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- unless otherwise noted, answers to questions by Keith Sharp -

## In This Issue...

In this special issue of Meditate On These Things, we have two articles looking at the role of women in the church, in particular, women speaking when the church is assembled.

- **The Role Of Women In The Church** | *Ajayi Ojeva*
- **Women Speaking In Church** | *William J. Stewart*

Finally, brethren  
**WHATEVER THINGS** are true  
are noble  
are just  
are pure  
are lovely  
are of good report  
IF THERE IS ANY VIRTURE AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –  
**meditate on these things.**

PHILIPPIANS  
**4:8**

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## The Role Of Women In The Church

Ajayi Ojeva | Osogbo, Nigeria

### Introduction:

One of the Bible subjects that have troubled the church over the years is the role of women in the public worship of the church. Churches have been divided over the issue; whereas Bible teachings on it are so explicit that we need not be divided over it but for our attitudes towards the scriptures and our interpretation of certain passages that speak on this subject. Albert Barnes wrote in his comments on 1 Corinthians 14:34,35; "This rule is positive, explicit, and universal. There is no ambiguity in the expressions; and there can be no difference of opinion one would suppose, in regard to their meaning."

There are various degrees of departure from the scriptures in this area. Churches have gone as far as appointing women elders, deacons, allowing women to pray in the assemblies, officiate the Lord's Supper, read scriptures, and interpret teaching and sermon. "On July 31, 1988, the elders of Berring Drive Church of Christ in Houston, Texas announced their intention to encourage the expression of women's gift in congregational worship services. By 1992, women were leading payers, reading scriptures, and waiting on the Lord's Table in regular worship of the church." -Dave Miller – *Piloting the Straight*, p. 245.

In some places, the problem is still limited to women reading scriptures and asking questions in the assembly. It is with this in view that we are going to deal with this subject. We will examine the approaches of brethren to the subject, and we shall study the two passages that deal with the subject, these are: I Cor. 14 and I Tim. 2. I believe that if we approach the subject with humility, and study these passages with an open mind, we will come to an agreement on the will of God for women in the church.

### I. ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE BIBLICAL ROLE OF WOMEN – APPROACHES TO THESE SUBJECT

A. Two major passages that deal with this subject are I Cor. 14:34, 35 and I Tim. 2:11, 12.

## B. Approaches to these passages:

There are various approaches to these passages. Most of these are attempts to explain away the passages. Let us examine these approaches.

### 1. The meeting of 1 Cor. 14 is a special meeting.

One of these is that the meeting of I Cor. 14 is a special meeting. It is asserted that “brethren spoke in tongues, prophesied, and exercised the gift of interpretation...A meeting of that type is therefore no longer held” – Guy N. Woods. Shall we apply this principle to other assemblies in the New Testament? On the day of Pentecost, the apostles spoke in tongues “as the Spirit gave them utterance.” - Acts 2:4, KJV. Are we to rule out Peter’s teaching based on this? Are we to disregard his teaching of Acts 2:38 because it was uttered under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? Also, the meeting at Troas involved a miracle – Paul raised the dead -Acts 20:8-11. Are we disregarding the application of Acts 20:7 because of this? I know of no one who does so. If we cannot treat these passages this way, why are we doing so with I Cor. 14?

### 2. Women are bound by absolute silence.

It is contended that the words for silence (sigao) and speak (laleo) demand absolute silence on the part of women, therefore, if these passages apply today, women cannot sing in the assembly, confess Christ, or confess their fault one to another. This is not correct. The command for women to keep silent does not forbid them to sing than the command for the prophets and tongue speakers to be silent forbid them to sing. Firstly, let us consider verse 26: “How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.” –NKJV. The psalm here apparently refers to extemporary psalm, inspired by the Spirit, as that of Mary, Zacharias, Simeon, and Anna (Luke 1: 46- 55, 67-79; 2: 34-38). In his comment on this verse Matthew Henry wrote, “while one has a psalm to utter by inspiration, another has a doctrine, or revelation;” What if the prophet raises a psalm, could other prophets sing along with him. Yes, they can. If the silence of the prophets in verses 28- 30 would not forbid them to sing, should the prophet who stood up received a psalm, neither will the silence of the women prevent them from singing under the same circumstances. Secondly, in the art of singing in worship, only the song leader is speaking in the capacity of which the woman is forbidden to speak – he is leading the assembly authoritatively – he is leading this speaking while others are following, when he stops, they stop; a woman must not do this. She cannot lead the singing, but she is to speak to others by singing as commanded in Ephesians 5: 19.

