

Does the Word of God Forbid Women From Holding Any Position of Authority Over Men?

During this political year in which the people of the United States of America have the blessing of being able to select the individual of their choice to lead our nation for the next four years, I have been asked to address the issue of whether or not the word of God forbids women from holding any positions of authority over a man. It is obvious why this question would come up now because we have witnessed seeing a woman, Senator Hillary Clinton, almost become the first woman to be selected as her party's nomination for President. Additionally, we now have on the Republican side Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska selected to be the running mate as Vice President with Senator John McCain. In a nutshell, I have seen many individuals, predominantly women, too, who are of the opinion that women are never to hold positions of authority over men, period. These individuals turn to 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 11:3 as the basis or foundation for their beliefs. Here is what these two passages say:

“But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness.” (1 Timothy 2:12)

“But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.” (1 Corinthians 11:3)

But the fact of the matter is that this question of women being forbidden by the Bible from holding any position over authority over men is very selective in its application. It somehow only arises when it comes to matters of elected public officials. If it was true across the board that women were absolutely forbidden by God from having any positions of authority over any man at any time then the majority of men would be forced to resign their position of employment immediately since the majority of men in the work force have a woman over them somewhere along the rungs of the corporate ladder. Most Human Resources departments in companies are staffed and ran by women, which means that most men would not even be able to apply for work because the woman taking your application holds authority over you as a man. The person making the decision to pass along your resume and application also would most likely be a woman, which means that once again a woman was in a place of authority over a man.

And to take this view to its logical conclusion, then, no man could ever be convicted of committing a crime against any woman, ever. First of all, a woman denying a man whatever it is he desires, whether it is her body or her property, would be holding and usurping authority over him. If she called the police we better hope it would be a male police officer to respond for a woman police officer would hold authority over a man. We then better hope that the

prosecutor is a man and not a woman for the woman DA would hold authority over the man. We better pray that no woman is on the jury for they would hold authority over the man. We then cannot have a woman as a judge for she would be holding authority over the man. We then could not have the woman who was the victim of the crime to begin with testify against the man for she would hold authority over the man. If the state cannot have a witness to testify against the man, the man is free to go and commit more crimes against more women, for their denying him is holding authority over a man. So I hope you can begin to see that interpreting the passages of 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 11:3 as across the board prohibitions against women having authority over a man at any time is not even practical, let alone a Scriptural, interpretation of their meaning. Remember, the first rule when engaging in Bible study is to study it properly in its context. And when one applies a proper context to what is being discussed in 1 Corinthians 11 and in 1 Timothy 2, one will see that the Apostle Paul was teaching about husbands and wives and their relationship, and the roles God has assigned for men and women **in the church**. If we apply the biblical principles of leadership in the home and the church to governments, we may be taking liberties with Scripture that God did not intend.

For instance, we have examples from the word of God itself of women in positions of authority in government. Are we simply to discard them out of hand? Deborah led Israel as a judge in Judges 4:1-5:31, although one may argue that she appears to have had more of an influencing role. But she was, nonetheless, a judge and a prophetess. Micah 6:4 has Jehovah Himself saying, ***“For I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.”*** This statement has God declaring Miriam as a leader of Israel and, therefore, she would have been in a position of authority over men.

Modern times have seen several outstanding female national leaders, including Israel’s Golda Meir, who successfully ruled Israel from 1969 to 1974, and Margaret Thatcher, who was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979-1990. Since we know that God ordains all leadership – ***“For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God,”*** Paul writes in Romans 13:1, then we can assume that He placed Mrs. Meir and Mrs. Thatcher in the position as leaders of both Israel and the United Kingdom, and that He sovereignly ordained their terms of office.

Generally speaking, God designed men for positions of leadership. But apart from leadership in the church and family, which is given to men alone, the Bible does not expressly forbid women from positions of government. As a “gray” issue, the question of women leading in government has been passionately debated. Even those who are most vehemently against a woman President (or Vice President) would be hard pressed to justify voting for an ungodly man who has an in favor of position toward abortion, for example, over a godly Christian

woman with a strong pro-life stance. I, for one, would not wish to stand in their shoes come Judgment Day and try to explain that away!

