

“Quiet in the Church”

Scripture Readings: Judges 5:1-3 (text); I Timothy 2:8-14; Titus 2:1-5

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Dear congregation of Christ: Forty years ago, in 1976, the Episcopal Church USA allowed homosexuals to become members of the church. Then in 2003, this denomination ordained an openly gay bishop. Six years later, in 2009, the ECUSA officially recognized same-sex marriages. And last year, they officially rejected the doctrine of marriage as the union between *a man and a woman*.

When the ECUSA first ordained an openly gay bishop, Karen King, Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Harvard University's Divinity School, wrote,

As the Episcopal Church considers the ordination of an openly gay bishop and the blessing of same-sex marriages, it is worthwhile to remember some of the dynamics of sexual politics from the first centuries of Christianity. The earliest surviving documents of Christianity, the letters of Paul, already show that there were controversies over same-sex relations, marriage, and women's roles in leadership. The logic against same-sex relations, that they violated the hierarchical rule of men has remained in place. It's time to break that logic.

It is noteworthy that those who support the homosexual movement in the last 40-50 years tie this issue with the role of women in the church. But women leadership in the church goes back more than 50 years ago, probably when churches started sending unmarried women missionaries in the middle of the 19th century. At the beginning of the 20th century, women already outnumbered men in the foreign mission field. The most notable of these women was Pearl S. Buck, a Presbyterian missionary in China in 1914-32. But she became a strong modernist who rejected the doctrine of original sin, and taught that the virgin birth, the divinity, and the miracles of Christ were not necessary for Christianity. She also emphasized humanitarian efforts, which we call today as the “social gospel,” more than preaching the gospel.

Professor King also adds, “The Episcopal Church now needs to consider what the Spirit is saying about the goodness and justice of the ancient rationale against same-sex relations.” She pits the Spirit against the Holy Scripture. I'm sure that the spirit she's referring to is the evil spirit of the devil, since the Holy Spirit cannot contradict the clear teaching of Scripture about the sin of same-sex relations, and about the role of women in the church.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) is the prime example of this tie between the leadership roles of women in, and same-sex relationships blessed by the church. The church has sent unmarried women missionaries for over 150 years, and has ordained women deacons for 110 years, women elders for 85 years, and women pastors for 60 years.¹ In 2011, the church officially allowed the ordination of homosexual pastors, and last year, actually ordained a lesbian couple. What's next for these apostate denominations and churches? In this year's General Assembly, the PCUSA welcomed a Muslim to offer a prayer to Allah! Slip, slip, slippery slope.

¹ Rhashell Hunter, <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2016/5/24/pcusa-celebrates-60-years-womens-ordination/>, May 24, 2016.

We will not study what the Bible says about homosexuality today. But what does the Bible actually teach about the role of women in the church?

Our theme today is “**Quiet in the Church,**” under three headings: first, **What the Bible Doesn't Teach**; second, **What the Bible Does Teach**; and third, **What Does a Woman Do for the Church?**

What the Bible Doesn't Teach

Last Sunday, we studied the story of Deborah, the only woman judge in Israel, in Judges Chapter 4. In the following chapter, we read of a song sung by Deborah and Israel's general Barak after they defeated their Canaanite oppressors. The song opens with a call to worship the Lord, “*Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day: ‘That the leaders took the lead in Israel, that the people offered themselves willingly, bless the LORD!’*” (Jgs 5:1-2).² Although she was a woman judge, Deborah was praising God that the “leaders” of Israel led in battle. The noun “leaders” is masculine, so she was joyful that the men of Israel took the lead.

Our text in 1 Timothy 2:8-14 is often used by the feminist or women's “liberation” movement to ridicule the Bible. They accuse the Scripture – and churches faithful to it – of sexual discrimination. But is the Bible really biased against women?

Firstly, the Bible does not teach that women are inferior to men. In Scripture, many women are extolled, sometimes even more so than men, for their faith and wisdom. Deborah, as we have learned, was one of them. We can only mention a few of them here: Sarah, Abraham's wife; Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron; Rahab of Jericho; Ruth the Moabite woman; Hannah the mother of Samuel. And who can forget Esther, a Jewish woman who became a queen of Persia, and is praised because of her strength and wisdom? Wisdom, plus strength and industry are the virtues of a godly woman, wife and mother in Proverbs 31.