### 3. Decency and orderliness is the only principle in these passages.

It has been claimed by several men that what concerns us here today is the principles of decency and orderliness. If it were just a matter of decency and orderliness, Paul would have regulated that in the same way that he regulated the speaking in tongues and prophesying. Just as one prophet was to keep silent to give another prophet opportunity to speak; the woman who has question would also have to wait for her turn to ask her question.

### 4. A problem in Corinth.

Some contend that Paul is referring to a problem in Corinth; he is not speaking to all women. If we treat the passage this way, we can as well say that in I Cor. 11:23-31, Paul is addressing a problem in Corinth. Therefore, everyone may bring his or her food to the assembly and eat it in the assembly during worship. I do not know anyone who treats 1 Cor. 11 this way. Let us consider.

### 5. The women of 1 Cor. 14: 34, 35 are wives of prophets.

Based on the KJV rendering, “Let your women keep silence in the churches...” –vs.34a, some have concluded that the women under consideration were wives of the prophets.

This translation is based on the text of Textus Receptus which has the Greek pronoun humon , your, of yours “Hai gunaikes humon en tais Ekklesiiais sigatosan.” “Let your women keep silent in the churches.” However, there are other more reliable texts that do not contain this pronoun. Wescott and Hort Greek text,

Tischendorf Greek New Testament, among others, read “Hai gunnaikes en tais Ekklesiais sigatosan” “let the women keep silence in the churches...” -ASV. There are several English translations of the passage which do not render it the way KJV did. In Acts 2:17, we read “and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy...” This does not necessarily connote family relationship. Therefore, even granted that “your women” is genuine in this passage, it still does not indicate family relationship, but women in contradistinction to men in the assembly. The passage nowhere states that the women under consideration were the wives of the prophets. The immediate context does not lend itself to such interpretation. Compare vv. 27-32, 37, and 39.

Just as this passage nowhere states that the women under consideration were the wives of prophets, it does not state that the women who had spiritual gifts are under consideration. Mike Willis rightly observed, “The prohibition appears to apply, not to just the wives of certain men (such as the prophets), but to all women” (Truth Commentary, 1 Corinthians, p. 419). Albert Barnes remarked, “...It does not refer to those only who claimed to be inspired, but to all;..”

We are able to consider 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 simultaneously because we have the complete Bible. The Corinthians did not have such opportunity for about five years. 1 Corinthians was written about 56 or 57 A.D and 1 Timothy was written about 62 or 63 A.D. The church at Corinth would definitely have knowledgeable women like Priscilla (Acts 18: 26), (after all, we are not told that Priscilla and Aquila taught Apollo by inspiration), and the kind of women addressed in 1 Tim 2: 11-12, whose knowledge is not spiritual gift. It is certain that not all teachers in the New Testament were inspired (Cp. Rom 12:7). Does it mean that between the time the Corinthians received this letter and the time they had access to the first epistle to Timothy, knowledgeable women at Corinth who were not spiritually gifted continued to speak in the church either by teaching or leading public prayer, while spiritually gifted women held their peace in the assemblies because they were not permitted to do so? The command is to all women in the church whether spiritually gifted or not.

#### 7. Question on the new order given by the Holy Spirit.

It has been argued that the question the woman is not allowed to ask is not a question about the message of a prophet or tongue speaker in the assembly, but that she is not allowed to ask question on the new order given by the Holy Spirit. This submission simply means that the women at Corinth may go on asking questions from the prophets about their message in the assembly. They are free to do so as long as the question is not about the new order given by the Holy Spirit. Does it mean, then, that these spiritually gifted women were not allowed to speak in the assembly by using their spiritual gifts either by prophesying or speaking in tongues, but they are allowed to speak by asking question about the message of the male prophets? Where, then, is their silence in the assemblies? It is a shame for them to prophesy in the assembly, it is a shame for them to ask question on the new order of the Holy Spirit in the assembly, but it is not a shame for them to ask question about the message of the prophets in the assemblies. Let us think over this.