Let us now examine 1 Timothy 2 in its entirety, and see what it is that is being discussed.

1. I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all men; 2. for kings and all that are in high place; that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity. 3. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; 4. Who would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. 5. For there is one God, one Mediator also between God and men, Himself man, Christ Jesus, 6. Who gave Himself a ransom for all; the testimony to be borne in its own times; 7. whereunto I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I speak the truth, I lie not), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. 8. I desire therefore that the men pray in every place, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and disputing. 9. In like manner, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefastness and sobriety; not with braided hair, and gold or pearls or costly raiment; 10. but (which becomes women professing godliness) through good works. 11. Let a woman learn in quietness with all subjection. 12. But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness. 13. For Adam was first formed, then Eve; 14. and Adam was not beguiled, but the woman being beguiled fell into transgression: 15. but she shall be saved through her child-bearing, if they continue in faith and love and sanctification with sobriety.

I am of the belief that to use verse 12 to teach that women cannot be in positions of authority over men **at any time** is to take this verse out of context. I am persuaded that Paul wrote to Timothy with the express purpose of addressing issues having to do with the church and when it is assembled together.

Now some will key in on verse 9 and ask, "So if this is discussing the church and issues it was facing, then are you saying that a woman is not supposed to be dressed modestly except when she is in the assembly?" to that I say this is not an either/or situation. Just because Paul **is** discussing issues with the church and **specifically** says here that a woman must be adorned modestly does not mean that God's eternal moral laws are to be thrown out the window when one is no longer gathered within the assembly. One must study the Bible properly **and** study it in its historical context. Why should we be surprised to see Paul writing to Timothy about the church and have to state that women should be dressed modestly? Remember, the apostles were having to battle Gnostic thought at this time in the infancy of the church, and that Gnostic thought had permeated **much** of the body of Christ to the point that great immorality had infiltrated the church at Corinth to the degree that the congregation was **proud** of one of their members who had taken his own father's wife!

"Well," you might say, "that is only one isolated case! Corinth was a unique phenomenon! You can't say this was a widespread problem in the church because of what happened at Corinth!" Oh, is that so? Let's see what Jesus had to say about that in the *Book of Revelation*:

6. "Yet this you have, you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." (Revelation 2:6)

12. "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of Him Who has the sharp two-edged sword. 13. I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; you hold fast My name and you did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 14. But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice immorality. 15. 'So you also have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.'" (Revelation 2:12-15)

18. "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: 'The words of the Son of God, Who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. 19. I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. 20. But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practice immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. 21. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her immorality. 22. Behold, I will throw her on a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her doings; 23. and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches shall know that I am He Who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve.'" (Revelation 2:18-23)

So we can see here that ***even the practice of immorality had entered into the very church***. This immorality originated with the Gnostics whose beliefs taught that only flesh was evil, and spirit was good, so that which was done in the flesh had no effect on the spirit. This is why they claimed that Jesus did not come in the flesh, and we have many teaching this same heresy to this day, denying the Deity of Christ. The Nicolaitans were a branch of Gnosticism, they practiced immorality and it is very possible they directly led to the creation of the distinction between "clergy" and "laity" that has plagued the Catholic Church and many Protestant groups for centuries. Paul was reminding Timothy to make sure that he taught the principles of modesty for women, particularly when the church was assembled together.

Faithful believers who have put on Christ Jesus are all God's "clergy". Peter exhorted the elders among us to, ***"Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd is manifested you will obtain the unfading crown of glory."*** (1 Peter 5:2-4)

Shepherds serve the sheep but the wolves that clothe themselves with so-called leadership and spiritual authority serve themselves, thinking that they serve God. In essence, this makes them false christs. Early church leaders were established as overseers, not a ruling hierarchy. The Early church father Irenaeus identified the Nicolaitans in his treatise **Against Heresies** in the Second Century as they who are an "offshoot of the knowledge [**Gnosticism, my addition**] which is falsely so-called," mentioning that they "lead lives of unrestrained indulgence." The reference to Balaam and Balak should be recognizable for anyone even remotely familiar with the history of the children of Israel to know that they engaged in immorality in their assembly as well.

