

“Women and Worship”

1 Timothy 2:11-15

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.

I should begin by saying that I did not intentionally intend to be preaching on these verses on the same Sunday when America is observing Mother’s Day, even though this is the only mention of childbearing in the NT. It happened because it’s our practice here at Providence to preach “Lectio Continua” that is to preach successively through books of the bible, verse by verse and chapter by chapter, which means sometimes you end up with some interesting juxtapositions.

Now, as to these verses themselves. Well to say that they are controversial would be a major understatement. The context of these verses is the worship of the church, and Paul clearly expects that women will be present in the worship of the church, but in verse 11 Paul says that what the women are to be doing in the worship, is to *“learn in silence with all submission.”* That, by itself would be enough to offend modern egalitarian Westerners, but he doubles down in the next verse to explain exactly what he means by that. When it comes to the worship of the church, women are not to teach, and not to have authority over men, but again, to be in silence. This would mean they are not to preach or exposit scripture in a worship service, nor are they to fill leadership positions in the church. So no female Pastors or Elders.

This is America, circa 2018, we have women now filling combat positions in the Army, we have female sports reporters walking around in locker rooms filled with naked men, and nobody dares to say that's not right. So when one preaches on verses that say women shouldn't be pastors, people have tendency to take great offense. And not just people *outside* the church. These verses offend people inside the church as well. And I'm not just talking people we would describe as liberal Christians who don't believe that the bible is the word of God, I mean Christians who believe all scripture is inspired. That is until they reach verses like these. As soon as they do something very odd happens.

Let me explain what I mean, as I was preparing to preach on these verses, I noticed how modern commentators, who had up until that time been primarily laboring to explain what 1 Timothy *meant* on reaching 1 Timothy 2:11 suddenly switched over to trying to explain what it *didn't mean*. They try to limit what scripture is prohibiting to the least possible restriction. Some commentators tried to get rid of entirely, saying that these verses were either *just Paul's opinion*, or that this is somehow an accommodation to the culture of the time and that it no longer applies.

Let's talk about those ideas for a moment. First the idea that this is just Paul's opinion.

Doesn't he say, "And I do not permit" in verse 12. Well then it must be that it's just Paul's desire, not God's command, right? No! When Paul speaks here, he is speaking with all the authority of an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul is not conveying his preferences, but God's commandments. In just the same way that in verse 8 of this chapter when he said, "***I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting;***" The words "I desire" do not mean that this is Paul's preference rather than God's command. It is God's command that men pray everywhere, and Paul is an ambassador of Christ, so it's the will of God that he is doing. Its not Paul commands he's transmitting, but the authoritative instructions of Jesus Christ to His church in every place and every age.

2) Well what about the idea that this is just a reflection of the culture of the time? You know, women don't teach in Ephesus, and they don't have positions of authority, so they needed to follow that cultural norm? Rubbish! The Ephesians lived in a city where the most coveted religious position, that of high priestess at the Temple of Artemis, had always been filled by women. It was a position of the highest honor that the chief families fought to have their daughters fill. Let me give you an example of just one of the inscriptions found on a monument in the city:

"The Council and People honored Vipsania Olympias, daughter of Lucius Vipsanius Apelleus, son of Neo of the Cornelian tribe, and of Claudia Pythos, the daughter of Polemonis, completed her term as Priestess of Artemis as befits a sacred office, fulfilling both the rites and sacrifices worthily; she wreathed the shrine and all its precincts in the days of the goddess's manifestations, making the public sacrifices and the distributions (of money) to the State Council and to the Council of Elders, and bestowing in addition for repairs the sum of 5,000 imperial denarii. She served her priestly term during the prytany of Gaius Licinnius Dionysodorus".

Now does that sound like the kind of inscription you'd see in a city that didn't want women in positions of religious authority? Not at all. In the context of Ephesus, it's Paul's command that the men be the authorities and do the teaching that's counter-cultural. And incidentally, to this day, missionaries deal with this phenomenon, they will go into cultures where the women have traditionally had the spiritual authority, and they have great difficulty getting the men to make that transition. But we don't have to go to foreign cultures to see that happening. We can see that happening right here in America.

- *Just 35% of the men in the USA attend church weekly*
- *Women comprise over 60% of the typical adult congregation on any given Sunday*

- *At least one-fifth of married women regularly worship without their husbands*
- *The majority of men attend worship services and nothing more*
- *Men 18-29 are the LEAST LIKELY demographic group to be in church*

Men in the US are handing over spiritual authority to women. And that isn't right.

Now in order to explain why men are supposed to exercise headship in the church and female headship is such a problem, Paul goes all the way back to the Creation order. And he says God who could have created both male and female at the same time, or could have created women first, instead created man first, to be the head, and then he created the woman from Adam to be his helpmeet. Not his head.

