

Must Women Keep Silence in the Churches?

1 Corinthians 14:34-36

“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.

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.

36 What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?”

As we mentioned previously, in the original Greek there is only one word for "man" — none for husband; and only one Greek word for "woman" — none for wife. You must determine from the context whether a text is talking about women in general, or specifically about wives.

Verse 34, for instance, is not talking about **all** women. It couldn't be, because the next verse says, ***"If they will learn any thing, let them ask their HUSBANDS..."***

All women don't have husbands. Unmarried women are certainly not included in this text. The Greek word **gyne** should have been rendered here as "wives." ***"Let your wives keep silence "***

A. S. Worrell (a renown bible translator) translates these verses, ***"Let the wives keep silence in the assemblies; for it is not permitted them to speak, but let them be in subjection, as also says the law. And, if they wish to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is a shame for a wife to speak in an assembly."***

The other famous text on this subject is much like our first one.

I TIMOTHY 2:11-15

"If Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.

12 But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

13 For Adam was first formed, then Eve.

14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.

15 Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety."

Remembering these things about our texts will help you understand them: (1) Paul is not talking about all women, but about wives. (2) He is talking about learning something and asking questions (**First Corinthians 14:35; First Timothy 2:11**).

Translate the Greek word **gyne** as "wife" rather than "woman," and these texts will make sense to you. In Timothy, Paul refers to Adam and Eve, a husband and wife. He's dealing with a husband-and-wife proposition.

You see, there is really no great danger of women in general dictating to, domineering, or usurping authority over men in general. But wives have been known to subject their husbands to such indignity. And Paul is saying the wife is not to dictate to her husband or usurp authority over him in the Lord.

The women in that day had little or no education. Paul advised the wives if they would learn anything, to ask their husbands at home — thus implying the men were better informed than the women.

Alas, this is not always true now. Many women would die in hopeless ignorance of the principles of our holy faith if they depended on what crude, half-baked, pernicious, and fallacious ideas their husbands could communicate to them.

The Law of Scriptural Interpretation

Every Scripture must be interpreted in the light of what other Scripture says on the same subject. It must harmonize with all other Scripture.

Much error has resulted from ignoring this law of interpretation. That's how people have gotten into difficulty on our subject, as well as others. The interpretation we put on our text Scriptures must harmonize with all other Scripture.

You can lift verses out of their settings, ignore the law of interpretation, and make them say anything you want them to say.

There have been some wonderful men, with beautiful spirits of love, baptized with the Holy Spirit, who were great witnesses and blessings to others — for a while. But then they got off into error because they did not interpret Scripture in the light of other Scriptures.

One such man told another preacher how God had brought him a great revelation. (Revelation is all right if it is in line with the Word. If it isn't — forget it.) He thought he had a great revelation which no one else knew about. But the preacher he told it to had been in Pentecost a mighty long time and had seen certain things come up every now and then — and then fall.

Such was the case with his revelation. various pretty names on it — Restoration, Eternal Restoration, Ultimate Reconciliation, etc. In essence it was that everything is going to be restored, and everybody is going to be saved. One such group taught that even evil spirits, and possibly the devil, would be saved. And they picked out a few verses of Scripture which they think say that.

Another man, with the same revelation, was so thrilled when he told that same preacher what he'd "found out from the Bible." The preacher could tell from this man's breath he'd been drinking, and he'd curse and use God's name in vain as he talked. But he was so happy and laughed as he told me, "Our preacher preached — and I've found out from the Bible it is true — that everybody's going to be saved. It doesn't make any difference what you do. Isn't it wonderful! You know, the Bible says that with God all things are possible. And the Bible says that God's not willing that any should perish. Are all things possible to God?"

"The preacher answered, "Yes."

"Is God all-powerful? all-knowing? all-wise?"

"Yes."

"Can He do anything?" "Yes."

"Well, He's plainly said He's not willing that any should perish, so nobody's going to perish. Everybody will be saved! I've been so thrilled since I found that out."

A Full Gospel minister who for many years had a real ministry in getting people saved and baptized in the Holy Spirit got off into the same error. "For years," he said to a preacher, "I thought my alcoholic uncle who died cursing God went to hell. But now I've found out he

went to heaven. He's saved because God's not willing that any should perish, and God's all-powerful.

The man continued, "I used to talk to him years earlier about accepting Christ, but he'd curse him and send him on his way. He never did make a profession of Christ. But I know now he went straight through to the glory world."

