

I Corinthians 14:33-35

View #1 - Read it and do it - literal reading without context - "women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak."

Problem - nobody does that. Women speak in Bible classes, small groups, even in our assemblies - they sing (Eph. 5:19 - "speak to one another in Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs"), sing female leads or solos, or soprano, alto only portions, many our songs are prayers and so in song they pray, they may even "Amen" a prayer or comment, they read scripture in unison with the congregation, they speak in congregational special meetings, they confess Christ publicly when baptized, they speak during greeting times,..... So there has to be some interpretation of what this means and, in fact, all are interpreting.

Also, such a restriction seems to contradict 1 Cor. 11:3-5 where Paul gives instructions/regulations for women prophesying or praying in the church with their heads uncovered.

So, if we are going to have to interpret the text (which we always have to do), let's look at the context.

With the fact that according to 1 Cor. 11 women were prophesying, lets look a minute at what women do in the Bible that is not the traditional role of women -

1 Cor. 11 - prophesy and pray

Acts - Philips 4 daughters who prophesy (Acts 21:8-9)

Luke - Mary at Jesus' feet (being discipled) (Luke 10:38-42)

Acts - sons and daughters prophesy (Acts 2:16-18)

Priscilla - Acts 18:26 and Rom 16:3

Phoebe - Rom 16:1-2 (Deacon and possible courier of Paul's letter to the Romans)

Junia (or Junias) - Rom. 16:7 ("outstanding among the apostles)

Deborah - Judges 4-5 (4:4 - "shaphat" = national leader, judge, military leader)

Miriam - Ex. 15:20-21 and Micah 6:4 (page 1043 part of leadership team of Israel)

Huldah - 2 Kings 22:14 (options: Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk or Huldah)

4 women listed in the genealogy of Jesus - A.B. Bruce "unusual from a genealogical point of view).

Ps. 68:11 - "The Lord announces the word, and the women who proclaim it are a mighty throng." (New NIV, ESV, CEV, NLT (footnote - a host of women). Literally, "of the women who bring the news, the host is great.") The verb proclaim or publish is feminine gender, therefore, most today, translate it women. Consistent with the tradition of women announcing, singing and dancing (See Ex. 15) a great victory.

God seemed to use gifted women for his purposes throughout history even though the culture of the time seemed to lean against women in those roles.

Back to context - Let's consider 1 Cor. 11:2-16, also see 17-34 and then chapter 12 (spiritual gifts), chapter 13 (love), chapter 14 (gifts of prophecy and tongues, etc.) and then read 14:26-39.

1 Cor. 14:26 - "When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation...." Highly participatory type service. When you take a synagogue style of participatory service, add the Holy Spirit to the equation, things are going to get interesting, even chaotic - so Paul steps into that and gives them some additional regulations for the church assembled: #1 - Tongue speakers, #2 - Prophets and #3 - Women.

What does that mean for us today?

View #2 - 1 Cor. 11:2-16 is not in the assembly, transition to the assembly is 11:17 and 14:33-35 is the assembly. Paul is restricting a certain kind of speech here - speaking with authority to the whole congregation (similar to the restrictions on tongues and prophecies in v. 28 and 30) and questioning (which has become disruptive).

The justification for these restrictions is #1 - the Law (14:34) and #2 - the created order (11:8-10).

View #3 - There is a distinction between prophesying (which is regulated) and the speaking prohibited in v. 33-35.

What might these assemblies be like? Possibly like the synagogue assemblies? Most likely. A person would speak and the "elders" of the synagogue would then question and respond, etc and some determination would be made as to whether or not the teaching was acceptable.

F. Legard Smith (from his book, "Male Spiritual Leadership") - "the silence Paul is referring to in this context...narrowly defined in scope and application."

Women are not allowed to participate in this process - either the proclamation of the word (which Smith sees as different than prophecy) or the questioning process. For Smith, prophecy is a direct, revealed message from God which for the most part doesn't happen today per Smith since we now have Scripture. This gift ended (see 1 Cor. 13:8).

J. W. McGarvey (distinguished late 19th Century (1829-1911) restoration movement leader and commentary author) -

"The powers of woman have become so developed, and her privileges have been so extended in gospel lands, that it is no longer shameful for her to speak in public...the gift of prophecy no longer exists, but, by the law of analogy, those women who have a marked ability, either for exhortation or instruction, are permitted to speak in the churches... The law is permanent, but the application of it may vary. If man universally gives woman permission to speak, she is free from the law in this respect."

