

## The Neglected Virtue of

# SILENCE

The opposite of silence is noise. We have too much noise in our society today. That's why I recommend this book: *Noise: How Our Media-saturated Culture Dominates Lives and Dismantles Families* by Teresa Tomeo. That's the sorry reality we have chosen for ourselves and our children. Society is too hectic, too restless, too noisy and bombards us with ungodly junk without any regard for our privacy.

### What is silence?

In a general sense, stillness, or entire absence of sound or noise; habitual taciturnity; calmness; quiet; cessation of rage, agitation or tumult. In 1910 doctor and scientist Robert Koch predicted: *"One day man will fight noise just as relentlessly as we fight cholera and the plague today."* Today scientists tell us: *Noise is detrimental to health in several respects, for example, hearing impairment, sleep disturbance, cardiovascular effects, psychophysiologic effects, psychiatric symptoms, and fetal development. Furthermore, noise has widespread psychosocial effects including noise annoyance, reduced performance, and increased aggressive behavior.* One of the problems of today's is the distraction caused by **stimulus satiation** and esp. **media saturation**. People are simply bombarded with too many impulses too often. It completely numbs and dumbs them down.

In a radio interview people were asked about their favorite places. Several people answered that their favorite place is in the woods. There they can take a walk and enjoy the sound of nature and the absence of man-made noise. There is a natural desire for silence in man.

It is noteworthy that the Bible promotes the virtue of silence. The saying goes: Speech is silver,

silence is golden. If you study the book of Proverbs you will immediately notice the comparisons between a wise and the foolish person. Often you will find the foolish person to be noisy and constantly speaking, whereas the wise person is able to bridle his tongue and to keep silence. To sum up the book of Proverbs, we can say it is better to keep your mouth shut instead of carelessly spilling the beans. Heed this warning:

**In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.** Proverbs 10:19.

If you really let the truth of this verse sink in, it becomes obvious why a Christian should not watch or listen to godless talk shows, participate in wordly discussions, endless debates, strife, joking, small talk, gossip.

### **Too much talk = too much sin!**

Throw your TV out and avoid people who say things which they ought not:

**He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips.** Proverbs 20:19.

Nothing is more unbearable than people with a cantankerous spirit who constantly want to argue. Check Proverbs 21:9,19, 25:24! The silence of a desert or a housetop would be more preferable. Man has a desire for simple quietness according to Proverbs 17:1 and Ecclesiastes 4:6.

Even the Psalmist speaks of silence in Psalm 39 1,2:

**I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with**

**a bridle, while the wicked is before me. I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred.**

There is a time to every purpose under heaven. According to Ecclesiastes 3:7 there is

**A time to keep silence , and a time to speak.**

Have you asked God for wisdom to discern between those times. Most people think it is a time for non-stop running of their mouth. Not so with God's people! God's people are silent when the world is involved in foolish talk. But God's people speak up when it comes to proclaiming and praising the name of Jesus. That's when the world all of a sudden clams up.

According to Amos 5:13 it is prudent to keep silence in evil times. Proverbs, Psalm 39 and James 3 also defend the concept of the "bridled tongue". Silence keeps us from sinning with our tongue.

The apostle Paul makes a "**quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty**" (2. Tim. 2:2) the goal of our prayers. Even in our worship there needs to be a healthy balance between "making a joyful noise unto the Lord" (Ps. 100:1) and to "be still, and know that I am God". The challenge is that our noise in worship is truly joyful. I have seen a lot of noise among Christians that was not "joyful" but rather motivated by pride, arrogance and contention. If we could summarize the whole counsel of the Bible, we simply say: **Don't be a loudmouth.** Let me give you some scripture: *Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas ... Acts 15:12.* Be a listener. Do not interrupt when someone is speaking. *And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.* Lk. 11:1. The disciples had enough respect to let Jesus finish praying and they did not talk to him until he ceased praying. When someone is praying, reading, studying etc. do not interrupt, do not interfere, do not start noisy activities. That is

rude.

*As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart.* Proverbs 25:20  
*He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him.* Proverbs 27:14

There is something wrong about busting in and interrupting others.

