

## **WOMEN—KEEPING SILENCE IN WORSHIP** **(A study of 1 Tim. 2:8-15)**

Much has been said about women keeping silence in the church. Men vary in giving their views as to the application of Paul's language in 1 Tim. 2 and 1 Cor. 14. This article will be an examination of the two passages in relation to this subject. We will not delve into a deep study of other verses within these two passages, but confine our remarks to those verses that are pertinent to our study.

We note in verse 7 that Paul refers to his being “an apostle”, which surely reminded Timothy that what he is about to address is “authoritative”, and from the Lord, as what Paul writes is as much authoritative as if Christ Himself had said or written it (1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Cor. 2:10). The word “therefore” in the very next verse opens up what he is about to say as being “from the Lord.” He begins with the work of “men” (from the Greek word *aner*, which refers to “males”, rather than the word for mankind in general being *anthropos*.) So, the instructions here are for “males” and do not include “females” (girls or women). Paul begins with instructions regarding “prayer” but will later discuss “teaching” the word. Following this Paul says “every where”, meaning that the application of his instructions would apply **in** the setting of the worship assembly, or outside the worship assembly—in public or in private—in every place, in Corinth or any other place (1 Cor. 1:2).

We shall not spend time here looking at the rest of the verse which describes the life of the men praying. However, the application of this passage would have to be considered as prayer is offered in public places (other than in the assembly), such as the home, or in Bible study. One congregation had a group within it to start meeting in one's home, with women leading in prayer—possibly some were “chain prayers.” When the elders learned of it, they dropped in on one of the gatherings, and inquired as to their authority for women leading in prayers. The elders were told that it “just happened”, without any planning to do so. But then, the Bible Chair director (in whose house they were gathered) also “just happened” to have a piece of paper in his pocket that he pulled out with scripture he “thought” authorized such actions. “Every where” would include such gatherings. I have never heard my wife leading in prayer, for she is in subjection to me as head of the family. If it is scriptural for her to lead in prayer at home, suppose two families decide to get together for devotionals on a Saturday night, and then other families in the church also drop in and participate in the prayers, with some or all women doing the leading in prayer. Then, with the whole congregation being present in the house (which might be the place used for the Sunday worship), at midnight the group decides to just go ahead and have their Sunday worship, but in this hour the women would not be permitted to lead prayers. Doesn't this sound a little inconsistent?? They are still doing what they were doing (in worship), but it is right one time and wrong in another. It is the **action** and not the **place** that must be considered.

Some try to confine these instructions regarding “prayer” as being instructions to the “church” in the assembly, and only in the assembly.. “Every where” means “everywhere.” The persecuted disciples went “every where” preaching the word (Acts 8:4). Were they only preaching the word to a church assembly only? God commands all men “every where” to repent (Acts 17:30). Does this mean in the assembly only? Paul said he preached the same thing “every where” he went (1 Cor. 4:15). Did this mean only inside

the Sunday church assembly? Did he only preach the same thing in assemblies, and then teach something else outside the assembly? “Every where” in 1 Tim. 2:8, would mean in the church and outside the church—on the street corner, or on the radio or television or in the classroom—PUBLICLY or PRIVATELY—in whatever place they may be. In verse 9, Paul says “in like manner” before giving instructions. This term does not mean that women are also to pray “every where”, or in every place, for they are not “men.” In the term “in like manner”, he has some instructions for women, for something else that would apply “every where.” The subject of modesty is then considered. I preached at one place where one of the elders said that the passage here has nothing to do with a woman's immodesty in public, but only pertains to her dress in the worship assembly. However, the very next verse refers to her “godliness” and “good works”, with both to characterize her life in general, and not just to the assembly, for what kind of “good works” would she be doing “in the assembly?” She is to practice “godliness” and “good works” outside the assembly as well.

