

MUST WOMEN KEEP SILENT IN CHURCH?

- A. Introduction: We're getting more and more viewers to our live stream and the website, and although many find the teachings helpful, some express confusion because they've been told that the Bible does not permit women to teach men. So, we're taking two weeks to consider whether or not women can teach the Bible.
1. Our purpose is not only to clear up confusion, but to demonstrate the importance of learning to read the Bible in context. The idea that woman cannot teach the Bible, particularly to men, comes from taking two verses out of context and giving them meanings not supported by the text. I Tim 2:12; I Cor 14:34-35
 - a. The Bible is not a collection of verses. It is a collection of 66 books that all together reveal God's plan of redemption—His plan to have a family of sons and daughters through Jesus and the Cross.
 1. The Bible wasn't written in chapters and verses. Those divisions were added for reference purposes long after the writings were completed. To properly interpret Scripture, we must consider individual verses in the context of the book in which they are located.
 2. The Bible is over 50% history. It is a historical record of God's interaction with human beings He worked out His plan of redemption. Every book and every verse in each book has a historical context. Real people wrote to other real people about real issues. A verse cannot mean something to us that it would not have meant to the people to whom it was first written.
 - b. This is why it is important to understand the origins of the New Testament. The men who wrote its contents (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) were eyewitnesses of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ or close associates of eyewitnesses—Matthew, John, Peter, Mark, Luke, James, Jude, Paul.
 1. These men did not set out to write a religious book or list the rules of Christianity. They set out to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus. They proclaimed what they saw and what they heard from Jesus. Acts 1:8; Acts 2:32; Acts 3:15; Acts 4:33; Acts 9:15; Acts 26:16; etc.
 2. Jesus commissioned His apostles (eyewitnesses) to make disciples of all nations by teaching them. Writing to the new believers was a necessary part of that process. Matt 28:19-20
 - A. As people came to faith in Christ and churches were established, the apostles found themselves in charge of new believers who needed to be educated in their new found faith.
 - B. These converts were from different cultures and backgrounds and they brought issues with them that had to be address. In addition, false teaching sprang up almost immediately as Satan tried to make the Word of God ineffective by perverting it. Acts 20:28-29; etc.
 2. The New Testament epistles were written to explain to new believers what Christians believe and how they live—as well as to combat false teachings. The two verses that we're considering in our discussion about women teachers are located in the New Testament letters (epistles).
 - a. Last week we examined the verse most often cited to assert that women can't teach: But I suffer not a woman to teach nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence (I Tim 2:12—KJV).
 - b. When this verse is examined in context we find that Paul (the writer) was not banning all women everywhere from teaching but was dealing with a particular situation at a specific time and place.
 1. Paul was writing to Timothy, the overseer of the church at Ephesus. One of the reasons Paul wrote was to exhort Timothy to deal with false teachings that were infiltrating the church.
 2. Timothy faced false teachers, some of whom were women. Paul's prohibition of women teachers had nothing to do with their gender. It had to do with what they taught. I Tim 1:3-4
 3. In this lesson we'll deal with Paul's other statement cited to say women can't teach: Let your women keep silence in the churches...for it is a shame for women to speak in the church (I Cor 14:34-35, KJV).
- B. As with last week's verse (I Tim 2:12), we must consider the context of I Cor 14:34-35. Would Paul's first readers and listeners have taken his statement to mean women can't speak (or teach) in church?
1. After Jesus rose from the dead He remained on earth for 40 more days before returning to Heaven.

Before He left, Jesus told His apostles to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit. About 120 men and women, along with the twelve apostles, gathered together. Acts 1:1-8; 13-15