## **SILENCE and the CHURCH**

Some churches today practice noisy worship and point to Psalm 100:1: **Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands.** These churches practice "shouting", "getting happy", raising hands in praise, etc. These things are not wrong. You should publicly and loudly praise the Lord. The problem is when you get out of balance. Worship is not always loud and noisy. It is not always shouting and rejoicing. Worship sometimes involves silence. That silence is lacking today in many churches. It is extremely neglected. Pastors nowadays have problems getting the service started because the congregation loves to talk, talk, talk in the sanctuary. There ought to be a "holy hush" stemming from a fear, respect and love for God. Let me tell you that there is **silence in heaven!** Yes, there are singing choruses of the saints praising the Lord, but in Revelation 8:1 we read of silence in heaven when the Lamb of God opened the seventh seal. This silence was an expression of reverence to the Lamb of God, our Savior Jesus Christ. I remember being in a church service and on Sundays after the sermon the pastor would just call for a couple of minutes of silence for personal prayer to let the congregation "process" what was preached. During these minutes it was silent.

As a child I remember that many churches in our area were not locked. Anybody was welcome to enter the sanctuary at any time for personal devotion. The greatest thing I remember about that is the „holy hush“ - the silence upon entering the house of God. The respectful ways of people who knew this was a place of silence and prayer.

This was not a place to discuss politics, sports, economy etc. It was a place where people met the Lord. So churches need to have a healthy balance of making a joyful noise on the one hand and being still and know that I am the Lord on the other hand. We need both: the stillness and the joyful noise.

Remember that God many times cannot be found in the loud and spectacular things. Elijah fled from a wicked female ruler's persecution into the silence of the desert. At Horeb God appeared to Elijah. But God was not found in the strong wind, not in the earthquake and not in the fire. But God appeared in the form of a still small voice in 1. Kings 19:12 and God gave Elihah a new task.

## WOMEN AND SILENCE

The word of God also contains special admonitions for women in the church with regard to silence:

**Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.** 1. Timothy 2:11,12.

These verses are self-explanatory and do not need a whole lot of interpretation. They say what they mean and mean what they say. Paul, the church-planting missionary, is giving pastor Timothy some practical instructions on how Christian ought to behave themselves in God's house. A strong church is not run by women. A strong church has men in authority. There are no women in the ministry. Women are not to undermine that authority – neither in the church nor in the home. The women are helpers and succourers with their ability of good works (1. Tim. 2:10, Romans 16, Acts 9:36). It is an ugly sight when you see churches run by women or churches full of gossiping women. It is an ugly sight when females try to undermine the authority of fathers. Here is what the Lord does **NOT** want:

**And withal they learn to be idle, wandering**

**about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.** 1. Tim. 5:13.

These are the women who have waxed wanton against Christ. That's not what you want, so in anticipation of this we have this exhortation in 1. Cor. 14:34:

**Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted to them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in ther church.**

Married women here are commanded to be silent and when they have questions on doctrinal issues they do not mingle in little cliques or get on the phone, but ask their husbands at home. These verses are simple and self-explanatory. It should not be our custom to argue with God's word. But it is those easy-to-understand, plain and direct scriptures that are “hard“ to understand for some. The Bible way is too simple for them, and therefore they like to complicate and spiritualize things. Some people argue with these plain scriptures because these scriptures demand a change in life and a sacrifice that they stubbornly refuse to make because of selfish pride..

## PUTTING SOMEONE TO SILENCE?

The Lord Jesus Christ put those to silence who hated him and attacked His doctrine.

**But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.** Mt. 22:34.

In Mt. 21 to 23 Jesus contends with the religious leaders of his day who rejected him altogether. Tthe Lord always responded to contentious questioning in a way that left his opponents unable to answer. He put them to shame and silenced them by answering questions with

another question, causing conviction, giving parables, rebuking lack of scriptural knowledge etc. So in Mt. 22:22 his opponents heard his word and left him and went their way. In Mt. 22:46 no man was able to answer him and did not dare ask him another contentious, smart question. In John 8 Jesus silenced an angry crowd of scribes and Pharisees by saying in verse 7: **He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.** His words worked conviction, as we read in verse 9, and everyone left until Jesus and the woman were alone. How does this apply to us as believers now? Are we to silence those that oppose themselves to sound doctrine?