#### 8. Gift of understanding.

There is a school of thought that they all have the gift of understanding and would understand what is taught, so that there was no need for any one asking questions in their assemblies. This cannot be true because the Bible says they do not all have the same gifts (I Cor. 12:7-11, 28-30). And Peter affirmed that some of their teachings were difficult to be understood (II Pet. 3:16; cp. I Cor. 5:1-5; II Cor. 2:5-11).

#### 9. Literal or Figurative?

Much emphasis has been laid on “their own husbands at home” with the question, is husband and home here literal or figurative? If it is figurative, what type of figure? If literal, it means women can only ask their husbands their questions. Paul had given a similar instruction to the church at Corinth in chapter 11. “And If any man hunger, let him eat at home...” -I Cor. 11:34. “What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in?...” -I Cor. 11:22. Is home and house here literal or figurative? If figurative, what type of figure? If literal, there were families that have church in their house (Rom. 16:5, I Cor. 16:19, Col. 4:15). Where will these

brethren eat, in the church, or in their houses? If literal, they could not eat in restaurants, but only in their houses. If anyone who is hungry could eat anywhere outside the assembly, the women can also ask their questions anywhere, anytime, outside the assembly.

The restriction on asking questions is naturally an extension of the command to keep silence. No one will assert that if a woman in Corinth should ask a teacher her question outside the assembly, she would be contravening the instruction of the Holy Spirit. She has not spoken in the church by asking the teacher her question outside the assembly. The continuous stress on "their own husbands" invariably authorized unmarried women, widows and women whose husbands were not spiritually gifted or were unbelievers in Corinth to ask their questions in the church. Obviously, God's command here is for all the women in Corinth and all women of all ages.

## II. I COR. 14 AND WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE CHURCH

A. Some keywords in I Cor. 14. Study of some keywords in I Cor. 14 will help in understanding this passage

1. Edify, edifying, edification – Grk – Oikodome Edify, edification;

To build in a spiritual sense as the church Mt 16:18. Spiritual profit or advancement -1 Cor. 14:3, 5. The act of one who promotes another's growth in Christian wisdom, piety, holiness, happiness, (I Cor. 14:12) what contributes to edification or augments wisdom, etc.(I Cor. 14:35). Paul says the word of God does just this (Acts 20:32). Hence the church is edified whenever the scripture is read in the assembly. The church receives edification when the speech of the one who is speaking in tongues is interpreted – I Cor. 14:5.

The one who speaks in tongue edifies the church when his speech is interpreted -v. 5.

If his speech is not interpreted, the church is not edified, and the purpose of the assembly is for the edification of the church, since the purpose is defeated, he should keep silent in the church -v. 28.

2. Speak – Laleo , To utter a voice, emit a sound. To speak i.e. to use the tongue or the faculty of speech; to utter, articulate sounds; absol. (1 Cor. 14:11).To use words in order to declare one's mind and disclose one's thought; to speak I Cor. 14:9. Of the words of a teacher I Cor. 14:19. Many of the exx already cited show that Laleo is frequently used in the New Testament of teachers; of Jesus, the apostles and others. To those passages may be added – Lk. 5:4; Jn. 1:37; 7:46; 8:30, 38; 12:50; Acts 6:10; 11:15; 14:19; 16:14; I Cor. 14:34. (Thayer, p. 369).

"Laleo – for which see say, No. 2, is used several times in I Cor. 14; the command prohibiting women from speaking in a church gathering, vv. 34, 35, are regarded by some as an injunction against chattering, a meaning which is absent from the use of the verb everywhere else in the same sense as in vv. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 13, 18, 19, 21, 23, 27, 28, 29, 39" ( W.E.Vine).The woman may not address the assembly for edification (I Cor. 14:34). For what purpose is the Bible read in the assembly? For edification, for comfort, for exhortation, for learning or teaching? Yes, God, through Paul says a woman should not do this in the assembly.