For Smith, the "Law" is the general law of male spiritual leadership.

What about Bible classes? They seem more like the synagogue type assembly than our main church assembly. Smith - "where the discussion is for personal growth and spiritual development" and women are submissive in their participation, then it "is permitted."

View #4 - This is cultural for that church in that time and has no application for the church today. Therefore, just ignore it.

Like we do texts about slavery. God allowed this for a time because of the nature of the culture and mission, but he was moving them forward and today we don't allow slavery and we should not restrict women.

The first century view of women contributed to this and we should not let that culture dictate our practices today. Jewish prayer - "I thank God that I am created male and not a Gentile, slave or woman."

Even if this instruction is specific to the culture and practice of the church in Corinth in the first century, might there still be something embedded in this that is valuable to the church today? In other words, is there a principle in this that is still applicable for today?

For example, five times in the NT we are commanded to “greet one another with a holy kiss.” Obviously, that was a very cultural thing. We don’t strictly obey that command today. But is there a principle in that command that we do or should follow today? Yes, greet one another warmly, with Christian, holy love for each other.....

Even the slavery texts, we interpret to apply valuable principles to the employee/employer relationship.

But how do we deal with - “As in all the congregations of the saints?” Maybe this applies to the previous statements, not the subsequent restriction on women.” The original Greek had no punctuation, no sentences as we know it, no paragraphs (no verse numbers) and all lower case.

“As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches” - kind of redundant.

Paul’s pattern is to conclude an instruction with this kind of universal statement (not begin with it) - see:

1 Cor. 4:17

1 Cor. 7:17

1 Cor. 11:16

Even if you agree that the reference to “all the congregations of the saints” is referring to the former and not the later, the restrictive verses (34-35) are still in the text and need to be addressed.

View #5 - In some early manuscripts, v. 34-35 come after v. 40. It actually doesn’t fit well where it is. Seems to be a break in what Paul was talking about. Many scholars, including Gordon Fee, doesn’t think Paul wrote these two verses, but someone added them later in the margin and then later scribes decided best where to put it and some put it after v. 33 and others put it after v. 40.

View #5A - It was not in some of the earliest manuscripts and so, Paul didn’t write it and we should not even consider it.

View #6 - This is not an absolute prohibition against women speaking in the church assembly today. There was a cultural issue Paul is dealing with in that church in that day, but there is an underlying principle that applies today.

View #6A- The speaking being prohibited is during the questioning that normally took place in these synagogue type assemblies. Women in the Jewish synagogues were not allow to speak at all. So in the Christian churches’ assemblies, there was this incredible freedom and elevation for women (see 1 Cor. 11 where they are prophesying and praying). But it is getting out of hand. There are some women that are questioning men during this time in the assembly and it is inappropriate - either because in the culture it is inappropriate for women to speak in public with a man who is not her husband or the women don’t have the educational background yet to participate well in this time or they are doing it in a way that is not mutually submissive or not orderly.

Scott McKnight and Craig Keener - "if they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home" clarifies the type of speaking that Paul is restricting. The asking of questions in the Q&A time of the assembly. The reason: they are not yet educated theologically or biblically as the men.

Jewish women were taught enough of the Torah "to know the penalty for adultery." See Jay Guinn, "Buried Talents", p. 119. This may especially be aimed at Jewish members of the church in Corinth - see v. 36 "did the word of God originate with you? Are you the only people it has reached?"

Grecian women fared no better. Plutarch, a contemporary of Paul, wrote "not only the arm, but the voice of a modest woman ought to be kept from the public, and she should feel shame at being heard, as at being stripped....she should speak either to or through her husband." see Barclay in Guinn p. 120. Women questioning men who were not their husbands would have opened the church up to the reputation of being loose and immoral.

Obviously, these Greek Christian women would have little or no theological or biblical education.

What Paul is saying is "learning before speaking". This is significantly progressive for that day and time. Paul is saying women can and should learn. Wow! He is way ahead of his time - as Wade Hodges would say, this is consistent with the "arc or projection of scripture" pulling humanity forward to the ideal (as in Genesis 1 and 2 and will be).

Application: During our classes, assemblies, maybe even small groups, people (both men and women) might not ought to speak if it is disruptive because their speaking to someone or in a way that is inappropriate (for example, speaking to one not their mate in inappropriate ways or disruptive because of their very limited understanding). Maybe for awhile they should just quietly learn and then they can speak.