Some will also turn to verse 15 of 1 Timothy 2 and ask, "But how does childbearing come into this? That seems like it's not in the church." This is a good question, but once again, we must remember to study passages and keep them in context. What is the context of 1 Timothy 2:15? What was Paul just saying prior to verse 15? Let's take a look at it again:

12. But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness. 13. For Adam was first formed, then Eve; 14. and Adam was not beguiled, but the woman being beguiled hath fallen into transgression: 15. but she shall be saved through her child-bearing, if they continue in faith and love and sanctification with sobriety.

Paul was talking about how **sin** entered into the world. He is referring his reader, Timothy, and those he instructed, to Genesis 3. Verse 15 above has absolutely **nothing** to do with women having babies today. If it did, then Paul would be teaching **salvation by works**. Additionally, he would be teaching in contradiction to the Apostle Peter who said that God is not a respecter of persons, meaning that all people are subject to the same Gospel plan of salvation, in Acts 10:34.

Men cannot give birth. Therefore, to understand that this passage is teaching that women giving birth to babies today saves them is completely off base. What Paul is referring to, once again, is Genesis 3:15: ***"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."*** Paul was referencing the very first prophecy uttered by God Himself in which He predicted that the Seed of woman, Jesus Christ, would be the defeat of Satan. And that is what is meant by Paul saying in verse 1 Timothy 2:15, ***"but she shall be saved through her child-bearing, if they continue in faith and love and sanctification with sobriety."***

Paul points out that Eve (*he gune*) brought herself into transgression by abandoning her role and taking on that of the man in the Garden of Eden. God does not wish for women to do this in His church today. But by fulfilling her role, difficult as it may be as a result of sin ("**To the woman He said, 'I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you shall bring forth children; yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you'**", Genesis 3:16), she gives birth to the Messiah, and thereby, "she" (*he gune*, fulfilled, of course, in Mary, the mother of Jesus. Paul elaborates on this further in Galatians 4:4: "**But when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman,**" [*genomenon ek gunaikos*]) brings salvation into the world.

It would be Eve's Seed that would save men, by crushing the head of the deceiving serpent. Paul was showing how Eve had been instrumental in bringing about the fall of mankind into sin, but he did not stop there. He further showed how indispensable she will be in the history of redemption of fallen mankind. For from the fruit of her body, and through the immeasurable love and grace of God, will come the Messiah, Who will save both her and all of mankind. In fact, this is how **every** woman in particular is saved, for Paul switches to the plural in the last half of verse 15 and makes application to women in general. There is then a definite transition from Eve ("a woman": the singular *he gune* of Galatians 4:4) back to women in general ("women": the plural *meinosin*, "if they continue"). They will be saved "**if they continue in faith and love and sanctification** (holiness) **with sobriety** (submission)." Women in general are not saved through bearing children, they are saved through their faith in the fruit of **the** childbirth, that being Jesus Christ, the Promised Messiah, for all of mankind.

If this redemptive historical interpretation is correct, and I believe it is, then 1 Timothy chapter 2 has nothing to do with the essential mothering role of women in general. Neither does it apply to some universal prohibition against having women being leaders or "usurping authority" by taking on leadership roles in the "secular" world. Rather, this chapter assures us of the central place of "the woman" in God's redemptive plan and reminds us that women in general are saved from eternal death through faith in the promised Child, His blessed Son, Jesus Christ, **if** they persevere in holding onto their faith in Him unto death.

So I hope you see why I believe the passages in 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 11:3 are **not** universal prohibitions against women being in positions of authority, but it is reserved for their role while gathered in the congregation of the Lord's people and with their husbands. 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 11 are addressing issues in the church, just as the rest of both 1 and 2 Timothy are. To treat these as otherwise is to take the passages out of context. To take 1 Timothy 2 out of context is to miss the beautiful, historically redemptive Messianic message that was intended for believers. There is no break in either of these passages where Paul goes from addressing the issues of the church to life in general.