3. Silent – Sigao To keep silence, hold one's peace – Acts 12:17; 15:12; I Cor. 14:28, 30, 34 – (Thayer, p. 514).

4. Prophecy, prophet

Prophet – propheteia – signifies the speaking forth of the mind and counsel of God – in the New Testament, it is used as of the gift e.g. Rom. 12:6; I Cor. 13:2; either of the exercise of the gift or of that which is prophesied e.g. Mt. 13:14; I Cor. 13:8; 14:6, 22 and I Th. 5:20. With the completion of the Canon of scripture prophecy apparently passed away, I Cor. 13:8,9. In his measure the teacher has taken the place of the prophet, cf. the significant change in II Pt. 2:1. The difference is that whereas the message of the prophet was a direct revelation of the mind of God for the occasion, the message of the teacher is

gathered from the completed revelation contained in the scriptures. ( Vine).

5. Teach – Katecheo. To teach orally to instruct in the NT used only by Luke and Paul I Cor. 14:19 – by hearing the law, want to be publicly read in the synagogues Rom. 2:18 (Thayer, p. 740).

6. Learn – Marthuno – absol. To increase one's knowledge, I Tim 2:11; II Tim 3:7; to be increased in knowledge I Cor. 14:31, Rom. 16:17; I Cor. 14:35, Ph. 4:9. Learn – Manthuno – to learn, to increase one's knowledge, or be increased in knowledge, frequently to learn by inquiry or observation e.g., Matt. 9:13;... I Cor. 14:35; Phi. 4:9;... – Vine.

### III. UNDERSTANDING I COR. 14

A. Paul would be contradicting himself if within the same book, in chapter 11, he says women may prophesy in the church provided they cover their head, but in chapter 14, he says they should keep silent in the church as they are not permitted to speak but to be in subjection. If that be the case, the Corinthians would have become more confused.

The women at Corinth apparently understood that prophesying in the church, thereby teaching the church is an act of authority. For this reason they were removing their veils before prophesying or praying in the assembly. Paul simply told them the divine order of headship: God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of man, and man is the head of woman. He also told them their action was contrary to what was obtainable in all the churches – I Cor. 11:3-9, 16. In chapter 14, he told them explicitly that it was wrong for them to prophesy, speak in tongues, etc., in the assembly. To maintain decency and orderliness in the church, two or three prophets may not speak simultaneously; hence one prophet should keep silent for another to speak (v. 28-30).

Those who speak in tongues should speak in turn, one after another (v. 27); and one prophet should keep silent for another to speak (v. 29, 30). But women should keep silent in the churches for they are not permitted to speak (v. 34).

This is a universal regulation based on a divine law – “as in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches, they are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says.” In an attempt to justify women speaking in the assembly on the supposition that the word silent here forbids a woman to sing or say amen, some have made the following quibble. “If women should say amen in the assembly, under the law, there is no reason to forbid it today.” Could women have read the scriptures where they said amen in Nehemiah 8 in the Old Testament? If not, what are we saying then?

If they want to know more, if they need clarification concerning what has been said – remember they have been learning, vv. 3, 9, 31. But they want to learn more, let them ask their husbands at home. It is worthy of note that the word speak as used throughout this chapter is connected with edification – i.e. speaking in tongue, v. 5, prophesying, v. 3. The woman is commanded to be silent in regard to the speaking of the chapter (v. 12; cp. v. 26). If they want to learn, if they want to increase their knowledge about anything (v. 35). This does not mean that they were disrupting the service.

B. The fact that women were told to ask their questions outside the assembly shows that it was an assembly where questions can be asked but women were forbidden to do so.

Paul is simply saying they should ask their questions outside the assembly and not in the assembly. He gave a similar injunction in I Cor. 11, “If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home...” -I Cor. 11:34. I doubt if anyone understands Paul here as saying at home is the only place anyone who is hungry may eat. Let us be realistic in understanding Paul's injunction here also.

Is it reasonable to think that Paul would have forbidden a class of women to ask questions in the assembly while he allows another class of women to ask their questions?

Let us think for a moment, did the Corinthians obey Paul's injunction in this chapter? If yes, were they allowing some women i.e. widows, unmarried, women who had no spiritual gifts and wives of unbelievers to ask their questions in the church but disallowed wives of prophets, spiritually gifted women and married women to ask their questions? Let us reason. Is it not the case that just as God through Eve spoke to all women in the book of Genesis, God through the Corinthian women spoke to all women of all ages?