And in the New Testament, Jesus' ancestry includes four women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Mary. And we can mention only a few more: Mary the mother of Jesus, the Samaritan woman, Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus, Mary Magdalene, Lydia, and Priscilla. Many of the 120 disciples gathered in a house in Jerusalem on Pentecost Sunday were women (Acts 1:14). Paul greets and commends many women in his letters (Rom 16:1–16; Col 4:15; 2 Tim 1:5), some of them he calls his co-laborers in the gospel (Phl 4:3).

In fact, Christianity is the only religion where women are extolled for their godly virtues. Other religions are not so loving and gracious towards women. We know for a fact that women are oppressed in Islam. Jewish men were instructed to pray in the morning, “Blessed are you, Lord, our God, ruler of the universe who has not created me a woman.” And first century pagans would rather abort, give away, or let baby girls die.

What then does Paul mean when he instructs Timothy not to allow women to lead in the church, “*she is to remain quiet [or silent]*”? Note that the context of this instruction is in the church. In verses 9-10, Paul cautions women to dress modestly, respectfully, and not

² I didn't mention this in the sermon, since this would be too technical. But verse 2a, “*That the leaders took the lead in Israel,*” is difficult to translate. Some translate it as “*when the hair was let loose in Israel.*” What does this mean? Maybe the warriors made a vow to fight the Canaanites till they were victorious. The Nazirite vow, for example, includes the leaving the hair uncut (Num. 6:5, 18), so Samson and John the Baptist.

ostentatiously. Obviously, this applies to women's attire not only when they are in church, but also in public places. Then in verses 11-12, Paul says that women are to *"learn quietly with all submissiveness,"* and that they are not *"to teach or to exercise authority over a man."*

Is Paul teaching that women are to be absolutely silent in our worship services? That they cannot sing, recite the prayers and the creeds, and participate in responsive Scripture readings? When we lived in the SF Bay Area, we drove about half an hour to a Bible study in a Reformed church in Alameda. What we found out in that Bible study surprised us: women are not allowed even to ask questions! This is not what Paul was teaching. The context of women prohibited from preaching to the whole congregation, and teaching men in the church is also mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:34, *"As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission."*

Those who do not allow women to ask questions in a Bible study or Sunday school, cite the next verse (35), *"If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church."* But what if the husband cannot answer her questions, or worse, if he is an unbeliever? What about a single woman who does not have a husband or a father? We will answer these questions in the last point.

Secondly, Paul also teaches that men and women are both images of God, endowed with holiness, righteousness (Eph 4:24), and knowledge of God (Col 3:10). God places equal inherent value and dignity to both men and women. To stress this point, Paul says in Galatians 3:28 that believing men and women of all walks of life are of equal standing in God's sight, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). He is not teaching that both men and women can have equal roles in the church, but that all Christians are joined together as one body, the body of Christ.

Therefore, in our text and several others, the Bible does not teach two things: first, that women are inferior to men; second, that although men and women are equal in Christ before God, they have been appointed by God for different roles. What then does the Bible teach?

What the Bible Does Teach

The Bible is clear that only men are appointed by God as officebearers in his church. In both 1 Timothy 3:1-12 and Titus 1:5-9, where Paul lists their qualifications, he says that the elder or deacon must be the *"husband of one wife,"* and Paul uses the pronoun *"he."*

In 1 Timothy 2:8, Paul assigns men to lead the people in prayer in public worship. But what about prayer meetings in the church or in homes? We know that when the 120 disciples were gathered in prayer at the upper room, there were many women with them. And we will not be wrong to assume that some of those women also offered their prayers aloud.

Still, those who advocate the appointment of women pastors, elders and deacons argue that Paul's command to women to be silent in the church stems from several reasons. They say, first of all, that Paul is putting down women because of the patriarchal culture of the Jews. But we have seen that the Bible actually praises many women of faith.