**For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.** 1. Peter 2:15.

Ignorance of scriptures is enormous nowadays. Most people's concept of Jesus, Christianity, church, pastor and the Christian life is messed up. The world now thinks that Christians have to be some flattery nice people who get along with everybody. But Jesus tells us that light came into the world, but the world loved darkness rather than light because the world's deeds are evil. The world hated Jesus and Jesus promised his disciples that for that reason they will be hated, too. John 15:18-20. Jesus said:

**Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you.** Luke 6:26.

It is our job to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men around us by well doing as servants of God. See also 1. Peter 2:12. Titus 2:8,9 shed more light on how we are to silence those who are contrary to sound doctrine:

**In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.** Titus 2:8.

You can silence those that oppose themselves by

not giving them any ammunition. Through good works we can keep a testimony of faithfulness to God.

## SILENCE IN THE CHRISTIAN CLASSICS

Even in the great classics of Christian literature we find how the virtue of silence is extolled:

In the **Rule of St. Benedict**, a book that greatly shaped western civilization and its work ethic, we read the following:

### *Of Silence*

*Let us do what the Prophet saith: "I said, I will take heed of my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I have set a guard to my mouth, I was dumb, and was humbled, and kept silence even from good things" (Ps 38[39]:2-3). Here the prophet showeth that, if at times we ought to refrain from useful speech for the sake of silence, how much more ought we to abstain from evil words on account of the punishment due to sin. Therefore, because of the importance of silence, let permission to speak be seldom given to perfect disciples even for good and holy and edifying discourse, for it is written: "In much talk thou shalt not escape sin" (Prov 10:19). And elsewhere: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Prov 18:21). For it belongeth to the master to speak and to teach; it becometh the disciple to be silent and to listen. If, therefore, anything must be asked of the Superior, let it be asked with all humility and respectful submission. But coarse jests, and idle words or speech provoking laughter, we condemn everywhere to eternal exclusion; and for such speech we do not permit the disciple to open his lips.*

In the great classic **Imitation of Christ** by Thomas A. Kempis we read this:

*Of the danger of superfluity of words Avoid as far as thou canst the tumult of men; for talk concerning worldly things, though it be innocently undertaken, is a hindrance, so quickly*

*are we led captive and defiled by vanity. Many a time I wish that I had held my peace, and had not gone amongst men. But why do we talk and gossip so continually, seeing that we so rarely resume our silence without some hurt done to our conscience? We like talking so much because we hope by our conversations to gain some mutual comfort, and because we seek to refresh our wearied spirits by variety of thoughts. And we very willingly talk and think of those things which we love or desire, or else of those which we most dislike.*

*2. But alas! it is often to no purpose and in vain. For this outward consolation is no small hindrance to the inner comfort which cometh from God. Therefore must we watch and pray that time pass not idly away. If it be right and desirable for thee to speak, speak things which are to edification. Evil custom and neglect of our real profit tend much to make us heedless of watching over our lips. Nevertheless, devout conversation on spiritual things helpeth not a little to spiritual progress, most of all where those of kindred mind and spirit find their ground of fellowship in God.*

## **FINALLY**

By now I hope you have discovered what it means when God's word says:

**Be still, and know that I am God.** Psalm 46:10.

Our tongues need to be bridled with God's help or else they will cause sin. Silence is good. Silence many times shuts the door to all the distractions and makes us available for God. Sometimes we can say things by not saying anything. Silence is an expression of reverence and worship to our Lord.

Have you taken some practical steps to foster an environment of silence in your home. Here is a little, incomplete checklist:

- A prayer life requires silence.
- Bible study requires silence.
- Family devotions require silence.
- Do you have a room or a location where it is quiet?
- Radios, TV or other devices should always be turned off when not being used. They should be used only when you pay attention. They are not meant to be background noise.
- Teach your children to sit still at a table, sit still in a church pew and not to be noisy and unruly.
- Can you be still while looking at beautiful natural scenery. Are you filled with a sense of awe and wonder at simple things?
- Keep silence in your car. No need for radio, loud music. Buy a car with no CD, MP3 player. Pray, sing and praise the Lord while you are in the car and paying attention to the traffic, first of all. No cell phone usage in cars.
- If you are in a church where there is gossiping and constant talking about meaningless things before and after service, sit quietly in your pew, lower your head in prayer, go to the altar to pray, avoid the people who initiate gossip. Silence is just a part of common courtesy.