

WOMEN IN CORINTH

These verses are only a piece of a jigsaw puzzle, the others being other Biblical accounts regarding women as instruments in the plan of salvation. Viewing only one piece does not enable us to see the total picture. On the day of Pentecost Peter explained the events of that day by quoting a prophecy foretelling a work to be done by both men and women, "your sons and your daughters will prophesy" (Acts 2:17-18; Joel 2:28-29). Since "to prophesy" means "to preach," then, in order for that to occur, a person must speak. Further, it was the Holy Spirit that gave them utterance. Prior to that day, Scripture also gives accounts of women judges and prophetesses (Exodus 15:20; 2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chronicles 34:22; Nehemiah 6:14; Isaiah 8:3)

With this in mind, these instructions by Paul seem inconsistent, unless we understand them as being part of the dictates of the Corinthian society. Paul states that women "are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law." However, Divine laws do not ban women from speaking, but do mandate that all be obedient. Hence the law to not speak was a local law and it was women's obedience to the Lord's ordinances that enabled them to submit to the precepts at Corinth. However, for us, given that we understand that women held positions of leadership in Israel and prophecy foretells of them receiving God's Spirit to share the message of salvation, we identify Paul's instructions as a local requirement that

should by no means prevail for us. It would make no sense and would contradict light which we will discuss now.

In other of his writings Paul presents that the duty of slaves (bondservants) is to obey their master (Colossians 3:22). Does that mean that forever and ever there should always be slaves? Paul also declares the duty of men is to pray everywhere lifting their hands. (1 Timothy 2:8) How long has it been since you saw a man with lifted hands *all the time*? Does it mean men's prayers are of no avail, not valid because their hands are not lifted? Does that make any sense? Should we incorporate into our culture all of Paul's instructions for circumstances that were traditions? No. We must grasp the difference between God's will and man's culture of other times and places. Does it seem fair to stubbornly continue burdening women, yet we do not burden society imposing slavery or burden men demanding they continually lift their hands?

Paul comments in another of his epistles about "women who labored with me in the Gospel... whose names are in the Book of Life" (Philippians 4:3). Labored with him in the Gospel? How? Not speaking? "I will pour out my spirit... and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (Joel 2:28). Even God's angel at the tomb of Jesus committed to the women the responsibility of announcing the message of His resurrection, even to the other disciples of the Lord (Matthew 28:1-7). And then, as the women started on their way to do just that, Jesus Himself appeared to them, confirmed the instructions of the angel by commanding the women to give to the rest of His disciples the news about His resurrection, and to also tell them to wait for Him in Galilee (vs. 8-10).

Jesus could have very easily appeared directly to the disciples, but His command to the women confirms that there was no hidden agenda regarding them. In fact, at the cross Jesus first addressed His mother, then John the apostle. We learn in the rules of etiquette, that when we introduce two persons, the one of lesser rank is the one that should be introduced to the other person. An easy way to remember how to do that

is to first address by name the person of greater standing or seniority, or position of wisdom or importance. (For example, "Mr. President, this is my neighbor." "Grandma, this is my boss.") When Jesus at the cross said, "Woman, behold thy son" and then addressed John, "behold thy mother" (John 19:26-27), He validated her dignity and His utter respect for women in general. In excruciating pain, nailed to a cross, Jesus magnified the Commandment, "Honor thy father and thy mother" (Exodus 20:12) by honoring her thus and making provisions for her well-being. Yet many, both males and females, are so into degrading women that they forget they have a mother whom they are indirectly dishonoring.

Further because women's status in the society of Jesus' time, it would have been more appropriate for a man to convey any news at all, his account of the events having more credence. Yet, by having women carry the news also serves to confirm that the resurrection of Jesus *is not* a fabricated hoax. That is because people who deceive try too hard to accommodate their presentation of lies as close to what is acceptable as possible. But by Jesus clearly directing women, and the writers giving an exact account of it, it served as further proof that there was nothing to hide. Hence this is yet an additional surety for us that the resurrection of Christ *is a fact* just as stated.

What, then, happened to Paul in Corinth regarding women? Women were good enough for God to have as judges and prophetesses, they were good enough for the angel at the tomb, and they were good enough for Jesus and those who wrote about His resurrection, but, apparently, they were not good enough for Paul. Did Paul turn wishy washy on us? Did he not have women labor with him in the Gospel? What is the Gospel? The Good News of a resurrected Savior which message women were the first to give; and fifty days later the Holy Spirit poured like refreshing rain on them also so they would continue in full force. It does not make sense that Paul would have women labor with him and then turn himself around when dealing with the church at Corinth. How do you explain that?