David Lipscomb -

"Yet, women have the right to teach those who know less than themselves; Priscilla and Aquila taught Apollos (Acts 18:24-26). So, I am sure that a woman may teach the Bible to young and old, male and female, at the meeting house, at home, at a neighbor's house, on Sunday or Monday or any other day of the week, if they know less than she does, if she will do it in a quiet, modest, womanly way."

View #6B - Most likely, in the first century assemblies men sat on one side and women on the other, just like in the synagogue (and in India, Africa, ...). If, in fact, the women were not well educated about the things being said, the women may have become bored, etc and started speaking among themselves and this is causing a disturbance. Some of the women may not even know the language or Greek dialect being used. If so, then Paul is saying "hush" you are disturbing the assembly.

We do this sometime with our young people - you need to be quiet. We don't mean they can never speak in the assembly. In fact, next week, we may ask them to read scripture.

Application: Our assemblies should not be disturbed by people (men, women or children) who are carrying on their own conversations during the assembly.

View #6C - This is only restricting married women based on a specific issue dealing with some married women in the Corinthian church.

The greek work “gyne” (pronounced “guy-na”) can be translated “woman” or “wife.” There are no separate words in the Greek for woman and wife. So one must rely on the context. Here the context seems to indicate that Paul is referring to “wives” since he clearly states in v 35 that “they should ask their own husbands (“own man”) at home.”

These women may have been speaking out in a way that was embarrassing their husbands - disagreeing with them or arguing with them. Paul - “do that at home, not here in the church”. Or questioning or debating a man not her husband which would be culturally inappropriate since it was somewhat inappropriate to speak in public to a man not your husband. Further, if Paul meant all women can’t speak but have to ask questions at home, then how do unmarried and widowed women learn? (Possibly, they would have a “guardian” or legal representative, etc to ask).

Greek “aner” = man or husband. Again there are not different words in the Greek for man and for husband. So have to figure out which is meant by the context. The Greek word here before “aner” is “idios” = own. So speak to “your own man” not someone else’s man (probably meaning husband).

Application: Men nor women should speak in the assembly in a way that is embarrassing to their spouses or argumentative. Speaking in ways that is inappropriate should not take place, but rather do this at home or in private.

View #6D - The Greek word Paul uses here for silent is “sigao”.

1 Cor. 14:28 - re. tongues “If there is no interpreter, the speaker should (sigao) keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God.” It was a conditional silencing until there is an interpreter.

1 Cor. 14:30 - re. prophecy, prophecy “Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. 30 And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should (sigao) stop. 31 For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.” It was a conditional silencing for there to be order.

1 Cor. 14:34 - re. women, “Women(or wives) should (siago) remain silent in the churches.” they are causing issues and should “sigao”, be silent. The context seems to be that Paul is dealing with the disorderly, confusing, chaotic assemblies and so he tells these women who are contributing to that to “hush” (not permanently) until and unless is it orderly and appropriate.

Compare v. 28 - “be silent in the churches” to v. 34 - “in the churches be silent.”

This seems to fit the context of all of this about their assemblies.

Furthermore, most scholars interpret (based on other uses of the word in the NT and other literature of the day) as to “hold one’s peace.” In other words, listen for awhile. Listen to what someone else has to say.

Different Greek words for silence -

#1 - "hesuchadzo - meaning peaceful, calm, to cause no disturbance (Acts 22:2 and 1 Peter 3:4)

#2 - "katasello" - meaning to quiet down, to appease, to cease from loudness (Acts 19:34-35)

#3 - "phimoo" - meaning to muzzle, to force speechlessness (Matt. 22:34, 1 Peter 2:15)

#4 - "sigao" - meaning to hold one's peace and be silent (Luke 20:26)

#5 - "siopao" - meaning to be silent, unable to speak (Matt. 20:31, Mark 4:39)

It seems that if total silence was intended Paul would have used #3 or #5, but he used #4. #1, #2 and #4 seem to indicate "more of a desire for calmness, peace or passive restraint."

Eugene Peterson -

"Wives must not disrupt worship, talking when they should be listening, asking questions that could more appropriately be asked of their husbands at home... Wives have no license to use the time of worship for unwarranted speaking" The Message.

