

## **Silent Women and the Law of a Mother**

*2 Timothy 2:11 Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. 12 But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.*

This may be the most debated passage in Scripture in the modern church. The place of women in the church and in particular female officers in the church have caused a lot of discussion in the church and in places divided the body of Christ.

In other places some appeal may be made to the usage of the male gender in the passage as the normal way of p[resenting the issue with the rule applicable to both genders. For example, “Husband of one Wife” has been argued this way. Others appeal to the culture in which the Scriptures were written and declare it isn’t a hard and fast rule for the church today since culture has changed. It is true that in many places the Bible uses the male gender in ways that apply equally to both genders. In such places the context is easy to see and the proper application of the Scripture easy to attain. The appeal to culture is pure foolishness in that we are dealing with a divine word that will not change or pass away until the end of time. The only passage, which may be appealed to without apparent debate that prohibits women elders in the church, is before us.

There is a cultural argument when we take this whole chapter into consideration as must be done to obtain the proper context. Paul tells women how to dress because it appears to be part of the nature of the gender to adorn itself so as to attract attention and appear attractive. This would have been particularly true in the city where this was written where most were of a means to obtain these external means of adorning themselves. Paul admonishes the women to not do so but rather to wear a spirit of submission and godliness as was fitting to women professing godliness.

We find the particular Greek word “hsucia – hesuchia” used in this passage four times in the Bible. In the AV this is translated silent or silence three times and as quietness one time. In this passage we find two of the instances it is translated silence. This is not in context of the passage and the preferred English word here is quietness indicating a submissive attitude and way of life. The Bible does not contradict itself and unless we find the proper understanding of this passage and set it in its proper context we will create such a contradiction.

*A parallel passage is found in 1 Corinthians 14:34 ff-- “ 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.”* The Greek word here is sigaw – sigao means to keep silence or hold one’s peace. In general then the words used for silence in regards to women in church describes a quiet condition both in thought and action. The attitude of a quiet reverence for God and for those appointed over her. Note that Paul begins this exhortation by telling everyone how they are to conduct themselves then the men in particular and finally the women. Elsewhere we see women are allowed a part in public prayer and that they are told to teach their families. Likewise we find that

the older women are told to teach the younger. Obviously then complete silence in church is not the intent of the apostles in these passages.

What is clear is that Paul is setting up a natural order of things that have been so from the creation in that woman was created second from man almost as an appendage to man so to speak. The chronology of the creation isn't as important here as the reason for woman's creation to begin with. Because of the first sin this natural order was upset and is alluded to by God in the curse of the woman for her sin. We find this clarified a bit more with a very strange sounding verse where women are saved by childbearing. This too is an allusion to the fall and the curse whereby women finding themselves in this place of submission might feel inordinately guilty and unforgiven by God, thus the apostle points them to their original place in creation. It also speaks to those who refer then to women as the weaker or lesser of the species in that it takes extraordinary patience and strength to bear and proper care for children. This makes clear the issue is not about ability or can a woman do these things but of a deliberate subordination as such because this is what God has said. The best example of such voluntary subordination is found within the Trinity. In the Bible we see Jesus Christ the second person of the Trinity bow before the will of the Father with these words, "Not my will, but thy will be done." There is no subordination of the person or substance of the Godhead, yet here we find subordination within the economy of the Godhead. So much so that the Reformed have always formulated the position of the God head this way, "The Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son."<sup>1</sup>

The issue then is one that becomes very clear in verse 12, "And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence." The teaching here is in the sense of proclaiming the Word of God in the church preaching or teaching with authority. The authority given by God to those called by Him and ordained in the church for this purpose. Here we find the place where God excludes women from being elders in the church because elders are called to be apt to teach. The very name of the office invokes a sense of authority accompanying it. While Jesus Christ is the head of the church and its one authority, the elders in the church by the nature of their call and place in the church as the local overseers under Christ of His flock in this place have an authority God prohibits women from having.

This place of authority is limited then to the preaching of the Word and not all places within the church. Women may and should take part in all parts of the corporate worship and activities of the church, even in prayer and other than from the pulpit can each in the church. They are directed to teach all good things other than the Bible in the Corinthians passage.

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<sup>1</sup> WCF II. III. In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost;[38] the Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father;[39] the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.[40]

38. Matt. 3:16-17; 28:19; II Cor. 13:14; see Eph. 2:18

39. John 1:14, 18; see Heb. 1:2-3; Col. 1:15

40. John 15:26; Gal. 4:6

This leaves the practical question then can women teach Sunday school where men are present? While that would appear to be permitted in these passages by some the very nature of the qualifications of the elders for office would indicate that it is elders alone which by the Word of God must be men should be the only teachers in the church. Because the church has failed to hold this standard and particularly with children have delegated the task to women does not negate the Word of God. Practically in many churches there are not enough elders to fill this need and any qualified regardless of gender have been pushed into service. A need is being met, as it should be, for solid biblical teaching must be present in the church. However it is not the best and should be rectified as soon as practical. We find that God who has the prerogative to do so has at times raised up women to fill needs where no man was willing or present. Deborah is a good example of this and such should be to the shame of the men present.

God created all things and in that creation there is a natural order of life in the flesh. This order should not be upset by the church, the body of Christ but rather exemplified to the whole world. Not of ability or value but of the will of God alone only men may be elders in His church. Likewise then we see this carried into the home where the man is to assume his proper place as head of the household. The church is the household of God and to be ruled accordingly. Jesus was obedient to God the Father, even to death on the cross.

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