

A Precious Woman

1 Cor 14:33-35

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. When Robert Ingersoll, the notorious skeptic, was in his heyday, two college students went to hear him lecture.
1. As they walked down the street after the lecture, one said to the other, "Well, I guess he knocked the props out from under Christianity, didn't he?"
 2. The other said, "No, I don't think he did. Ingersoll did not explain my mother's life, and until he can explain my mother's life I will stand by my mother's God."
- B. Is there a man here this morning who has not been greatly influenced by his mother?
1. Abraham Lincoln said, "No man is poor who has had a godly mother."
 2. My godly mother has greatly influenced who I am, and I have no doubt whatsoever that many of you brothers would say the same thing.
- C. Yet, it is not just mothers who have had an influence on us guys, but our wives have greatly impacted who we are.
1. I know without any doubt that I would not be the man I am today were it not for my godly wife. So many times Tammy has been patient with me, counseled me, and guided me.
 2. Is it any wonder that King Lemuel's mother taught him these words: "An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels" (Prov 31:10).
 - a. When I was growing up, my dad had one pet name for Mom that he placed on every card and every gift tag he ever gave her. That name? Simply: "Precious."
 - Dad has always treated my mother as precious & taught me to treat women similarly.
 - Shortly after Valentine's Day this year, he sent me an e-mail that read: "I surprised your mother by taking her to the Mansion at Griffin Gate! Of course, it cost me an arm and a leg (almost literally!), but it was worth it. I had made a promise when you were just a baby, that someday I would take her there. I remember when they opened. I was working at Coke and would pass that place every day. I someday wanted to treat your mom like the Queen she is to me."
 - He concluded with an admonition only a father could give: "Don't forget you won't always have your wife and treat her like a queen because she is!"
 - b. As a kid, I thought Dad was crazy for calling Mom "Precious," but that was before I was married. That was before I read from Scripture.
 - c. In this text, Paul places the name "Precious" on specific women. He says that "A Precious Woman" is A SETTLED WOMAN, A SILENT WOMAN, A SUBMISSIVE WOMAN, A SCRIPTURAL WOMAN, & A STUDIOUS WOMAN.

II. A SETTLED WOMAN, v 33b.

- A. "As in all the churches of the saints."
1. Different translations place this phrase in different places—either as the conclusion of the preceding paragraph or as the first phrase of this new paragraph.
 2. In Paul's day, there was no punctuation of any kind in Gr, so all punctuation is the work of editors.
 3. But, honestly, I'm not sure it makes any difference as to what paragraph contains these words.
 - a. The words "as in all the churches of the saints" really apply to this entire passage.
 - b. I affirm that because:
 - Paul declares that the Corinthians need to worship in peace, not confusion, because God is a God of peace, not confusion. God's character doesn't change from one congregation to another.
 - Paul also declares that what he writes is a command of the Lord. The command of the Lord doesn't change from one congregation to another.
 4. Thus, what Paul writes about the role of women applied not just in Corinth but in all the congregations of God's people.

- B. Here's what we need to grasp: What Paul writes here is a settled principle. Thus, precious women are settled women, i.e., they acknowledge this settled principle & do not meddle with it.
1. Many of our religious friends hold that what Paul writes here in 1 Cor 14 is not a timeless principle.
 - a. Paul was writing to correct abuses of spiritual gifts in Corinth & so what he says applies only to that narrow context.
 - b. The reasoning goes: Since spiritual gifts are not available today, these prohibitions on female leadership do not apply.
 2. Yet, Paul makes clear in 1 Cor 14 that female submission is a rule "in all the churches of the saints."
 - a. The principle of male leadership & female submission in the church and home are as old as man himself.
 - "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Tm 2:12-14).
 - In 1 Tm 2, Paul doesn't tie the prohibition on female leadership to any social norms, but he ties that prohibition back to the order of Creation & the order of the Fall.
 - b. Do we have precious, "SETTLED WOMEN" here in this congregation, women who understand the role God has given them has been settled once & for all?