Can you see they use Scripture all right? ***With God all things are possible*** (Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27). ***God is not willing that any should perish*** (Second Peter 3:9). Can God do anything? Is He all-powerful? Certainly! But they belabored the point. They didn't harmonize these Scriptures with other Scriptures.

The Lord Jesus Christ said that some people are going to be lost. He said, ***"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned"*** (Mark 16:15,16).

No, the extreme teaching of ultimate reconciliation is erroneous, devilish, misleading, and does damage to the Body of Christ. And we wanted to use it as an illustration.

Coming back to this woman question, can't you see that you can do the same thing with this? When one man tried to make his point with a verse of Scripture he was clinging to, it was pointed out to him another Scripture. "Well," he said, "there may have been some exceptions. But this is the way God wants it." No! If an interpretation doesn't harmonize with all other Scriptures, then the interpretation is wrong.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:5

"5 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."

Paul is talking here about women praying and prophesying in church. Some people think that to prophesy means to preach. And really it is one phase of preaching. If while you preach you say something under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, you are prophesying. Now, was Paul illogical enough — especially writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit — to tell women they could pray and prophesy (or even preach) in the 11th chapter — and then come over to the 14th chapter and tell them to be quiet?

ACTS 2:16-18

16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;

**17 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:
18 And on my servants AND ON MY HANDMAIDENS I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy."**

Hundreds of years before the Day of Pentecost, the Prophet Joel prophesied about it, saying, **"And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh____"** (Joel 2:28). Peter said on the Day of Pentecost, **"This is the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy."** We still live in that dispensation today — the Holy Spirit dispensation. God has poured out of His Spirit upon all flesh — which includes women as well as men. **"...your sons and your daughters shall prophesy ..."** The daughters will prophesy as well as the sons.

When a young Baptist pastor, first came around Full Gospel people, he fellowshiped with them primarily around divine healing. He sort of closed his ears to other things they taught, but he knew they had been given revelation on divine healing that no other churches he knew of did. The young pastor had been healed by the power of God and had been standing in faith alone — so when he found these people, it strengthened his faith to fellowship with them. As a Baptist pastor he would attend every Full Gospel service he could get to.

Some of his colleagues among the Baptists warned him against those Pentecostal people. One man in particular, a seminary graduate whom he'd known all his life, said to him one night as they discussed it for hours, "You ought to be careful now, young man, about going around those Full Gospel people. I will admit they're good people. And I'll admit they live stricter and straighter lives than most folks in our own church do. But," he warned, "that speaking with tongues is of the devil."

"Is it?"

"Yes, it is."

"Well now," the young pastor said, "it seems a little strange that people could have something from the devil and it would help them live better lives. The way I'm able to ascertain it, the works of the devil make people worse — not better." (He didn't understand speaking with tongues but instead of hindering him, the seminary graduate helped him to see that it must be good.)

"Those Pentecostal people," he went on to say, "have got to be wrong."

"Why?" the young pastor asked.

"They've even got women preachers."

"They do?"

"Yes. They let women teach, testify, and take a prominent place right in the very church service. And that is wrong."

"Is it?"

"Yes, it's wrong for women to preach, or take the lead in any way. The Bible says, '**Let your women keep silence in the church ...**' "

"Our women don't."

"Oh, well," he said, "we let them teach over in the Sunday School building, but not in the church."

"That's ridiculous!" the young pastor said. "And it's exactly what Jesus said the Jews were doing. They'd say, 'Oh, the Temple is holy here right around the altar — but the rest of it's not holy. You can do what you want to out there. You can sell sheep and cheat people out there.' But Jesus took a whip and drove out the money changers. "

"That Sunday School annex," the young pastor went on to say, "is just as holy as the sanctuary. And besides that, as far as having church is concerned, it's where two or three are gathered that they're having church. It's not the building. The building is just a place to meet."

(The church under the New Covenant is not confined to any building. Paul wrote several times, as did others, about the church in so-and-so's house. You can have church in the open air, a barn loft, downtown in a little mission, in a tent, or in a great cathedral.)

Being a Baptist, the young pastor knew this Bible teacher thought that to "prophesy" meant to preach, and there is an element of truth in that. However, all prophesying is not preaching — and all preaching is not prophesying. But the young pastor knew his friend thought that when the Bible spoke of "prophesying," it meant preaching.

So, the young pastor said, "Peter quoted Joel's prophecy on the Day of Pentecost that under this dispensation the daughters will prophesy as well as the sons. To prophesy means to preach, doesn't it? Is it wrong for them to preach?"