#### IV. I TIMOTHY 2:11, 12 AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN

Paul had enjoined prayers for kings and all men in vv. 2-4. In verse 8 he directed that the men should pray everywhere. Man in contradistinction to women. Just as this passage states (11) women should learn in silence. In verse 12 he says he does not permit a woman to teach nor to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.

An analysis of 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14.

1 TIMOTHY 2	1 CORINTHIANS 14
I suffer not a woman to teach (12)	It is not permitted unto them to speak (34)
Nor exercise dominion over man (12)	Commanded to be under subjection (34)
Let the women learn in silence (11)	Keep silence in the churches (34)
With all subjection (11)	It is a shame for women to speak (34)
Reference to creation (13, 14)	Reference to law at creation (34)

A woman should learn (the same Greek word we have in I Cor. 14:31, 35) in silence is used for quietness as well as silence – hesuchia.

Quietness: descriptive of the life of one who stays at home doing his own work, and does not officiously meddle with the affairs of others II Th. 3:12

Silence: Acts 22:2; I Tim 2:11 (sq-Thayer). In this verse it means silence as in Acts 22:2. A woman is not to teach – woman not to teach – didasko – to hold discourse with others in order to instruct them, deliver didactic discourses: I Tim. 2:12.

To teach one something II Tim. 2:2. Didactic “To teach, used or intended for teaching or instruction.”

What is the purpose of Bible reading in the assembly is it not for teaching or instruction? Paul told Timothy, “give attention to public reading, to exhortation, to doctrine”, I Tim. 4:13 (KJV). May a woman do the same? When a man stands up and reads scriptures to our hearing, is he in any way instructing us? If yes, what difference does it make when a woman does so? Think about this!

V. A woman is not to have authority over a man. Paul says, “...I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man,....” –v.12, NKJV. Some capitalize on the word “usurp” and contend that if a man asks a woman to read the Bible to the assembly, she will not be usurping authority over the man. The word usurp as found in KJV is not in the original, the Greek word simply means to have authority. Vincent says “the verb means ‘to do a thing oneself’ hence, ‘to exercise authority.’ The King James version ‘usurp authority’ is a mistake”. No man, under the pretense of not usurping authority, has the power to authorize a woman to do what God has forbidden her to do, by asking her to read the Bible or make comments in the assembly.

VI. A woman should be a teacher – II Tim. 2:2. The word “men” in this passage is the general word for human being. Anthropos univ., with ref. to the genus or nature, without distinction of sex, a human being, whether male or female. Therefore, women should be teachers. However, they are not to be teachers of men but of women (Tit. 2:4).

VII. Silence in the two passages.

The words Paul used for silence in both passages are appropriate for his purpose and easy to understand if we are really prepared to be obedient and do the will of God. W.E. Vine defines Sigao thus; "to be silent" (from sige, "silence") translated "to hold one's peace" in Luke 9: 36;18:39; 20:26;Acts 12:17;15:13; (in verse 12 "kept silence"; similarly rendered in 1 Cor. 14: 28,30, KJV., " hold his peace," (v.34). Hesuchia may describe a silence stronger than sigao as can be seen in Acts 21: 40 and 22:2. It is crystal clear that the silence of the people in 22:2 is greater than in 21:40, yet Luke used "sige" to describe their great silence in 21:40, "there having been a great silence," (YLT), but he used "hesuchia" in 22: 2 to describe the greater silence; "gave the more silence..." –(ibid). This is the sense in 1 Tim 2:11.

Some have conjectured that if Paul meant that women in Corinth should be absolutely silent, He would have used the Greek word "siopao". Even if Paul had used "siopao" in these passages, it would still not mean that the women will remain dumb in the church forever. For Jesus held his peace, "siopao" before the high priest (Mat 26:63), but he broke his silence within a few minutes, he spoke to the same high priest in verse 64. A spiritually gifted woman at Corinth may break her silence in the assembly without contradicting the new order of the Holy Spirit; by answering a query as Saphira did in Acts 5. But she will disobey the Holy Spirit if she takes up public reading of the scriptures as Paul instructed Timothy to "attend to the public reading of scripture..." -1Tim. 4:13, RSV.

