

# **Let Your Women Keep Silent**

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## 1 Cor. 14:34-37

In recent years the role of women has changed in many churches.

Many denominations now have women preachers, pastors, bishops, etc. The trend is beginning to catch on in some churches of Christ.

The scriptures certainly reveal that women were involved in the spread of the gospel.

It was foretold that women would prophesy.

Acts 2:15-18, *“For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.”*

Philip had four daughters who prophesied.

Acts 21:8-9, *“And the next day we that were of Paul’s company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.”*

Instructions were given for when women prophesied.

1 Cor. 11:3-16, *“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. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman: but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels. Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the*

woman; but all things of God. Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.”

Priscilla accompanied her husband Aquila in teaching Apollos.

Acts 18:26, “And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.”

Older women were to teach the younger women.

Tit. 2:3-5, “The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.”

Yet there are scriptures that clearly place limitations on women.

In Paul’s first epistle to Timothy. 1 Tim. 2:11-12, “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.”

In Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians. 1 Cor. 14:34-37, “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only? If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.”

In this study, we shall examine Paul’s remarks to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 14:34-37) by raising several questions that are commonly asked. The first question is...

## **Does this passage apply today?**

### **Some say it does not apply today.**

They say the context describes a situation where women had husbands with the gift of prophecy. 1 Cor. 14:29-33, “Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be

*comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.”*

Such women could (and should) ask questions of their inspired husbands at home.

Since we do not have inspired men today, some reason the passage does not apply. This view holds that Paul’s comments were intended only for the circumstances at Corinth.

## **Reasons to say that it does apply today.**

Note the reason Paul gives for the women to ask their husbands at home. 1 Cor. 14:35, “... *for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.*”

Why should wives of inspired men be silent? Because it was shameful for women (i.e., women in general) to speak in church. Not a cultural shame, for Corinth was known for its many priestesses. But a spiritual shame, as even taught in the Law of Moses.

1 Cor. 14:34, “*Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law.*”

Paul makes a specific application, by appealing to a general principle. Evidently the prophets’ wives were speaking out in the assembly. But it was shameful for women to speak in church (general principle). So they are told to be silent and ask their husbands at home (specific application).

The general principle remains true, even if the specific circumstances are not present. Women are still to be submissive. 1 Cor. 14:34, “*Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law.*”

They are still not to have authority over a man.

- 1 Tim. 2:11-12, “*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 Tim. 3:15, “*But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*”

The principle applies whether it is in Europe (Corinth), Asia (Ephesus), or the USA. We are dealing with a command of the Lord, not Paul’s personal bias. As Paul makes clear in succeeding verses.

1 Cor. 14:36-38, “*What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only? If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.*”

We either acknowledge the Lord’s command, or display our spiritual ignorance!

The context (immediate and remote) indicates this is a commandment of the Lord intended for all churches and for all times!

Having determined that we are dealing with something that applies today, we do well to ask...

## Where does this passage apply?

### Where women are to be silent.

Note what Paul says:

- 1 Cor. 14:34, “*Let your women keep silence in the churches:...*”
- 1 Cor. 14:35, “*... for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.*”

**The place is “*in the church*” (literally, “*in the assembly*”).**

When the congregation is assembled. 1 Cor. 14:23, “*If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, ...*”

Not necessarily elsewhere, e.g., at the home.

1 Cor. 14:35, “*... for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.*”

The principle applies whenever the whole church comes together in one place.

What bearing this might have on...

- Congregational business meetings — when the whole church is together in one place?
- During announcements — when the whole church is together in one place?
- Whenever the whole church is together, the principle should be followed.

In seeking to apply this principle whenever the whole church is together, we do well to ask...

## What does this passage require?

### Let your women keep silent.

Paul says: 1 Cor. 14:34, “...for it is not permitted unto them to speak; ...”

Not even to ask questions. 1 Cor. 14:35, “And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.”

But to be as the tongue speaker without an interpreter:

1 Cor. 14:28, “But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.”

Clearly, women are not to preach or teach when the church is assembled.

### What about women singing?

All are commanded to sing praises and teach one another in song.

- Eph. 5:19, “*Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,*”
- Col. 3:16, “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*”

In 1 Cor 14, to “speak” means to “address the assembly”.

1 Cor. 14:28-31, “*But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God. Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.*”

Where the one who speaks is teaching or exercising authority “over” others.

Which if a woman did so, would violate 1 Tim. 2:11-12, “*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.*”

In congregational singing, women are not teaching or exercising authority “over” men. In congregational singing, women may join in the singing of praises.

## Conclusion.

I am fully aware that to place any limitation on the role of women sounds...

- “Sexist”.
- “Old fashioned”.
- “Narrow-minded”.

Many would say the same about the Biblical teaching on marriage and sex.

Yet we should be more concerned about the commandments of the Lord, what is truly “spiritual”.

And so Paul’s admonition still holds true.

1 Cor. 14:37-38, *“If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.”*

Those who desire not to be spiritually ignorant and disobey the Lord Jesus, will do well to give heed to the teachings of His apostles, whose words are just as relevant today as they were in the first century.