Another issue sheds light on Paul's actions. He *ordained* in all the churches *not* to circumcise anyone called while uncircumcised, but that he should remain uncircumcised (1 Corinthians 7:17-20). In Christ, Paul said, all are the same, there is no Jew or Gentile (Galatians 3:28). However, when Paul met Timothy, who was already a disciple, but uncircumcised, Paul wanted Timothy to go on with him, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region (Acts 16:1-3). Contradiction? No. Paul ordained one way and then, at some point, acted contrary to his pronounced decree and conviction in order to not make waves in that specific region. In essence, neither being circumcised or uncircumcised was a sin. It was merely a painful inconvenience for the men.

Likewise, Paul demonstrated his conviction that women should labor in the Gospel by having them work alongside of him. In Christ, Paul said, all are the same, there is no male or female (Galatians 3:28). Therefore, his statement at Corinth regarding women came as a result of a regional formality which was not of God's designation. In essence, neither speaking or not speaking was a sin. But since Corinth was a spiritually shaky region, Paul, as with the circumcision, esteemed it best to let the custom prevail in *that* church. He was not about to make any waves concerning it. He was making enough waves already with the tongues issue.

However, in no way did Paul, through these two issues, leave the example that when under pressure we may act against our own convictions, and that is not what I am saying here. We are called to glorify God and we do that obeying Him above obeying man (Acts 4:19). But here Paul had the option of going either way and chose the route which brought no confrontation. Thus we observe that women were also good enough for Paul. In fact, we have him to thank for repeatedly condemning adultery and emphasizing that man is to be the husband of only one wife (1 Corinthians 5:1; Galatians 5:19; 1 Timothy 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6). What a burden has been lifted for us ladies by Paul's words to that

effect! They ushered in a healing process from the dictates that society had imposed upon the sacredness of marriage. Don't you love Paul? I do.

Unfortunately, "the law of the pendulum" sometimes may occur. Let me explain. When there is a way of life that needs to be addressed, at times some may go to the other extreme of their previous position, like a pendulum that is held to one side and when released will swing past the center. Likewise, since woman as "helper" for her man (one man, her husband) was turned by society into a "servant" of any and all men, then, upon correcting this, there may originate the problem of the pendulum swinging far onto the other side. Yet that imbalance does not mean the birth of a restoration for society was a mistake, for Jesus paved the way. It is a sin that eclipses reason, and we should not allow ourselves to partake in the distortions of God's intentions by placing ourselves at either extreme.

We know that our sons, whatever age they may be, are to respect and honor their mother. Many of them, past the age when they become emancipated, out of love remain submissive to her. Before that age, however, they must be submissive as she has rights over them by being their protector, nurturer, mentor, defender and guide when they are toddlers or adolescents or are in early adulthood. But that does not mean that every single adult in the whole world has rights over her sons at all times, for only she does, given that she is the one that loves them best, safeguards them and fulfills their needs. All others would end up abusing them. I recall one day my boy came back home from the store very saddened. He had put a coin into a gum ball machine, but nothing came out of it. He asked the owner to please return the coin to him and the man told him to talk to the machine. I called him on the telephone and very calmly said, "Sir, do you realize that boy has a mother? My son will be there shortly." The man returned the money. It should have been a matter of common sense for him: Do not take advantage of a lion cub seemingly stranded.

In like manner, the submissiveness of *one* wife to *her* husband does not mean that every living male in the planet has any rights at all to rule over that one woman. Yet that is what has happened in many societies, and the world, deceived into having that right, uses it to trample over her spirit. Thus humanity has taken advantage of women's demeanor of mercy and has pushed many of them to the point of unbearable oppression and abuse. My husband, who spent a year in an African country, tells me he saw how some women there were burdened like animals. He recalls a man who had eight wives and they would work for him carrying heavy cases of beer on their head. The man guided them on the road using a stick as if they were a herd, keeping them in single file. They bore the title "wife" as a deceit, for in essence they were slaves.

In our society, some men, instead of using their position of justice to protect their wife--who is their physically weaker self--just as a mother protects her child of tender age, they are the ones who victimize her. And some women, who should reserve their endowment of mercy for those times when the family needs healing and nurturing because it is hurting due to intrusion, instead diverge their compassion by accepting and excusing whatever cruelty their husbands decide to inflict upon them and the family. Both behaviors are distortions of God's justice and mercy which each respectively represents and which united should reflect God's love. Thus Jesus, in the process of redeeming humankind from the oppression of sin, opened the way for all of us, including women, to commence to be free from the burdens we carry, whether self-inflicted or brought upon us by the dictates of society. Jesus came to free everyone from all tyranny imposed upon them, and Paul helped facilitate and advance God's work in that respect on behalf of women in particular by plainly addressing the duties of a husband, steering man to also be submissive in that he is to submit his love to only one woman. A wise woman gladly submits to such a man (Ephesians 5:25-33).