### **CONCLUSION:**

God has placed the leadership of the church on the shoulders of men. Women are to learn in silence. Leaders of the church are always men. The Apostles of Christ were men. The Elders of the church were men. The Deacons of the church were men. The Evangelists were men. Only men taught publicly in the church in New Testament times. When churches assembled as a body or entire group for church functions, the only people who ever spoke or addressed the group were men. No examples of women speaking. Women are forbidden to teach, read the Bible or ask questions when the whole church comes together. Let us not tamper with God's order in the church; let us respect the word of God. God means what He says. Let the women keep silence in the churches!

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## **Women Speaking In Church**

William J. Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

### **Introduction:**

The topic of women's role in the church, and specifically speaking in the church, has sadly been a contentious issue among some brethren. As with any Bible topic, our aim must be to seek truth. As we study, we ought to acknowledge it is wrong to bind beyond what God has bound and it is wrong to tolerate things that fall short of what God has commanded. May our determination always be to do what pleases God, not ourselves.

I have been asked to review and respond to brother Ojeva's material in this issue of Meditate On These Things. I appreciate our brother's desire to pursue truth and his diligence in studying this topic and give a hearty "Amen" to many of the things which he has written. In particular, I am thankful for the time he spent dealing with the various attempts to discount 1 Corinthians 14. To be clear, I do not take any of the positions which he refuted. The principles in 1 Corinthians 14 are as applicable to the Lord's church today as they were in the time of the Corinthians. The key is for us to understand what speech the apostle Paul was limiting in the text.

### **The Principle Established - 1 Timothy 2:11-12**

We will come to a detailed discussion of 1 Corinthians 14 later in this article, but I would like to begin with 1 Timothy 2. I believe the general principle regarding women's role in the church is established by Paul in his writing to Timothy, and then what we see in 1 Corinthians 14 is a specific application of the principle.

Depending on translation, the Greek *hesuchia* is rendered as "silence," "quietness," or "quietly" in English. The word can describe complete desistance of speech (as used in Acts 22:2) but can also refer to

quietness (as used in 2 Thessalonians 3:12). Brother Ojeva affirms the sense of *hesuchia* in 1 Timothy 2:11 to be the same as in Acts 22:2, however, there is no contextual reason to draw this conclusion. The combination of *sigao* and *hesuchia* in Acts 21-22, leading to the phrase, "...kept all the more silent..." clearly demonstrates a hush over the crowd. 1 Timothy 2:11-12 does not necessarily infer the women are to be hushed.

In the second to last paragraph of his article, our brother stated, "*A spiritually gifted woman at Corinth may break her silence in the assembly without contradicting the new order of the Holy Spirit; by answering a query as Sapphira did in Acts 5.*" This stands in opposition to his statement about *hesuchia* in 1 Timothy 2:11 having the same sense as in Acts 22:2 (ie. no speech). A woman, gifted or not (nothing in Acts 5 would lead us to believe Sapphira was spiritually gifted) may break her silence in the assembly without contradicting God's word, and not simply by answering a query. The only stipulation given in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is that she be submissive learner not an authoritative teacher.

Paul's instruction for the relationship of men and women in the church is based on creation itself. Verse 13 reads, "*For Adam was formed first, then Eve.*" Why is the woman to be a quiet and submissive learner? Why is she not to exercise authority over a man? It is rooted in the creation account. Genesis 2:18 identifies Eve as "a helper comparable to him." He was given authority over her and she was to submit to his leadership (Genesis 3:16). It was when she stepped out of this God-given arrangement she was deceived by the devil and fell into transgression (1 Timothy 2:14; Genesis 3:6). God's expectation for women in the church is grounded in His design for the marriage relationship. Of course, the two are not 100% parallel, but there is a correlation.

The Bible has multiple authority/submission relationships in it. None of them require absolute silence by the submissive party. The wife does not negate her husband's authority by speaking in his presence. The servant does not negate the master's authority by speaking in his presence. The employee does not negate the employer's authority by speaking in his presence. The student does not negate the teacher's authority by speaking in his presence. All the above, including the woman who is a student in a Bible class, may speak in a manner which demonstrates submission and deference to authority.

