

Women in the Church

1 Corinthians 14:34,35

“Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.” (NKJV)

We see two extremes in attitude towards women today:

1. Islam, which suppresses and abuses women,
2. Feminism, which denies the unique role of women as being distinct from the man’s role as given by God.

Willing submission is emphasized in 1 Corinthians with Christ submitting Himself willingly to His Father as a steward. The Lord Jesus will subject all things to Himself and then subject Himself to His Father rather than reign independently. This example should motivate us to submit to the Lord Jesus Christ. (See 1 Cor. 15:27,28; 3:23; 11:3)

Galatians 3:28 – Positionally before God men and women are fully equal. In the world among both Jews and Greeks this Bible text would have been revolutionary. The truth in this text, however, does not do away with the distinction in **role** of man and woman.

When the Lord Jesus was here, as recorded in the Gospels, **He crossed many 1st century cultural barriers** in His communication and attitude toward women.

- As a man you wouldn’t talk to a woman in public. Compare the Lord talking to the Samaritan woman in John 4. Note especially vs. 27.
- A man would not allow a woman to touch him. Think of the woman with an issue of blood and how scared she was. The Lord was very gracious to her. (Mark 5). See also Luke 7 where a woman washed His feet with her hair.
- It was unacceptable to teach women about the Law and spiritual things. The Lord Jesus allowed Mary to sit at His feet and learn (Luke 10).
- The Lord Jesus stood up against the discriminatory attitude of the religious leaders in relation to the woman caught in adultery. Where was the adulterous man?!! (John 8)

- The testimony of women was not valid in court. The Lord Jesus showed Himself first to women and told Mary Magdalene to tell His disciples that He was risen. (John 20).

While the Lord Jesus viewed women as being equal to men in their standing before God, at the same time He only chose men as His apostles and public witnesses. The Lord’s teaching about women’s position and role was therefore **in accordance with the Old Testament’s teaching** on the subject. Compare also 1 Cor. 14:34B, where we see that the Epistles refer to the authority of the O.T. as well.

1 Corinthians 14:34-38 The words “keep silent” are “keep on remaining silent”. To “speak” is the **act** of talking or speaking (Greek “laleo”) –used 24 times in ch. 14. The Old Testament law teaches the woman’s submission both in foundational doctrine (Genesis 2 & 3) and practice.

The women cannot ask questions in the public meetings of the church; they have to ask them in a private setting. These verses along with the whole chapter are God’s commands. The women are not permitted to speak publicly in the meetings of the church. This role is given by God to the Christian men.

Objections raised by those who disagree with the above statements on 1 Corinthians 14:34,35:

3. **Objection:** “If women are not to say anything, they can’t participate in singing either. This sounds ridiculous and for this reason the word silence must mean something else.”

Answer: The “speaking” does not refer to what the congregation does collectively, but to what one individual does, namely addressing the church.

4. **Objection:** “These verses only mean that the women are not to judge what has been expressed by prophets (vs. 29).”

Answer: The text (vs. 34, 35) doesn’t add any particular circumstance to the prohibition to speak. Compare vs. 28 & 30 which do add a circumstance. Also, verse 34 is too far removed from vs.29 to directly refer to the judging of prophets.

5. Objection: "1 Corinthians 11:5 says that women can pray and prophesy in the church, so ch.14:34,35 can't mean total silence."

Answer: Chapter 11:2-16 doesn't say that the praying and prophesying happens in the assembly meetings. This section doesn't address the subject. R.C.H. Lenski puts it this way: *"By omitting reference to a place Paul says this: 'Wherever and whenever it is proper and right for a man or for a woman to pray or to prophesy, the difference of sex should be marked as I indicate.'"* In the 1st century most women would go about in public with their heads covered. Among the Greeks women would uncover their head when worshipping in idol temples. Paul in essence says: "Keep it on when you are in spiritual gatherings of God's people". The praying and prophesying is simply Paul's way of referring to the corporate spiritual exercises of the assembly when it is gathered, and other less formal settings where it might be permissible for women to participate.

6. Objection: "These verses and also 1 Cor. 11:2-16 are no longer relevant to us."

Answer: Paul doesn't refer to the local culture but to creation and the commandments of the Lord which are binding upon all churches. And besides, who decides what is relevant or not?!

Note: What is an assembly meeting? See 1 Cor. 11:17,18, 20,33; 14:23,26. It is any gathering that is open for everyone in the assembly to attend, whether the weekly meetings or special occasions where God's Word is heard and prayer or worship takes place.

1 Timothy 2:8-15

Vs. 8 – The men (males) are to lead in prayer everywhere (compare 1 Cor. 14:17,26 and further) whenever a group of Christian men and women are gathered. They are to do this in the right condition of heart and attitude. Notice: Not just ordained men....

Vs. 9,10–With the same attitude and heart condition women are to be marked by dignity in their behaviour and clothing. The Bible doesn't say what kind of clothes we should wear, just that they should be modest.

Our **standards of modesty** have fallen greatly.

Vs. 11,12 – The word "silence" here is "quietness". In 1 Cor.14 "silence" is a stronger word and is in contrast to "speaking". Here "quietness" is in contrast to "having authority over" (or: dominate). A woman can teach other women or children (Titus 2:3-5; 1 Tim. 2:15; 5:14,15), but not men. Therefore, having female pastors and preachers is against God's Word.

Vs. 13,14 –Two reasons are given: Adam was formed first and given the headship role (**Gen. 2**) –Because of **creation**.

Eve showed her weakness by being deceived; Adam didn't take the proper lead. All this led to sin. (**Gen. 3**) –Because of **chaos**.

Compare **Rev. 2:20** "Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols."

Vs. 15– Compare 5:14,15 – A woman will be preserved spiritually if she chooses the role God has designed for her, that is, a role that revolves around her family. Compare **Prov. 31** where the virtuous woman is quite ambitious and takes much initiative, but her work is still related to her family and the domestic sphere.

A few examples of Christian women in the New Testament:

Dorcus –(Acts 9:36-42) She "was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did." Such deeds will greatly enhance the public ministry of the church.

Lydia (Acts 16:11-15) – Lydia and other women prayed on a regular basis. Praying women, whether as a group or individually are vital for the spiritual health of the church.

Priscilla (Acts 18:24-28) – "When Aquilla and Priscilla heard him [Apollos], they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately." Priscilla is mentioned as sharing in the work with her husband Aquilla. The role of a Christian woman is to be a helper in the ministry of her husband.

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