This subject is so touchy that to this day there is strife concerning it. A brother from church told me he loves to mock his wife demanding of her,

“You have to be obedient to me because the Bible says so!” And thereupon he cracked up laughing. “I tell her all the time to bother her and keep making fun of her until finally she gets sooooo mad. That’s when I get a real kick out of it.” Ha, ha, ha some more from him. He was right in that Scripture states a woman is to obey her husband. But it also says that the husband is to love his wife. There are duties on both sides, like a contract. Yet in a contract, if one party fails to meet their end of the deal, the other party is free to not be bound by it. Jesus does not make fun of us, nor demands our obedience by force, but plainly just loves us and satisfies our needs; and we respond by obeying Him. However, a husband who demands obedience yet mistreats his wife, stirring her spirit to the point of robbing her of peace and joy, demonstrates by his behavior that he does not love her like Jesus loves the church. In essence, on the one hand he forfeits his rights and on the other he demands them. Contradiction is a giveaway characteristic of the old serpent.

Controversy regarding women exists to this day, in greater or lesser degree, in many regions. Sometimes more than others it is made manifest that the serpent’s enmity for women since the beginning (Genesis 3:15) is alive and well. Discrimination, oppression, dishonor, debasement, degradation, offense, prejudice, despotism, tyranny, enslavement, use and abuse, insult, assault, battery, rape, dehumanization, humiliation, injustice, injury and all manner of wrong, including female circumcision, infidelity, abandonment, and rejection of her children, and the latter sometimes even by the very man who fathered them, Satan has lashed against women in particular.

Amazingly, many men, like Paul, find women good enough to work in the Gospel, while many women discriminate against themselves. The latter is more difficult to comprehend. But just as Gentiles were not to be troubled regarding the circumcision, just as we do not trouble men to lift their hands everywhere in prayer, and just as we are not to trouble society by imposing the reestablishment of slavery, so also we should not trouble women who are moved by the Holy Spirit to help in the finishing of the

work. Burdening them so is a disservice to the Gospel, dishonors the command of resurrected Jesus to women to give the Good News, and perpetuates the hatred of the old serpent as if we were its little clones.

Should the helper be banned from helping in the eve of such a great need for laborers? Have not women, in many churches, always comprised the greater number of members, their monetary support even keeping it going, while they have not boasted about it or demanded any type of special recognition for it? Does not that fact alone in and of itself testify that their spirit is not into self glory? Have not the greatest number of converts in many churches come to the foot of the cross by the influence of a woman? If such has been the case when women have been laboring in the background, with the least of opportunities, does it not give a glimpse of how it would be when we finally acknowledge that the Holy Spirit can do with women whatever He wants? When will we accept the fact that God's Spirit is the One in control and that women are merely His instruments to use if and when He wants, the way He wants, and that we should not deter His purpose? Can we stop those women if their work is appointed of God? Of course not. And if it is, are we going to confront the Holy Spirit and fight against God Himself? (Acts 5:34-39). I am not referring here to any particular issue regarding women, save them preaching the Gospel. "When a great and decisive work is to be done, God chooses men and women to do this work, and it will feel the loss if the talents of both are not combined" (Evangelism, p. 469)

Spiritual sovereignty, as conveyed in chapter 2 herein, diminished gradually from Eden to Jesus, and then it reverted. Now, at the culmination of its full reversal, women in droves are answering God's call to ministry. Yet their full potential, when not ambushed, barricaded, or maimed, is at best tolerated with disdain as they are ushered to the rear of the Gospel bus. Hence the Lord's work is thus also blatantly mutilated.

As we shall see in the last chapter, the world will experience another Pentecost and it is going to be BIG. In the first one, women preached. In the second one, the same will occur no matter how much we try to

convince ourselves otherwise and even though we may resent seeing the engines warming up all around us getting ready for the grand finale as more and more women are convicted to enter the ministry. "Upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit" (Joel 2:29; see also Acts 2:19), and "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (Joel 2:28; see also Acts 2:18).

Please do not apply the old instruction of Paul to the Corinthians to block the Lord's work by those ladies who obviously give evidence that the Holy Spirit is guiding and using them as He moves them to work as preachers in God's vineyard. The entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 14 calls for banning from speaking in church those who should not speak: Women because of the custom at Corinth, and those with tongues not understood because of logical reasons. A contrast should be perceived. If it was improper for women to speak in church, then it would have been even more improper for any person to speak at all in church when his language could not be understood.