Thayer defines teach as "*to hold discourse with others in order to instruct them; deliver didactic discourses; to discharge the office of teacher, conduct oneself as a teacher, to impart instruction, instill doctrine into one; prescribe a thing; to explain, expound, to teach one something.*" Merriam-Webster defines discourse as "*a long and formal treatment of a subject in speech or writing, lecture, treatise, dissertation.*" The Bible never uses the word teach to describe participation from a crowd in a discourse being delivered by a teacher. It is used of the speech, lecture or dissertation itself, but not of comments from those who are hearing it, whether male or female.

Consider a few examples from the secular world to demonstrate the point. If a student in a public school classroom speaks, whether it be a question or a comment, has that student suddenly become the teacher of the class? Or if a college student speaks in the lecture hall, whether it be a question or a comment, has that student somehow become a college professor? It doesn't matter whether it is a public school classroom, a community college lecture hall or the assembly of the local church – participation in a class does not make the participant, whether male or female, the teacher of the class.

1 Timothy 2:11-12 is not an injunction against women speaking about religious things in the assembly or in a mixed Bible study; it is an injunction against her being the teacher, the one who has authority in the class, for a woman is not "*to teach or have authority over*" men. In John 4, Jesus taught the Samaritan woman and eventually the entire city of Sychar. In the course of their conversation, there is no doubt that Jesus is the teacher, yet the woman made more affirmative statements than she asked questions. Jesus did not rebuke her for trying to teach Him or usurp His authority but answered her questions and addressed her concerns in order to effectively teach her. In Acts 18, Apollos, an eloquent and powerful preacher came to Ephesus. Aquila and Priscilla were among those who heard him speak, and they heard him teach John's



baptism rather than baptism into Christ. Verse 26 says, “*When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.*” Who took him aside? Both. Who explained to him the way of God more accurately? Both. We don’t have details about the conversation, but the text tells us Priscilla was involved. She participated in a submissive fashion, not violating the authority of her husband, not taking the lead in the study, not becoming the teacher; but was still able to participate. In Luke 11, Jesus spoke of casting out demons by the power of God and the need to fill what has been cleansed with good, lest evil come once more and reside there. The text tells us “...*a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!’*” (v 27). Jesus did not rebuke the woman for speaking up, but build upon her statement, saying, “...*More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it*” (v 28). In each of these cases, women were active participants in religious discussions, both in private and public settings, but none of them violated God’s will for the woman to be submissive.

### **A Specific Application Of The Principle – 1 Corinthians 14:34-35**

The word “silence” in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is from the Greek *sigao*, defined as “*to keep silent; hold one’s peace ... to keep in silence, be concealed*” (Thayer’s). *Hesuchia*, used in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 governs the manner of speech (quietness, not causing disturbance). It allows speech but acknowledges deference to authority. *Sigao*, as Paul used it in 1 Corinthians 14 demanded desistence of speech. However, the text is not a blanket injunction against women speaking in church. It is a specific application of 1 Timothy 2:11-12, which says she is not to teach or usurp authority. She is not permitted to take a leadership role in the assembly. It is essential for us to understand 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 in its context if we are to grasp what Paul is forbidding.

1 Corinthians 14 is part of a 3-chapter context addressing miraculous gifts. Chapter 12 introduced the gifts; chapter 13 spoke about their duration, and chapter 14 addressed their use in the assembly. In 1 Corinthians 14, the word *laleo* (to speak) appears 24 times. Brother Ojeva states the word is used in connection with edification in the text. This is true, but also, *laleo* is consistently used in 1 Corinthians 14 to address miraculous revelation (prophecy, tongues, etc.). These would be used by those who were leading the congregation in their worship and instruction. Paul did not stray from the miraculous context in verses 34-35. There was no need for him to mention specific gifts (tongues, prophecy, revelation, etc) when speaking of the women, for a woman was not to teach or usurp authority over a man. Though she might have a miraculous gift, she was not permitted to use it in the assembly. Thus, in a context about the use of spiritual gifts in the assembly, Paul says of the women, “...*they are not permitted to speak...*” (verse 34). To apply his statement to anything more (ie. speech in general) is to pull these two verses from their context.

