

## Women “Keeping Silent” in the Church

There are many abuses of the Scriptural, and therefore, proper role of “the modern woman” by those who wish to conform God’s word to their standards rather than vice versa. But there are also legitimate questions whose aim is much more toward understanding and conforming to God’s expectations. Hopefully, we can assist some from both groups to come to a clearer understanding of the Word of God.

### I. The Germaine Passages: 1Timothy 2:11-12 and 1Cor.14:34-35

There are two primary passages in the N.T. that address this issue: 1Timothy 2:12-14 and 1Corinthians 14:34-35. (Please read these verses in their contexts of 1Timothy 2:8-15 and 1Corinthians 14:26-40 before proceeding.)

#### A. Location (scope) is important

Both of these passages seem to be addressing women *speaking in the assembly* (worship services) of the church.

1. While we might be inclined to view 1Tim.2:9ff more *generally* in its scope of application, v.8 speaks of the responsibility of men “to pray, lifting up holy hands,” and v.11 itself refers to the women’s responsibility to “receive instruction with entire submissiveness.” Both of which seem to indicate that **the assembly, or time of worship** is the scope of application under consideration.
2. The *private role* of women that is specified (v.15) is, therefore, mentioned in contrast to the *public role* that is denied, vv.11-12.
  - a. The only “scriptural justification” I’ve ever heard offered for abandoning this restriction to allow for *women preachers* is that “in Christ” there “is neither male nor female” (Gal.3:28).
  - b. But since Paul was speaking of *salvation* in Galatians and *women’s roles* in 1Timothy, such obviously has no merit. Context. Context. Context! While women certainly may (as far as my knowledge of the Scriptures go) hold positions of authority over a man in the workplace, government (Deborah was a Judge over Israel), or even as a professor, her role is *restricted* within the *assembly/worship* service, 1Tim.2:11-12.
3. In 1Cor.14, v.26 makes it clear that the *assembly* is under consideration, and vv.34-35 likewise speak of “*in the church*” and “*in church*” as a reference to the *assembly* of saints for *worship*, cp.11:18ff and 16:1-2.

#### B. What does “remain quiet” (1Tim.2:12) and “keep silent” (1Cor.14:34) mean?

1. Let’s take 1Tim.2:12 first. The phrase “*but to remain quiet*” is contextually linked to “*I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man*” in the first part of the sentence. Thus, *remain quiet* is the opposite of *teach*, and is defined by context to this application.
  - a. But *teaching* is also accomplished by *singing*, Col.3:16. Is she therefore *prevented from singing in worship* because *teaching* is involved? Good question! It is worthy of note that in singing she *blends* her voice with others, rather than *exercising authority* by *preaching* or *leading* it singly.
  - b. Note the other part of the *restriction*: “*or exercise authority over a man*.” Is this linked only to *teaching*, or does it apply to any act of worship wherein she would *exercise* (carry out, practice, lead) *authority* over a man. Note vv.13-14 where the reason for the restrictions is given (and it isn’t “toxic masculinity” or that “Paul was a male chauvinist!”).

- c. Since the scope of application (by context) for these restrictions pertains to *worship assemblies* (vv.8,11), then she is prevented from both teaching and exercising authority over men in the worship assembly. She cannot *preach*, or *lead singing* or any other part of the worship. Her *leadership role* is a *private* rather than *public* one, v.15. However, since Col.3:16ff, or any other passage which addresses *singing* as an act of worship within the assembly of the church, is not limited to *male* members, we conclude that she may join with the singing but not lead.
2. Now let's consider 1Cor.14:34-35. *Spiritual gifts* and the *proper exercise of them* are under consideration in this chapter (and since 13:1 for that matter), 14:1ff.
- a. "*When you assemble*" (v.26) clearly identifies the *scope of application* for what follows. Consider that there were *spiritually-gifted* women, cp. Joel 2:28 and Acts 21:8-9. Why give *women* spiritual gifts and then completely restrict them from using them? So, *scope of application/restriction* is important. The use of these gifts by the women possessing them was restricted "*When you assemble*" and "*in the churches*," vv.26,34,35.
- b. Therefore, does "*keep silent in the churches*" restrict women to total silence in every application of worship, or does it only apply to the *exercise of their spiritual gifts* in worship? We've already note Col.3:16 relative to *singing* in this regard. But consider further...
- c. If "*keep silent in the churches*" applies to more than the restriction of the exercise of spiritual gifts *by women* in the worship assembly, then it must also be applied in all the same ways *to the men*, since they are likewise commanded to "*keep silent*," vv.27-28,30.
- d. But what about v.35, "*it is improper for a woman to speak in church*"? Is *singing* "*speaking*"? Yes, Eph.5:19. The *speaking* under consideration in this text (1Cor.14) is in reference to the *exercise of a spiritual gift* for the purpose of *teaching* or *edifying*, vv.27-29. Otherwise, "*keep silent*" (translated from the Greek *sigao*- *to keep silent*) would restrict her from making any vocal sound in the assembly. But we don't assume such for the same word (*sigao*) when used of the men in vv.28,30, so why would we for the women? (The reference to "*the Law*" in v.34 is evidently Gen.3:16.)

## II. Conclusions/Applications:

- A. Both of our passages restrict women from *addressing the church assembled for worship*, and from *exercising authority* (or *leadership*) over men.
- B. Neither of these passages requires *absolute silence* of women in the assembly, as shown through the related command *to sing* (though she would be prevented from *leading*).
- C. Since "*the church*" is *the people* rather than *the building*, a partial gathering of *some* of the people for the purpose of bible study rather than *worship* does not fit the scope of these restrictions. Thus, I have no problem with a woman asking or answering a question in bible class.
- D. Now, please understand that addressing this particular issue was more about demonstrating *how* to study, reason, and think than about *what* to think.