

“Submit Is Not A Bad Word”

1 Tim. 2:1-15

Last week, I had mentioned in my opening greeting that struggling with, wrestling with the Word of God is a good thing. Not every passage of Scripture is clearly and neatly understandable as it sits on its own – especially in the English language. In regard to the passages of Scripture that we really don't want to talk about because they make us uncomfortable, 1 Timothy 2, on a scale of 1 to 10 is turned up to an 11.

There are two statements that cause all the stir. They should be taken together and they must be understood in context. Paul says, “Let a woman learn quietly and in submissiveness” and “she will be saved through childbearing.” Remember that this is the Word of God, so the operative question is “How can I understand that this is right? That this is correct? Where is the good in this text? That this is, as it is stated, the will of God?”

If you enter into your struggle and wrestling with the text thinking that Paul must be wrong because I don't know anyone who would say this today, then you are placing your faith within the philosophy of the day rather than the Word of God. That is a dangerous way to study the Bible.

So how can we understand Paul's words to be correct? Where is the good? Let's look at the words. Verses 8-15 is part of an ongoing conversation about the roles of men and women in the church and in society. Paul writes about this extensively in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians.

It is an important topic, because, you may have noticed, there are a lot of men and women within the church. So, if you are a man or woman, these words apply.

When it says, “Let a woman learn quietly,” that word is the same as a few verses earlier when Paul urged everyone to pray that we may lead a peaceful and “quiet” life, godly and dignified in every way. Paul desires for learning to happen without chaos and discord breaking in against us. There is an ancient Chinese curse which says, “May you live in interesting days.” It is a curse. A peaceful and quiet life is a blessing.

To submit is to willingly, and I stress willingly (this is not being under the thumb of a tyrant); willingly place yourself under the authority of someone else – to not demand that you are first. And remember that the first shall be last. Being first isn’t all that it is cracked up to be. And Jesus does not merely suggest that this is a good thing for you women, He lives it.

We need to read Paul’s words from 1 Cor. 11, “I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.” The head of Christ is God. Christ has willingly submitted to the authority of the Father. He says, “There is nothing I have that I have not received from Him.”

But isn’t Jesus equal to the Father, of one substance with the Father, as we confess? Yes He is. They are equal, but they are different. And they have different vocations, different functions within the relationship of the Trinity.

The head of a woman is her man (that is what the Greek literally says), just as the head of Christ is the Father. Anyone who says that,

by nature, a woman who submits is inferior to a man must also say that, by nature, Christ who submits is inferior to the Father. No Christian could say that. Read Philippians chapter 2, Paul certainly does not say that. If Christ claimed equality with God, it would not be robbery, Paul says.

But Jesus, though equal to the Father, made Himself to be nothing, became a servant to all, took on human flesh, suffered and died, so that all of the Father's children could live. And because of this, the Father has exalted His name above every name, so that at the name of Jesus Christ every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord – to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus is the Messiah. He submits to the authority of the Father; He does the work, the vocation of the Messiah – it was not the Father's vocation to die on the cross. They have different tasks, different authority, but are equal.

It is important to understand the proper role of authority. When you are given authority, it is not for your benefit. It is for the benefit of those who are under your authority. The police are to protect and to serve. It says so on their cars. And they put themselves in harm's way to protect those under their authority. A judge is entrusted with the authority to ensure justice for the sake of the victims and for the general welfare of society. And he has been given authority to do so.

With the authority that I have as a husband and father, it is my job to die, if that is what it takes to ensure the safety of my wife and children. In Ephesians 5, Paul says, "Husbands, love your wife as Christ loved His bride the Church." For the church to live, Jesus had to die. It was part of

His vocation. As part of my vocation, if I have to put myself in harm's way and risk my life so that my wife and children may live peaceful and quiet lives, that is what I must do. God has placed the burden of authority on men. It is our vocation. It is our burden.

So Paul says, "she will be saved through childbearing." I told someone what I was preaching on this week. She said, "I've been saved three times." That is not what Paul is saying. This is about functioning within the vocation that God has given you. This is written to a culture where basically every young woman gets married by their mid-teens – which is why the word for woman and wife is the same.

The vocation of wife under the authority of a protecting husband, and the two of them working together in this way is pleasing to God. God says, "It is not good for man to be alone." He also says, "Be fruitful and multiply." Childbearing is the vocation of womanhood in its full blossom. Obviously, not every wife is blessed in that way. But the point Paul is making is that women fulfilling their vocation as the helper we men so desperately need, when done in faith, love, and holiness, it is pleasing to God as a thankful response to the grace you have received, and you receive the further blessing of a peaceful and quiet life.

Isn't it ironic that the grace you have received has come through the Son of God submitting to His Father, not placing Himself first, and being born of a woman. Amen.