God intended Adam to be the authority. But that's not what happened. He recounts how Eve was deceived by the serpent, that is the devil and took of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and gave some to her husband. But notice Paul makes this amazing statement, EVE was deceived. She honestly bought into what the devil was telling her. ADAM wasn't. He didn't take the fruit and eat it, because he was convinced by the devil. Adam's eyes were wide open. Adam took the fruit and ate it because at that moment he made Eve the authority, and pleasing Eve rather than pleasing God became his desire. So when God asked him in Genesis 3, *"Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?"* His response was *"The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate."* What did he do? He abdicated all responsibility. This is the response of a leader acting like subordinate! *"Captain, why did you kill all the civilians in the village? Well, the Sergeant Major that the army assigned to me, suggested we kill them, so we did."*

So what is Paul saying? Not only is the male supposed to be the authority in the church, but when the men abdicate authority and reverse the roles, bad stuff

happens! This is not an insignificant matter, or something to be ignored, it goes all the way back to creation and the fall and we ignore as so many evangelicals are, at our peril.

This brings us though, to the most difficult of all the verses in this difficult section to understand, verse 15 – ***“Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.”***

Now what is Paul teaching here, is he really teaching that women are saved by having babies? Men are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, and women are saved by childbirth? No.

It seems to me that there are three reasons Paul adds this verse, the first is as a consolation after some hard teaching. This is going to be a change in the church that is going to be hard for many women to bear.

So as Calvin puts it: ***“For these reasons [Paul] modifies what he had said by adding a consolation; for the Spirit of God does not accuse or reproach us, in order to triumph over us, when we are covered with shame, but, when we have been cast down, immediately raises us up... It is proper to observe that the good effect of this consolation is twofold. First, by the hope of salvation held out to them, they are prevented from falling into despair... Secondly, they become accustomed to endure calmly and patiently the necessity of servitude, so as to submit willingly to their husbands, when they are informed that this kind of obedience is both profitable to themselves and acceptable to God.”***

Second, Paul pointed out that the first woman, Eve, didn't adhere to her proper domain and consequently fell into sin. ***How will women in the church age avoid succumbing to the same fate? They'll be preserved from Satan if they adhere to their God-given role focused on their family and home (with “childbearing” constituting a figure of speech called synecdoche, in which***

the part, “childbearing,” stands for the whole, “being devoted to a woman’s domestic sphere”; cf. 5: 14: “to marry, have children, manage their households”).

To quote Phil Ryken, and I wish our society understood this: *“A woman is not saved by becoming a man, but by embracing her God-given calling as a woman. Indeed, this is one of the ways that she works out her salvation.”*

Thirdly there is a sense in which not only the women, but all of us were in fact saved by childbearing. Well what do I mean, in the original Greek is not “childbearing” but THE Childbearing. So the verse reads, “Women will be saved through the bearing of a child.” How can we not be reminded by that scripture of the birth of Jesus Christ the savior of the World?

Did not God say to Eve, in Gen. 3:15 *And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.”*

And in time the seed of the woman did indeed crush the head of the serpent. No mother, no savior.

Walter Lock put the verse into a poetic couplet that draws out its meaning on this interpretation: *“A child from woman’s seed to spring; / Shall saving to all women bring.”*²⁸

Application: Within Our Own Denomination, holding on to the truth of what scripture teaches here is becoming a real struggle, for instance, Tim Keller, one of the most influential pastors in our denomination has long taught that 1 Tim 2:11 should be not be understood to say, *“And I do not permit a woman to*

teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.”

But

And I do not permit a woman to teach authoritatively over a man.

So therefore there is room for “Non-Authoritative” teaching by women in worship.

I remember being confronted with this interpretation by a PCA pastor who was defending one PCA church’s practice of having women “share a message” in worship services. I answered him at the time, let’s say you’re right and we can ignore the *oude* which is the Greek word for “or” between teach and authority, so that this clause in verse 11 really does mean “teach authoritatively”. I want you to explain to me how a woman is going to teach non-authoritatively IN SILENCE because that’s the second clause in the verse.

Will it be via charades or maybe the flip cards you see in YouTube videos? He didn’t have an answer.

Then I followed up with, just what is non-authoritative teaching anyway? Let’s say a woman teaches the truth from the scripture, but I don’t like it. It’s non-authoritative so I don’t have to obey it, right? Obviously not, all teaching in worship is by its very nature, authoritative.

These days, as female teachers become the evangelical norm, many are simply ignoring these verses.

So we will have to stand *contramundum*.

2) While these verses apply to teaching and authority in the worship of the church, it doesn’t mean that women can’t teach – period. Matthew Henry

Quote:

The path that leads to salvation is ever that of obedience to God's ordinances. It is his will that the woman should influence mankind "from the bottom up" (that is, by way of the child), not "from the top down" (that is, not by way of the man). She must choose to do that for which by God's creation-ordinance she is naturally equipped, both physically and spiritually.

3) Finally, the model of submissive learning we have here, is one we can all learn from its modeled best by Mary in *Luke 10:39* ***And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word.***

40 But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me."

41 And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things.

42 "But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."

In other words, as Mary sat in the seminary of Christ, she "learned quietly and with all submissiveness." This is the way all God's people learn. They sit at the feet of their Master, even when he is speaking through the voice of a minister.

We live in an age where everyone wants to speak and no one wants to listen.