In verse 11 he explains further that the woman is to “learn in silence”, **with all subjection**. The learning process would not mean she can **never speak** while in the process of learning in some places, for 1 Cor. 14 discusses some circumstance where she **can** learn **at home** when she has questions, but is not to do so when the **whole church** is assembled together. Verse 12 explains that this is referring to a time when men and women are together, at which time she cannot either (1) Teach, or (2) Usurp authority **over the man**. Women are not forbidden to **ever** “usurp authority”, but she can do so over her children, or in the case of older women teaching younger women (Tit. 2:3-4). But, she is “to be in silence.” In a smaller gathering than the whole church, either in the home or where men and women are gathered for a Bible study, there is no harm in her asking or answering questions, however.

“To be in silence” does not mean women can **NEVER** say “anything in the assembly”, but in the context of teaching and learning she is to be “in silence.” We do know that in the assembly where singing, confessing faith and confessing sins, women **can speak**. We know this because the same apostle **authorizes** women to “speak” in singing, and are told to do so, for Col. 3:16 (addressed to all the “saints” in Colosse, which included women). They are to engage in “singing”, and the very next verse gives specific instructions to women to be in submission to their husbands, and this cannot rightfully be separated from verse 16, which authorizes “teaching” in singing. Singing is a mutual act of worship, but nothing is to be done **in** worship that would put the woman above the man in any kind of a leadership or authoritative role. Such is also true in a woman confessing faith “before men” (Matt. 10:32-33, where the word “whosoever” is used, which includes women). 1 John 1:7-9 also includes women confessing sin.

Finally, let's look at the women who are “to be in silence.” “Silence” comes from the Greek word husachia, which is verb form of sigao (which means “to be silent”). This word is used 3 times in the New Testament, Acts 22:2 (where the audience was the “more silent” to hear Paul's defense, and then twice in 1 Tim. 2, verses 11 and 12. It applies here in the context of learning in a situation where men would be in authority (for she is not to usurp authority over them). Another form of sigao is used in Acts 20:40 and Rev. 8:1. This last reference refers to a time when the angel is about to open the 7<sup>th</sup> seal in the presence of God. I have difficulty visualizing women yelling out “Amen”, or even a “yes”, or chattering

among themselves, or even speaking **out loud**, or muttering from their seats, in such a situation. Yet today, women are sometimes known to speak out from their pews in agreement with something the preacher says. Sometimes preachers “ask a question” from the pulpit, but usually with the idea of emphasizing a point, and is **not** asked to get a verbal answer from just anyone in the audience, man or woman. Such questions are usually rhetorical in nature, and to ask them is to answer them. But, if a preacher does ask such a question, he should not expect a public answer from any woman. If he does, he needs to consider his contribution to a the mistake a woman may make. If men do not answer, he should not ask such questions from the pulpit. We have also observed a preacher carrying on a light-hearted conversation with a woman in the audience, while he was in the pulpit, supposedly preaching the gospel. This is a violating situation, to say the least.

It has been said that this context applies to the “worship service.” We cannot disagree with that, **but** it also applies **outside** the assembly. If it does not, then we would have to conclude that it is all right for a woman to dress immodestly “outside” the worship assembly. Remember, Paul's instructions are for “every where” (1 Tim. 2:8). If these prohibitions apply only to the worship assembly, could a Christian woman lead a public prayer before an audience made of men and women in a location outside the assembly?? Could she evangelize and preach publicly on the street corner or on television, and still be in subjection? If Paul's instructions here are only for the assembly **in** worship, on what grounds can we oppose a woman evangelist on TV or on the street corner?? A woman should never assume a role that is reserved for men, any more than man should assume the role that is reserved for Christ, according to God's rank of authority, with God over Jesus, Jesus over man, and man over women (1 Cor. 11:3).

The basis for Paul's instructions here go back to two events stated by Paul in 1 Tim. 2:13-15. First, because of the creation of man and woman, as man was created first, then the woman. This is discussed more in detail in 1 Cor. 11. Second, because of sin, as the woman was deceived and was the first to sin in the garden of Eden. This will always be the case, and a change in culture in a given society would **never** change the teaching of Paul in this context.