- a. Ten days later, on the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, they were filled with the Holy Ghost in a dramatic way and they all began to speak with other tongues. When the people outside the building where this occurred heard the noise, a crowd gathered. Acts 2:1-13
 1. Peter stepped forward and preached to the crowd, citing the Old Testament prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-29) to explain what was happening. There's a lot in this incident that we aren't going to deal with now, but notice one point relevant to our discussion.
 2. In the first sermon preached at the very beginning of the church, Peter, quoting the prophet Joel, said that in the last days (which began with the first coming of Jesus) God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh and men and women would both prophesy.
 - b. Luke (the author of Acts) came to faith in Christ, probably through Paul's ministry, and traveled extensively with him on his missionary journeys (Acts 16:10-17; Acts 20:5-28:31).
 1. If Paul were opposed to women speaking in church about the things of God, surely Luke would have known it and would not have included this detail in Peter's sermon.
 2. But, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, at the first public assembly, Peter proclaimed (and Luke reported) that in the days leading up to Jesus' return, women will prophesy as do men.
2. There are two kinds of prophesy found in Scripture. One is foretelling or predictive and is connected to the office of prophet (lessons for another day). There is also a more common type of non-predictive prophesy which is inspired speaking that edifies, exhorts, and comforts. I Cor 14:3
- a. Edify means to build up. Exhort means to arouse with words. Comfort means to encourage. I Cor 14:3—The one who prophesies...speaks to men (human beings) for their up building and constructive spiritual progress and encouragement and consolation (Amp).
 - b. Paul echoed what Peter proclaimed on the Day of Pentecost when he wrote in I Cor 14:31 that all (men and women) may prophesy. Paul further noted that through prophesy all (men and women) may learn and be comforted or encouraged. When a woman prophesies a man can learn.
 1. v31—For in this way you can all preach to one another, as you are inspired (Goodspeed) so that the whole congregation may receive instruction and encouragement (Neb).
 2. You may notice that this statement is in the same chapter where Paul supposedly commanded women to keep silent in church (v34-35).
3. To help us understand what Paul meant in I Cor 14:34-35 and how the people he wrote to would have understood it, let's get the historical background of this letter to the Corinthians. Acts 18; Acts 19
- a. Paul established a church in the city of Corinth around AD 50-52. Corinth was the capital of the southern province of Greece called Achaia. Corinth was a crossroads for travel and commerce and a city of wealth and pleasure. It had a population of 500,000 including Greeks, Romans, and Jews.
 1. Paul went to work as a tent maker to support himself. He met Aquila and Priscilla, Jewish tent makers who had been expelled from Rome due to the anti-Semitic decrees of Caesar Claudius. They came to faith in Christ, possibly through Paul.
 - A. Both Jews and Gentiles were converted to Christ, but, as often happened when Paul preached, he made many Jews angry and persecution against him began.
 - B. After much persecution from the Jews in Corinth Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla moved to Ephesus, an easy 200 mile trip across the Aegean Sea. Paul left the couple there, visited Jerusalem, and returned to his home base in Antioch, Syria.
 2. While Paul was gone from Ephesus Aquila and Priscilla met Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria. He knew only the Old Testament. The couple explained the way of God to him more fully (taught him). Apollos went on to Corinth with the recommendation of Aquila and Priscilla.
 - b. Paul returned to Ephesus (AD 52-55), established a church and had a successful three year ministry.

At some point Apollos also went back to Ephesus because divisions or factions were developing (I Cor 3:4-7). Paul received additional reports of problems in the church.

1. The household of Chloe also brought a report of division (I Cor 1:11). Three church members (Stephanas, Fortunatus, Achaicus) brought Paul a financial gift and probably added more details about what was going on (I Cor 16:17). One of these groups brought Paul a letter from the church at Corinth with questions dealing with various moral and doctrinal issues (I Cor 7:1).
 2. Paul couldn't leave Ephesus at that time so he wrote them an epistle. I Cor 14:34-35 is found in the section where Paul dealt with issues and questions in the letter that was brought to him.
 3. We don't have a copy of the questions themselves, so we have to presume what they were based on his answers. Paul addressed issues concerning marriage (7:1-24), virgins (7:25-40), things sacrificed to idols (8:1- 11:1), problems in public worship (11:2-34), misuse of spiritual gifts (12:1-14:40), the resurrection of the dead (15:1-58), and the collection for the saints (16:1-4).
- c. With this background information, let's consider what I Cor 14:34-35 means in its original context.

C. Some of the issues at Corinth expressed themselves at their public gathering and Paul addressed the problems in his epistle. For example, the Corinthians were getting drunk and overeating at their communion celebrations—and Paul rebuked them for it. I Cor 11:20-26