"Uh-h-h-h. Uh-h-h-h, his friend said. I'll have to give that a little more thought,"

"While we're on the subject," the pastor said, "let me say something else. We send women missionaries, and those women missionaries teach and preach on foreign fields. They teach other women and men as well as children. One of our recent mission magazines told about a mission station where there is no man. A woman is heading it up. Really, she's heading up what you'd call a local church, and we've put our stamp of approval on it.

"I believe it's inconsistent to say to them, 'Ladies, you can't talk over here. You can't speak in the main assembly. We won't ordain you. You must be quiet. But we recognize the call of God on your life, so we'll send you to the mission field. You can't teach or preach to men over here, but you can over there.' Then we send them to the front lines, where it's the hardest. "What's the difference," I asked him, "of preaching to the heathen over there and preaching to the heathen here?"

ACTS 1:13,14

"13 And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James.

14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, WITH THE WOMEN, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren."

There were 120 individuals — both men and women — gathered together in the Upper Room at Jerusalem. When Pentecost was fully come, the Spirit descended on them, and they were all filled and all spoke with tongues — aloud. That Pentecost morning was one glorious morning when the women were not silent!

"Yes," someone might say, "but that was in the Upper Room."

They were having church just as much as you can have church in any auditorium. The room doesn't make the church. It's the individuals gathered together to pray and to worship God that make it church — even if it's in your living room.

There also must have been women present at Cornelius' house. In Peter's account of what happened, he tells how an angel from God appeared to Cornelius and told him, ***"Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved"*** (Acts 11:13,14).

Now all of Cornelius' house consisted of more than just men. It consisted of his wife, sons, daughters, etc. And when Peter came there, they had church. It might have been in their house, but they were still having church. The Word was being preached.

ACTS 10:44-46

"44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God."

Notice that it does not say they heard the men speaking and the women keeping silence. Peter was sent to preach to the entire household, and we can conclude that since the Holy Spirit fell on all of them which heard the Word, the women as well as the men spoke aloud in other tongues and magnified God.

Women Who Prophesied

When the Spirit of God came on Mary, the mother of Jesus, on Elisabeth, the mother of John, and on Anna, the prophetess, they did not keep silence. They spoke.

LUKE 1:39-42

"39 And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda;

40 And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth.

41 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:

42 And she spake out with a loud voice ..."

When the Spirit of God came upon Elisabeth, she spoke out with a loud voice and began to prophesy. The Lord gave her a message. When the Spirit of God came upon Mary, she spoke out the beautiful prophecy you can read in **Luke 1:46-55**.

"Yeah," someone will say, "but that was in the home. It's all right in the home."

When the Spirit of God moves as people worship Him in your home, your living room, or the church building, you're having church. And when the Spirit of God moves, as far as God is concerned, there is really neither male nor female. If the Spirit of God comes on a woman, I'm not going to tell her to be quiet, are you? If she's preaching a sermon, I'm not going to tell her to hush, are you? To do so is to do despite unto the grace of God.

LUKE 2:36-38

"36 And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity;

37 And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

38 And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem."

The Bible calls Anna a prophetess, which is simply the feminine form of prophet. Anna was speaking right out in what we would call the house of God.

Paul certainly would not prevent women from speaking messages given to them by the Spirit. For the Lord said, "Your daughters shall prophesy." Paul could not countermand the Lord's order by saying, "The daughters shall not prophesy," could he? And neither can any other man.

I'm convinced Paul was saying, ***"I suffer not a wife to teach or usurp authority over her husband."*** Yet, if the husband were not a Christian, he wouldn't know anything to teach his wife, and she might have to teach him. She might even have to take authority, which is not really hers, because children need to be taught in the home. If the husband is not going to take his place and read the Bible and pray with the children, the wife should. And she is not disobeying God by doing so.

But even leaving it as the King James translates it, ***"I suffer not a woman to teach,"*** it might not have been advisable in that day and in that part of the Roman Empire for women to teach. In our times, though, even those who take a strong stand for keeping women quiet in the church services have yielded enough to let them teach in Sunday Schools and in public schools.

"Paul means, though," somebody says, "that women should not teach men."

Priscilla and Aquila were Paul's companions in whom he had great delight. And Priscilla, a woman, taught Apollos.

ACTS 18:26

"26 And he [Apollos] 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."

"Well, it's all right to teach one man," some might argue.

If it's all right to teach one man, it's all right to teach a dozen. That would be like arguing it's all right to steal one dollar, but wrong to steal five.

"They can teach, all right, anywhere but in church."

Who said so? They were having church. The three were gathered in His Name. Jesus didn't specify where they had to be gathered.

