

## 1 TIMOTHY 2:11-15

This particular Scripture has been misused and abused to the extent that its incorrect interpretation has hindered many a woman of God from answering the call of God on her life.

To properly interpret Scripture passages, we must always look at two things: 1) the overall purpose of the book the passage is in and, 2) the overall teaching of the entire Bible. This is especially true for this portion of Scripture! We **must** look at the purpose of the writing of 1 Timothy!

Some people's narrow interpretation of this passage tells women they can not speak at all in church, or teach a man anything. Unfortunately, this creates a large number of problems by creating a number of contradictions. For example: **Is a woman not to teach at all?** Then how do you explain Titus 2:4 (older women teach younger) and the command to make disciples in Matthew 28 (or is it only for men to obey)?

**Is a woman not to teach a man?** Then why does Paul himself praise Lois and Eunice for instructing Timothy in the Scriptures in 2 Timothy 1:5? Also, in Acts 18:24-26, Priscilla (a woman) and Aquila both offer Biblical teaching and correction to Apollos. And why do churches that interpret this passage in a constrictive manner allow women to teach boys in Sunday school, etc.? Are boys OK, but when they become men, then the practice is unacceptable? And how do they determine when the boy is actually a man? I will also ask this question: What about a woman teaching in a university, or in a high school? Or...

**Are woman only commanded to not preach or teach in church, then?**

Preposterous! If the command to be silent deals with a woman not being able to talk at all, then why the discussion on how a woman needs to present herself when she is prophesying (which means preaching under the inspiration of the Spirit) as well as the promise that sons and daughters will prophesy (1 Corinthians 11 & Joel 2:28)?

**Can a woman have no authoritative position over a man?** Then how does one deal with the prophetess Deborah who was raised up as a judge of Israel by God in the OT, and Nympha whose church met in her own house? There are too many Biblical and historical examples that would contradict these incorrect interpretations and applications of this text!

But how do we understand it all?

Before I explain this in its Ephesian context (the context of 1 Timothy), I want to give you historical context and revisit our discussion in 1 Corinthians (this book was probably written from Corinth).

### **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

That a woman should not do anything, either in public or private, which belonged to a man as regarding his perceived function, was prohibited by Roman law.

Here is a direct translation of Roman law from the days of Paul:

"In our laws the condition of women is, in many respects, worse than that of men. Women are precluded from all public offices; therefore they cannot be judges,

nor execute the function of magistrates; they cannot sue, plead, nor act in any case, as proxies." They were under many other disabilities, which may be seen in different places of the law of that day.

Also, it is important to know that the reference to the issue of being silent speaks to the practice in Paul's day of it being lawful for men in public assemblies to ask questions, or even interrupt the speaker when there was any matter in his speech which they did not understand. However, this liberty was not granted to women.

### **BIBLICAL CONTEXT**

First, I would like you to look at the issue of praying or prophesying (inspired preaching). A look at 1 Corinthians 11:5 tells us that whatever may be the meaning of praying and prophesying, whatever it is to a man, it has precisely the same meaning in respect to a woman. Therefore women as well as men might speak to others for edification, and exhortation, and comfort. And this kind of prophesying or teaching was predicted by Joel 2:28, and referred to by Peter, Acts 2:17. In other words, if such gifts had not been bestowed on women, the prophecy could not have been fulfilled! The only difference marked by the apostle was that a man should have his head uncovered, because he was the representative of Christ and a woman should have hers covered, because she was placed by the order of God in a state of submission to the man, and because it was a custom, both among the Greeks and Romans, and among the Jews an express law, that no woman should be seen abroad without a veil. This was, and is, a common custom through the east, and none but public prostitutes go without veils. If a woman should appear in public without a veil, she would dishonor her head-her husband. She would appear like to a woman who had her hair shorn off as the punishment of prostitution, or adultery.

Regarding the issue of "keeping silent" in church, this was a Jewish ordinance; women were not permitted to teach in the assemblies, or even to ask questions. One Rabbi Eliezer said this, years ago: "Let the words of the law be burned, rather than that they should be delivered to/by women."

This was the condition of women! That is, this was their condition until the time of the Gospel when, according to the prediction of Joel, the Spirit of God was poured out on women as well as men, that they might prophesy, i.e. teach. And that they did prophesy or teach is evident from what the apostle says, as I have mentioned above, in 1 Cor 11:5, where he lays down rules to regulate this part of their conduct while ministering in the church.

But does not what the apostle says in 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Cor 14 contradict 1 Cor 11, and show that the words in 1 Cor 11 should be understood in another sense? It expressly says that they should keep silent in the church for it was not permitted for a woman to speak. No! Both places are perfectly consistent! It is evident from the context that the apostle refers here to asking questions, and what we call dictating in the assemblies. It was permitted for any man to ask questions, to object, altercate, attempt to refute, etc., in the synagogue; but this liberty was not allowed to any woman. Paul confirms this in reference also to the Christian church; he orders them to keep silent, and, if they wished to learn

anything, let them inquire of their husbands at home because it was perfectly rude and impolite for women to be contending with men in public assemblies, on points of doctrine, cases of conscience, etc. But this by no means intimated that when a woman received any particular influence (anointing or leading of the Spirit) from God to enable her to teach, that she was not to obey that influence; on the contrary, she was to obey it, and the apostle lays down directions in 1 Cor 11 for how to do it! All that the apostle opposes here is their questioning, finding fault, disputing, etc, in the Christian church, as the Jewish men were permitted to do in their synagogues. Remember, women received no education or training in these days of which we speak. In fact, an educated woman was considered flawed! But Jesus came and the Bible releases women- and if you are following what is being said, the command to teach women in the home is God stating, contrary to the rules of the day, that they should be taught and disciplined. The point being made is that the women, uneducated as they were, should learn, and their husbands had the responsibility to teach them. But this should not be done in the middle of a service, especially if the process would be prone to disagreements between them. What Paul was instructing was that a woman should live respecting her husband and should not publicly undermine him by correcting him and challenging his authority in the midst of the assembly (this is also true for men and how they treat their spouses, as we have read in the NT, e.g. Colossians 3:19).

**Now we are ready for a simple look into the context of 1 Timothy!**

Paul introduces the reason for the writing of the book: Timothy, you need to stay in Ephesus to instruct certain people (the word in the Greek is not masculine- it refers to people in general) to stop teaching strange doctrine. From what Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:7 and 1 Timothy 5:13 it becomes obvious that **the dangerous false doctrines being spread about in the Ephesian church were being spread by women!** On top of that, when Paul speaks of exercising “authority” over a man in 2:12, the term he uses is different than the one normally used in the Scriptures for authority. The word he uses only occurs once in the Bible and literally means “to dominate, take control, usurp” and in ancient times was used in connection with murdering others or oneself.

**The idea in 1 Timothy 2:11-15, therefore, is that Paul was speaking to women who claimed to be teachers but were in doctrinal error and who were attempting to dominate church meetings and usurp the authority of the spiritual leaders Paul had established there.**

In essence, this is how Paul might say what he is communicating in 1 Tim 2 today: “Enough! I am not going to allow undisciplined, untaught, know-it-all women filled with doctrinal error to teach in your church anymore, nor am I allowing them to overthrow or usurp the authority of the leaders I appointed to teach you.”