1. Our key verse is found in the chapter 14. Paul didn't spell out the specific issues he was addressing—he doesn't have to because they all know what he was talking about. It's their church and their problems. But there's enough information to infer that there was a problem with speaking in tongues in the church.
 - a. They were either showing off or trying to outdo each other since Paul emphasizes the fact that the purpose of inspired speaking in a known or an unknown tongue in a public setting is edification—the building up of fellow members of the body of Christ. The word edify is used seven times in this chapter (v3; v4 (2X); v5; v12; v17; v26).
 1. Paul told them that people should not speak to each other in tongues unless there is an interpreter. That way the hearer understands the message and is build up or edified by it. If there is no interpretation keep silence (or silent). v26-28
 2. Paul reminded them that God is not the author of confusion and that all things should be done decently and in order (v33; v40). Note verse 39—When Paul said keep silent in church he wasn't telling people not to speak in tongues. He was telling them not to be disorderly.
 - b. Before we address the verses concerning women keeping silent in church note two points.
 1. One, as Paul dealt with the issue of misusing tongues in public worship, he made the point that women can prophesy (speak an inspired message in a tongue known by the hearer, v31). It makes no sense that three verses later (v34-35) he would tell women they can't talk in church.
 2. Two, in I Cor 11:20-26 where Paul addressed drunkenness and gluttony at public worship services, Paul also addressed the appearance of women in public worship services. v4-5
 - A. We could do an in depth teaching on I Cor 11:3-16. The passage addresses issues concerning the role of men and women and submission and authority—way more than we can deal with now. And, that discussion doesn't affect the point we are making, one way or the other. In v4-5 Paul was addressing cultural issues concerning modesty in public.
 - B. In other words, Paul was dealing with how women (in that time and culture) should dress (wear veils) when they speak in a church service. This is the same epistle where Paul seems to tell women to be silent in church. If they can't speak in church why is he telling them how to dress when they prophesy or pray in public?
2. What did Paul mean in I Cor 14:34-35? Remember Paul was addressing was order in public worship.
 - a. Let's begin with his statement about the Law. Nowhere does the Law of Moses and the Prophets

say that it is a shame for women to speak in public. The Law referred to is the oral law of the Jews.

1. These laws consisted of comments on the Torah (first five books of the Bible). They included discussions, sayings, and interpretations from early rabbis and scribes. These regulations were handed down orally from one generation to another and were eventually written down.

2. By New Testament times these traditions were given the same weight as the Bible (the Torah). These are the traditions Jesus referred to in His discussions with the Pharisees. Matt 15:3

A. The oral law blamed women for the fall of man, viewed women as property that was to be heard and seen as little as possible. They were not permitted to learn to Law of Moses.

B. A rabbinic text read: It is better for the words of the Torah to be burned than for them to be given to a woman. Josephus wrote: The law says the woman is in all things inferior to a man. Let her accordingly be submissive. Jewish men prayed: Praise be to God he has not created me to be a Gentile. Praise be to God he has not created me to be a woman.

3. At that time there may have been 60,000 believers at Corinth, mostly Gentiles, but many Jews as well. Jewish women could attend synagogue but were not allowed to read the Scriptures.

A. The new found freedoms in Christ that the many women converts were experiencing in public gatherings was troubling to Jews because it contradicted their laws and customs.

B. It's possible that in the letter Paul received some of the Jewish believers appealed to him to stop women from speaking in public.

b. v35—Note that the women in Corinth seemed to be speaking so that they could learn. Women in general in that day (both Jew and Gentile) were less educated than men. The learning style in that day (for both Jews and Gentiles) was questions and answers.

1. In the synagogues Jewish men were permitted to object, refute, question, and dispute with the teacher. But that would have been completely culturally inappropriate for a woman to do so.

2. We know that early Christian gathering included a time of reading from the Scriptures. It is likely that women (who knew less and in the past were not permitted to speak) were disrupting by interrupting with questions about the Scriptures.

c. Notice, Paul tells the women to be silent (v34). It's the same word Paul used for those disrupting the services through misusing tongues (v28).

1. Paul's solution to the issue was: stop asking questions (don't disrupt). Remember, in I Tim 2:11-12 Paul admonished women to learn in silence, a word that meant "tranquility from within causing no disturbance to others" (*Vine's Dictionary*, same word is used in I Tim 2:2).

2. Paul admonished them: Ask your husband at home. This doesn't mean that only the husband can teach his wife. It means husbands help your wives.

3. In v36-37 Paul rebukes the Corinthians who think that their behavior in the services is acceptable: Did the gospel originate from you? Did other churches receive it from you? Should you have rules, orders, and customs different from others? What I write is the command of the Lord. Paul rejected the silencing women but called for order in the church by silencing the disorderly (men and women).

D. Conclusion: If Paul meant that women cannot speak in church, then how far do we take his statement? Does that mean a woman cannot ask for a handkerchief or say God bless you when someone sneezes? Does it mean that a woman can't say good morning to anyone once she enters the church sanctuary?

1. When we look at Paul's statements in I Corinthians 14 and I Timothy 2 and consider them in the context in which they were written it's clear that he was addressing specific issues at a specific time and place. Paul did not forever ban women from teaching or speaking in church.

2. We could say a lot more on this topic, but as we close, consider these words Paul wrote: Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God (Col 3:16, ESV).