PSALM 68:11

"11 The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it."

This is a prophetic Psalm. It is talking about the Good News — the Gospel — and the day in which we are living. It has troubled some of the opposers of the ministry of women to know that the Hebrew word translated "company" is feminine — and not just a word of feminine gender, but a word which means women.

Here is the way the Isaac Leeser translation from the original Hebrew reads:

PSALM 68:11 [Leeser]

"11 The Lord gave (happy) tidings: they are published by the female messengers, a numerous host."

After all, the first one to go tell — and to preach means to go tell — the good tidings of the Resurrection of Jesus was a woman. Jesus told her, ***"Go tell. . ."*** [Matthew 28:10] They've been telling it ever since — and they should keep on telling it.

Should Women Answer the Call?

"Would you sanction the full ordination of women to the Gospel ministry?" some would like to ask. "Can they fill the offices of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher?" We read about Anna, whom the Bible calls a prophetess. It doesn't just say that she prophesied — it calls her a prophetess. There is a difference. We personally — and this is our opinion now — do not see any harm in a woman filling any of the offices in the church. However, we do believe it would be a little more difficult for a woman to stand in the office of pastor. Yet we realize God does use women as pastors.

A preacher told a story about an elderly friend of theirs, an ordained Assembly of God minister and evangelist for years, she told them about the following experience.

She said, "We owned quite a bit of vacant land behind our house, and in the summer I would put up some chairs and hold an open air meeting. Many people on our side of the city came and were saved. And because I had more or less led them to God, we just kept on going and built a church building. As soon as it was running real good, almost 200 in Sunday School, we turned it over to the Assemblies of God. I really don't believe in women pastors myself, but because I had evangelized and they were saved under my ministry, it was easier for me to get the church built."

"A little while later, during World War II, the District Superintendent of the Assemblies came to me with a request. You remember how it was during the war, when people would move away from smaller cities to larger ones to work in defense plants. He said to me, 'We've got a new church building over here, and nearly all the congregation has moved away. There's just a handful left, and they can't support a pastor and make the payments, too. It looks as though the district is going to have to make the payments or lose the property. Would you take that church?' "

This couple was in the insurance business and had an income of their own. She wouldn't have to depend on the church for support, so she told him, "Just in this emergency I'll take it for a while. I don't believe in women pastors, but I'll submit myself to you brethren of the district and to my husband, and I'll go there."

It wasn't far from her home. All she had to do primarily was preach to the small group that was left. But God began to bless, and it began to grow. There were only a dozen people when she went there, but soon the building was full. And the district didn't have to make any of the payments.

She said, "Many people were saved there, but I wouldn't baptize them. A neighboring pastor would come and baptize them. I didn't preach any funerals, either." You see, she preached and taught under the anointing of the Spirit of God — and God used her. But she didn't usurp authority or dictate to anybody.

Another woman minister, now retired, was an evangelist mightily used of God. Her husband was not a minister; he was a contractor. She was preaching before he married her. He built houses and became quite wealthy. She built churches. She would go into small towns where there was no Full Gospel church, set up a tent, or have an open air meeting. She could win the lost. The touch of God was upon her. Hundreds of people were saved through her ministry, and about seven churches which are still going today that came into being through her ministry.

"That's all wrong," someone might protest.

If it was wrong, I'm sure God will forgive her for getting hundreds of people saved and seven churches going! But, no, it wasn't wrong. She had the call of God on her and the ability to preach where others didn't. She went in, people were saved, and then a church was established. Her husband would oversee it and build a church building. She would stay until it got going, sometimes a year, sometimes two. (The Apostle Paul sometimes stayed with a group as long as three years.) Then she felt led to turn it over to a man as pastor and go on elsewhere, which was her choice.

She said, "All I did really was preach. We had a board of men and my husband met with them. He even took all the preliminaries in the meetings."

She wasn't usurping authority over anybody.

P. C. Nelson said: "Think how many splendid works have been built up by the sacrifice of the consecrated efforts of godly women without much help or encouragement either from men. Shall heavy hands be laid on such women as God has evidently called and endowed with natural gifts and Gifts of the Spirit? If God hath called them — who are we to recall them? Let God send them forth — because He's the one who did it. And when He gets ready to call them in, let Him call them in."

I think some men think that they are God — but they are not, and they need to find that out. Then Dad Nelson gave this advice, which I think is splendid: To our sisters who are preaching, teaching, and even serving as pastors, evangelists, and missionaries, we commend you for receiving and obeying the call of God on your life.