III. A SILENT WOMAN, vv 34-35.

- A. "The women should keep silent in the church. For they are not permitted to speak. . . . It is shameful for a woman to speak in church."
- B. What does it mean for women to keep silent in the church?
1. Are women permitted to sing? What if there is a song that has a soprano or alto lead where the men keep silent?
 2. Are women permitted to confess their faith in the assembly? If a woman came forward to confess sin, should she be permitted to confess her sin?
 3. If a woman has a child that is misbehaving, may the mother correct the child during a church service?
 4. May a woman mention something during the announcements? Are women permitted to speak up in Bible class?
- C. I ask those questions, for Paul speaks both specifically & pointedly in this passage.
1. The term for "silent" means to utter not a sound.
 - a. This term is used in Lk 9:36 to describe Peter, James, and John's reaction to the Transfiguration: "They kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen." These three apostles said absolutely nothing to anyone about the Transfiguration—they were utterly silent.
 - b. The term is also used in Lk 18:39 to speak of the crowd's reaction to a blind beggar asking Jesus for mercy: "Those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'"
 - c. I do not wish to be offensive in the least, but this Gr term really carries the connotation that "Shut up!" has in our own day.
 2. Paul also says that women are not permitted to speak. The word "speak" means to open your mouth and utter a sound. Paul says women aren't to do that.
 3. If we simply look at the definition of these words, women cannot sing, they cannot confess faith in Jesus, they cannot confess sin, they cannot correct a misbehaving child, and they cannot say anything during the announcements.
- D. Yet, remember that I said Paul not only spoke pointedly—as we just noted—but that he also spoke specifically.
1. It is a mistake to take words at face value in any language—whether that language be English or Greek.
 - a. Context determines a word's meaning far more than a dictionary.
 - Take the word "R-E-A-D."
 - Because the term can be pronounced & used with two different connotations, you have to check the context.
 - b. So it is with the words we are studying this morning.
 2. Lest there be confusion about what Paul means by these words, let's notice the context quite carefully.
 - a. These same prohibitions are also applied to tongue speakers: "If there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God" (v 28).

- The tongue speakers did not have to keep total silence in the assembly—they weren't permitted to speak in tongues.
- They could sing, they could pray, they could even teach, provided that they weren't speaking in tongues without an interpreter.
- b. It becomes abundantly clear what Paul means by "speak" & "keep silent" as we read vv 29-31: "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and be encouraged."
 - Paul in regulating prophecy envisions one person speaking while the rest remain silent: he says that the prophets should prophesy one by one.
 - Speaking thus involves standing and addressing the entire congregation with authority.
 - Notice that Paul refers to the other prophets who are sitting—implying that the one doing the speaking is standing.
 - The prophets were to speak one at a time—so that everyone in the congregation could hear them.
- c. In this specific context, "speak" is basically a synonym for "teach." It is speaking to the congregation in an authoritative manner.
 - The prophets spoke in the assembly by giving the Word of God while everyone else listened. The tongue speakers spoke in the assembly by giving the Word of God in a manner that required someone else to interpret.
 - The Spirit of God here does not prevent women from making a sound in the assembly; he prevents from them from teaching. Women may speak in the assembly provided that they do not teach.
- d. May we always have precious, SILENT WOMEN in this congregation!

IV. A SUBMISSIVE WOMAN, v 34.

- A. "They are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission."
 1. We typically think of submission in quite negative terms, but submission has no negative overtones.
 - a. Jesus Christ himself submitted to his parents: "He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them" (Lk 2:51).
 - b. If the Creator of the Universe was submissive, how can submissiveness be demeaning?
 2. Interestingly, this text, unlike others, does not tell women to submit to men but simply to submit.
 - a. Paul likely intends us to get that from the context, for, as we'll see in a moment, in the Law, women were submissive to men.
 - b. Yet, Paul could have something larger in view here: Women submit to the Word of God.
 - The speaking Paul envisions in the previous chapter all has to do with a revelation from God—whether it be a tongue, or an interpretation, or a prophecy.
 - Therefore, as women were silent they would hear the Word of God, and they would therefore submit to that Word.
 3. Paul writes that his words here are the Lord's words: "If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord" (1 Cor 14:37).
- B. Here's an important point: No precious woman ever submits—in the home or in the assembly—to a man; she submits to God.
 1. When a precious woman honors her husband, she doesn't do it because her husband says so, but because God says so.
 2. When a precious woman remains silent in the assembly, she doesn't do it because the elders say so, but because God says so.
- C. Do we have precious, SUBMISSIVE WOMEN in this congregation?

