two opposing propositions; it's an either or choice that was presented to the recipients of his letter.

In so doing, Paul sharply rebukes whomsoever it is that considers himself to be the prophet who has proclaimed this 'law', and assertively declares that what Paul has just written i.e. that **all may prophesy one by one** (v31) is in fact the commandment of the Lord. He then summarily dismisses anyone who wants to cling to their ignorance and addresses the brethren, a term that includes both men and women, encouraging them all to desire to prophesy and speak in tongues (v39).

This understanding is confirmed by the prophet Joel who is quoted by Peter in the Book of Acts.

Acts 2:17-18 NKJV

'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. 18 And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy.

Okay ladies, as moved by the Spirit, prophesy! That all may learn what God has placed in your heart for He has poured out His Spirit on His maidservants.

Okay, let's now have a look at those verses in Timothy and we'll deal with Titus shortly.

1 Timothy 2:8-15 NKJV

I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; 9 in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, 10 but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.

11 Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. 12 And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.

13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. 15 Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.

This instruction from Paul's letter to Timothy is almost always interpreted as referring to gatherings of the church. Basically interpreted as saying, "Women, shut up". Some infer that because Adam listened to his wife and that caused all the trouble, a man should not listen to a woman teaching. We are going to have to go deep with this one and examine the original Greek words carefully in order to see what God has truly commanded in His Word.

Firstly, we need to understand that the word that is translated 'woman' is also the word for 'wife'. Likewise the word that is translated 'man' is also the word for 'husband'. In the Greek there is no distinction, except that the meaning is made clear by the context. The reference to Adam and Eve ought to have made the context clear that it is the husband and wife relationship which is being spoken of, not a gathering of the church.

Secondly, the original Greek word *hesychia* rendered 'in silence' is normally rendered elsewhere in God's Word as 'in peace' or 'peaceably', 'peaceable' or 'quietness' as in the following examples. In particular, Paul uses it only a few verses previous:

1 Timothy 2:1-2 NKJV

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and **peaceable** life in all godliness and reverence.

2 Thessalonians 3:12 NKJV

Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in **quietness** and eat their own bread.

Silence is not in mind, rather it's an attitude of peace. Likewise with this verse:

1 Thessalonians 4:11 NKJV

. . . that you also aspire to lead a **quiet life**, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you.

This word *hesychia* describing an attitude of peace and is not used in a way that commands silence. For modern translators to render this word as 'silence' is simply not an honest translation. Even the word 'quiet' in 1 Timothy 2:2, which is a different word, is literally 'tranquil'.

Thirdly, the word 'teach' is from the Greek *didaskein* (Strong's 1321), from which we get the English word didactic, and is variously rendered: teach, direct, admonish. While it is translated 'teach', depending on its context it could be rendered as instruct, give orders or dictate. Usually the word is in the positive sense, but here it is in the negative.

Fourthly, the word rendered 'have authority over' is from the Greek *authenteo* which is a compound word joining *auto* and *hentes*. Basically it means to act of oneself, to arm oneself, to dominate. The context of the following verses ought to help us understand the intended meaning.

13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.

Eve wasn't exercising authority over Adam, she was acting on her own, while Adam watched. What Paul is correcting is the self-willed actions of some of the women who were lacking in submission. Putting it all together, what follows is what I believe is a better translation.

1 Timothy 2:11-15 My Version

Let the women learn peaceable submission, and I do not permit wives to be ordering their husbands around and acting independently but to be in peace. For Adam was formed first and then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, acted independently and fell into transgression.

Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.

More abruptly it might simply say, “Ladies, stop your nagging!”

There is no doubt in my mind that this verse has been subjected to an unfortunate overt misogynistic bias by the translators causing this particular instruction to be greatly misunderstood. It is clear to me at least, that it has nothing to do with a meeting of the saints, except perhaps that the admonishment applies to women where ever they are.

That said, any man who believes that he cannot learn from a woman is simply arrogant. Of course a woman can teach. My wife taught well and I learned more than a thing or two from her. However, she always acknowledged the truth that I as her husband was the head of the home.

Titus 2:1-5 NKJV

But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: 2 that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; 3 the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things— 4 that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.

This passage is sometimes used to restrict women to teaching only other women when it actually says they are to teach ‘good things’ and then lists some of the good things. To interpret this verse as a restrictive command rather than an inclusive command reflects upon the bias of the interpreter. To come to the assumption that it is restrictive command, one has to presume that this list is limiting what can be done to what is written. Simply ridiculous. If that be the case, it doesn’t mention preaching the Gospel as a requirement for men or women. Does that mean that because it isn’t mentioned here that it is excluded? Say no more.

Ladies, do and say whatever you believe the Holy Spirit is leading you to do and say. Be assertive, respectful and loving in all that you do and the God of peace will be with you always. Bearing in mind that He will always lead you in loving submission to your husbands, just as a man of God ought always to be led by the Spirit as a servant leader loving his wife as Christ loves the church.

And by the way . . .

Ephesians 5:22-24 NKJV

Wives, submit to your **own husbands**, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. 24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their **own husbands** in everything.

Wives are to submit to their **own husbands**, their own man, **not just any man**, particularly not any man that wants to shut them down from functioning in their gifting. Feel free to assertively and respectfully put them in their place. And rise up and take your place in the Body of Christ. Amen.