The second argument is related to the first argument: that Paul's command applies only to his culture and time, the ancient first-century Graeco-Roman world, where women were not

treated well. His command is obsolete. But did they ever read the grounds for Paul's argument? We see this in verses 13-14, *"For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor."* Unlike today's egalitarian advocates, Paul doesn't go back just 2,000 years, but all the way back to creation, in the Garden of Eden. The command transcends all time and culture. God created men and women in his own image, but they will have different roles. Just as *"the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband"* (1 Cor 11:3). But already in those primeval days, Adam did not exercise his headship. He did not prohibit his wife from obeying Satan's temptation.

The resulting fall into sin damaged the roles ordained by God for men and women. Part of God's judgment against Adam and Eve is in Genesis 3:16, *"Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you"* (Gen 3:16). Is this desire by Eve sexual, as some think? No, this verse tells us of the consequences of the fall. First, instead of submitting to men's leadership, women will try to assume leadership over men. Second, instead of leading, guarding, and loving their wives, husbands will be domineering, even oppressing, over their wives. And this corruption of the God-ordained order of leadership in the home and in the church is now wreaking havoc in our culture. Women and even men are demanding equality in all aspects of life.

So, the ground for the prohibition against women pastors, elders and deacons were not just Paul's culture and time. Paul grounds his command on the order of creation –man first – , and the order of the fall – woman first. This is not putting down of women, but God's wisdom.

If this is so, what may women do for the church?

What May Women Do for the Church?

We already answered this question in part. To be silent in the church does not mean absolutely silent. In the corporate worship, men and women in the congregation are equal in participating in singing, praying with the pastor, and in reciting Scriptures, creeds and prayers together. In prayer meetings, women may offer their own prayers. In Bible studies, they may ask questions or offer comments. What about women with unbelieving husbands or husbands who are not knowledgeable about the Bible? Who do they ask? They may ask other women, or better, they may ask the pastor or elders, as can be seen in a few passages.

In Acts Chapter 18, there is a story that has a bearing on our subject. A Jew named Apollos, *"competent in Scriptures... fervent in spirit... taught accurately the things concerning Jesus"* in the synagogue in Ephesus. Though he had great knowledge, a couple named Priscilla and Aquila *"took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately"* (Acts 18:24-26). This means that the couple explained the deeper things about God and Jesus in private, not in a public worship in the synagogue. So both men and women – note that Priscilla is mentioned first – may teach one another in private, informal settings, such as a group Bible study. They did not violate Paul's prohibition against women teaching men.

In the story of young Timothy, Paul commends him for his sincere faith. Who taught him this faith? His grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice, not his father (1 Tim 1:5). And finally, in Titus 2:3-8, Paul has instructions for older women: *"Older women... are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children."* What happens if they did not perform this duty? The Word of God will be reviled, because the young women in the church

will not be “*self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive.*” And the young men will not be “*self-controlled.. a model of good works,*” and will not “*show integrity, dignity, and sound speech.*” So also with the young men who are not instructed by the older men and women.

Dear friends, the Bible is clear. Only men are to be appointed as pastors, elders and deacons. But where are you, men? You are to lead your household and the church in spiritual matters.

Why is it that women show more spiritual maturity and are more active in attending worship services, Sunday schools, and Bible studies? They are more engaged in day-to-day tasks in the church. We learned last Sunday that God appointed Deborah, a woman, as a judge in Israel, because the men were negligent of their duties.

How are we going to address this situation? Men are to be fit to assume this leadership role by studying and meditating on God's Word; by showing yourself to your family, church and neighbors as “*sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness*”; and if the Spirit so moves you, by aspiring to the most noble task of being an officebearer.

If you do desire this noble task, Paul says that you are one of Christ's gifts to the church. In Ephesians 4:8-14, when Christ ascended into heaven, “*he gave gifts to men.*” What are these gifts? These are “*the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers.*” After the apostles, prophets and evangelists have laid the foundation of the church, the building up of the body of Christ is now in the hands of God-appointed pastors, including elders and deacons.

So to the elders and deacons, do you realize that you are Christ's good gifts to the church? Can you honestly say to yourself that you are modeling the virtues and qualifications of your noble offices to the congregation? Especially in attendance and punctuality in worship services, Sunday schools, and Bible studies? May the Lord help all the officebearers, and the men and women in our church to fulfill their God-appointed responsibilities.