The word *sigao* (silence) is used 3 times in the text. In verse 28, if there was no interpreter, the male tongue speaker was to “...*keep silent in the church...*” In verse 30, if something was revealed to another, the male prophet was to “...*keep silent.*” And then in verse 34, the women were to “...*keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak, but they are to be submissive...*” Neither the male tongue speaker nor the male prophet were banned from all speech. The injunction was specifically against the use of their gifts in the assembly based upon certain circumstances. Equally, Paul did not restrict women from all speech. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 specifically forbade women from using their spiritual gifts in the assembly, for to do so would be to exercise authority in the congregation. To conclude otherwise is to ignore the context and leaves the text open to misuse and abuse. It is a specific application of the general principle established in 1 Timothy 2:11-12. Does this make it a useless text, since the time of miraculous gifts has passed? Absolutely not. Do we discount John 14-16 because it contains some promises specific to the apostles and not for us? Are there still not things to learn, as we rightly divide the word? Despite the miraculous context of 1 Corinthians 14, there are timeless principles given:

- Do things with the spirit and the understanding (1 Corinthians 14:15);
- Let all things be done for edification (1 Corinthians 14:26);
- God is not the author of confusion but of peace (1 Corinthians 14:33);
- Let all things be done decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40).

In 1 Timothy 2:13, Paul linked his teaching to the creation. The apostle does the same in 1 Corinthians 14, stating women are “...to be submissive, as the law also says” (v 34). There is no “thou shalt not” command in the law regarding women speaking in a religious assembly. In fact, the topic is not addressed. Paul’s statement leads us back to Genesis 2:18; 3:16 – the authority structure established by God for the home is generically applied to religious activity, whether in Old Testament Israel or the New Testament church. Consistently texts speaking about the Levitical priesthood identify them as male (ie. Leviticus 21:1-4). Women were not permitted leadership in a religious assembly. The same is true under the New Covenant, whether it be through using miraculous gifts (as in 1 Corinthians 14) or any other exercise of leadership. Participation through comments or questions is not leadership.

But 1 Corinthians 14:35 says, “...if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.” What is she prohibited from doing in church? What is she to do with her husband at home? A straight reading of the verse, void of its context, would mean it is wrong for a woman to ask a question for the purpose of learning or seeking clarification. Those who come to such a conclusion have completely ignored the context. Remember, Paul is addressing her use of miraculous gifts in the assembly. He prohibits her from taking authority and leadership; he is not limiting her capacity and opportunity for learning.

When people see the words “learn” and “ask” in the text, it is assumed by some that she desires clarification about something that was said at the assembly. Again, this ignores the miraculous gift context. The speech under consideration are miraculous gifts. She is not permitted to use such in the assembly. So, where might she use her gifts? Paul says in verse 35 that she is to ask her husband at home. He does not mean she should ask him questions about something said at the assembly (she can do so, but that’s not what the text is about). She is to ask her husband’s permission to use her gifts in his presence at home. One of the definitions given by Thayer for *manthano* (learn) is “learn by reason of use.” If she wants to use her gifts, let her ask (seek permission) her husband at home, not at the assembly.

Some might object - she would be usurping her husband’s authority then! If God’s word tells her to ask her husband at home, then the Lord did not count it a violation of the husband’s authority. And presumably, if his conscience is weak and he feels threatened, he would have the right to say no. To give a modern equivalent, my wife cannot lead a song she knows which others do not in the assembly. For her to lead the assembly in song (any song, whether known or unknown to the group) would usurp authority and cause her to become a leader. However, in the privacy of our home, she can share her knowledge of the song with me.

## **Conclusion**

As stated in our introduction, we must not bind where God has not bound, nor loose where God has not loosed. Paul clearly forbade women to exercise leadership within the assembly. She is not to address the assembly in such a way that she takes a role of authority. Some brethren would have us believe God’s word forbids a woman from commenting in a Bible class, from asking a question for clarification or from answering a question posed by the teacher. The Scriptures place no such limitations on women. These brethren are binding where God has not bound.

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