"Lalien" = speak in v. 34. (Guinn) - the verb is in the present tense indicating continuous action. "they are not allowed to continually speak."

Also, if this is a silence of a type of speaking, then what is that type? Unsubmissive - since the text goes on to state "but must be in submission." Maybe the speaking that Paul is restricting is a type of speaking that is not submissive.

More on submission later, but Paul taught that women were to be submissive to their husband and Paul also taught mutual submission.

Application: Those (men or women) who speak in the assembly in ways that are contributing to disorder and confusion should be silent and speak only in ways that are appropriate and edifying to the church.

View #7 - Paul is not actually setting forth a rule for the Corinthian church or other churches for that matter, but is actually quoting someone who is proposing that women not speak and is then dismissing that idea out of hand.

In verse 34, he refers to "as the Law says." What law? There is no place in the OT or Torah commanding women not to speak in an assembly. In fact, the synagogue practice of assemblies really didn't arise until Israel went into captivity.

In the NIV, ESV, NLT footnote, Amplified Bible, ASV, the Complete Jewish Bible, Ps. 68:11 is translated "the Lord gives the word; the women who announce the news are a great host." Sounds like the OT endorses women speaking the word. A literal translation seems to be "a host of women."

Now, the Talmud (oral traditions that became written in 200 BC, commented and expanded upon the Mishnah which was a commentary or repeating of the Torah) prohibited a woman from speaking in the Jewish assembly or even asking questions.

“A woman’s voice is prohibited because it is sexually provocative.”

“Women are sexually seductive, mentally inferior, socially embarrassing, and spiritually separated from the law of Moses; therefor, let them be silent.”

“It is a shame for a woman to let her voice be heard among men.”

“The voice of a woman is filthy nakedness.”

Then in verse 36 when Paul says “What, did the word of God originate with you” he is calling into question those who are saying, based on the Talmud, that women must be silent.

Probably the best example of Paul doing this is in Rom 6:1 - “shall we go on sinning so that grace may about? By no means!”

Remember in the Greek there is no punctuation so it is not always clear where to put quotation marks. If you do put quotation marks around v. 34-35, then it is read as if Paul was saying, some of you are saying, but did the Word of God originate with you.....therefore, be eager to prophesy and do not forbid speaking in tongues...but everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.”

View #8 - If allowed by the elders of the church, then a woman is speaking under their authority and so it is ok. This is based on the authority of the elders and on the text admonition that these women or wives “must be in submission.” More on this next time as we discussed the restrictive passage in 1 Tim. 2.

View #9 - Grace - Doesn’t really matter, because it is all about grace. It is not critical to the gospel. We are saved by grace and so even if we get this wrong, it doesn’t matter. We don’t compromise the gospel, but in everything else there is freedom.

However, so was the church in Corinth and yet Paul seemed to think this mattered. it matters to Paul because it is missional - how the church represents God to outsiders (v. 33 and 22-25).

HOMEWORK – Read Acts 19-20, Ephesians, and 1 and 2 Timothy

I Corinthians 14:33-35

Instructions: Circle the View or Views you believe are the correct interpretation of the text.

Views

View #1 - Literal reading without any contextual interpretation. It means what it says and women need to be totally silent in the assembly of the church.

View #2 - 1 Col. 11 is not speaking about the assembly and 1 Cor 14 is. Thus there is no contradiction. Women are restricted from speaking to the assembled church.

View #3 - Prophecy has ended; therefore no contradiction and speaking to the church by women is prohibited.

View #4 - This is cultural and has no application for today.

View #5 - Verses 34-35 were not written by Paul and should not be in the text and are, therefore, not binding.

View #6A- Paul is prohibiting questioning that was inappropriate or disruptive. These women need to learn first.

View #6B - Paul is silencing some women who were causing a disturbance in the assembly by carrying on conversations, etc.

View #6C - Paul is silencing some married women who were speaking out in an inappropriate way (possibly embarrassing their husbands).

View #6D - "Silent" here is "sigao" which means to hold one's peace" which is not a permanent silence, but speak in ways that is orderly, appropriate and edifying.

View #7 - Paul is quoting someone else who is proposing that women should be silent and is then refuting that proposal.

View #8 - If allowed by the elders, it is ok because the elders have the authority to do so and then women are in submission to the elders.

View #9 - Grace allows this because it is not contradictory to the gospel. So women have the freedom to speak.

Other View(s) -