V. A SCRIPTURAL WOMAN, v 34c.

- A. "They are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says."
- B. There is no passage in the Law that requires women to be in submission to men.
 1. Paul likely alludes to Genesis 3:16 where God places the curse on the woman: "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

2. It could also be that Paul alludes back to Genesis 2 where woman is made from and for man.
3. Some also suggest that Paul may have in mind that Israelite leaders were male.
- C. It doesn't matter specifically what Paul references when he refers to the words of the Law, for the principle runs throughout the OT.
- D. There are two truths we need to grasp from this reference:
 1. The principle of male spiritual leadership is not at all a new principle.
 - a. The truth is as old as man himself; remember what we said about 1 Tm 2: Paul ties this prohibition back to the Creation & the Fall.
 - b. Just as this truth is old, so is the controversy. In the 19th century Restoration Movement, there were many questions about the submission of women:
 - In 1886, the *American Christian Review*, a restoration paper, noted that for years this issue appeared in its columns "often as once a month, if not more frequently."
 - In 1894, David Lipscomb, publisher of the *Gospel Advocate*, complained that his office had recently received "not less than twenty queries on the subject of women preaching in public." However, Lipscomb refused to answer these queries, because he had recently addressed the subject.
 2. But, the second truth we need to learn from Paul's reference is that this truth is Scripture.
 - a. If I am to be faithful to the truth of God, I cannot determine what role I will give women in the assembly or in the home. God has spoken. The issue is settled.
 - b. Tammy had a co-worker at the library whose husband is a "pastor" at a denominational church.
 - Linda would often say things to Tammy like, "Our denomination has long allowed women to preach. You can't do anything in the church."
 - Linda failed to grasp that (1) women can do much in the church; and (2) that no church has a right to set aside the Will of God.
 - c. Scripture cannot be set aside.
 - Jesus says, "Scripture cannot be broken" (Jn 10:35).
 - "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever" (1 Pt 1:24-25).
 3. Do we have precious women in this congregation—women committed to following the Word of God?

VI. A STUDIOUS WOMAN, v 35.

- A. "If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home."
- B. Before we talk about what Paul really means here—let's address a common question from this passage.
 1. What if a woman isn't married? The text says, "Let them ask their husbands at home." What is a young woman who isn't married or a widowed woman to do?
 2. Gr does not have separate words for husband & man; the same word is used whether you are speaking of a single or married man.
 - a. Context has to determine the meaning; here the context doesn't really indicate which Paul means.
 - b. We could translate this as "Let them ask their own men at home." Therefore, a young, unmarried girl could seek counsel from her father, & a widowed woman could seek counsel from a son or son-in-law or brother or some other relative.
- C. Women might desire to learn something.
 1. In Paul's day that was an amazing statement.
 - a. Women were largely considered too stupid to learn.
 - b. In fact, one Jewish rabbi said, "Let the words of the Law be burned rather than committed to a woman."
 2. Paul elevates women and envisions that they would want to learn.
 3. Do we have women today who want to learn?
 - a. Precious women have always desired to learn:
 - When Jesus was first resurrected, he appeared to Mary Magdalene. She didn't recognize Jesus at first, but when the Lord revealed his identity, we read, "She turned and said to him in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means Teacher)" (Jn 20:16)—Mary recognizes Jesus as her "Teacher."
 - When Paul was in Philippi, the apostle spoke to a group of women and we read: "One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple good, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul" (Acts 16:14).

- b. Sisters, do you desire to learn?
 - Do you spend regular time in Scripture, asking for guidance when there's something you fail to understand?
 - Do you attend Bible study to learn more of the Word of God?
- D. Yet, Paul says that if women desire to learn anything, they need to ask their husbands at home.
 - 1. Does that make it wrong for a woman to speak up in Bible class? I've heard many times that it does.
 - 2. That understanding overlooks the context in which Paul writes.
 - a. Not far from Corinth was the Oracle of Delphi.
 - At that temple, a woman priestess called Pythia. She prophesied for Apollo.
 - People would come and ask the Pythia questions, often very personal and irrelevant questions.
 - b. Being that many of the Corinthians were former pagans and the worship of Apollo was important in Corinth, the Corinthians likely understood prophesy in their assemblies to be like the prophesying at Delphi.
 - The women may have been interrupting the service to ask inappropriate and irrelevant questions for the assembly: "How many children am I going to have? How long am I going to live? Should my husband become involved in this business adventure?"
 - Paul says, "No, that's out of place in the assembly. That's not decently & orderly."
 - c. Thus, the cultural context has to do with women asking questions in the worship assembly, not the Bible class, and interrupting the speaker to receive a personal answer from God.
- E. But, the principle of a woman's desiring to learn still stands. Are you a precious, studious woman? Are you a woman who is seeking to know how God desires you to live? Do you need to come & become a studious woman or a studious man?