### **(A study of 1 Cor. 14:23-35)**

In this study, we shall note that the “silence” of women specifically deals with teaching going on in the assembly, and is perfectly in harmony with 1 Tim. 2 which does include the assembly where prayer and teaching are taking place. **1 Cor. 14:23-35**

In this part of our study, we shall not attempt to analyze the spiritual gifts, or the actions on the part of those exercising these gifts, but to a continuation of the role of “women keeping silence in worship” which we set out to do from this chapter.

Paul begins by referring to the “whole church” being assembled together into one place. It should be observed that the word *ekklesia* (translated “church”) is used in three senses in the New Testament: to refer to the church *universal*, the church *local*, and in this chapter, to the church *assembled*. Then in verses 23—25 he alludes to what may happen when an unbeliever comes into the **assembly**. In verse 26 he reminds them that they “come together”, and that sometimes there is the need for some to “keep silence in the

church" (v. 28). This refers to an occasion when there is "no interpreter" available when tongue speaking occurs.

Moving on to verse 34, he mentions another situation where some are to "keep silence", namely the "women". Some have tried to explain that these women were the wives of the prophets. True they would be included, as they and others could ask their husbands at home (v. 35). We believe this would refer to all the women of the church, who are under the prohibition to speak, who are subject to "the law", which in principle would apply to single women as well, for they are to be under obedience, as stated by God in Gen. 2 upon the fall of Adam and Eve from God's favor. Technically speaking, **IF** the "women" here **were** the "wives" of the prophets, then **they would be the only women forbidden to speak in the assembly**—meaning that the **REST** of the women in the church **would** be allowed to speak, and not remain in silence. What the law said from Gen. 2:16 was not intended for only wives of prophets in the NEW TESTAMENT age, but for all women "every where." Paul said women are to "keep silence in the churches" (v. 34). He does not say, "just in Corinth", but in "the churches" (plural)--namely **all** of them (cf 1 Cor. 1:2), as they call upon the name of the Lord.

We have examined some 21 translations or versions of 1 Cor. 14, and find only **one** (World English) that uses the word "wives" instead of "women", and one (Weymouth's) rendered it "married women." Remember, Paul is addressing the **church** (not prophets), and uses the term "Brethren". Taking the word "brethren" (v. 26), then omitting other things, we continue with the ASV, beginning a new paragraph in the middle of verse 33, and it would read: "Brethren. (**2<sup>nd</sup> personal plural, dwt**)...As in all the churches of the saints, let ("**your**", **dwt, meaning the women of the brethren, or in the assembly**) women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them (**3<sup>rd</sup> person plural, dwt**) to speak; but let them (**the women, dwt**) be in subjection as also saith the law. And if they (**women, dwt**) would learn anything, (**you, 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural, dwt**) let them (**3<sup>rd</sup> person plural, dwt**) ask their (**3<sup>rd</sup> personal plural, dwt**) own husbands at home." From verse 26 on, there are several "lets" for the entire congregation, and they continue through verse 38, and then concludes in verse 39 with "Wherefore, my (**1<sup>st</sup> person singular**) brethren (**2<sup>nd</sup> person plural**).

The Modern Literal Translation is said to be one of the most accurate, literal translations of the New Testament, reads much like the ASV. It reads, "As in all the congregations of the holy-ones, let your women be silent in the congregation, for it is not permitted for them to speak, but to be subject as the law also says." Nowhere in the entire chapter does Paul actually address "prophets" as to then say, "your wives," but this admonition is addressed to the "whole church." Truly, the ASV and the MLT make it clear that all the women of church are under consideration, and not just wives of prophets. It would be grammatical incorrect for Paul to have said, "You let them learn from their husbands" when the husbands are the "you," but would have correctly stated, "You let them learn from you."

When Paul appeals to "the law" of God in the matter of subjection, it would apply to them, as well as those who read or heard his instructions to Timothy in 1 Tim. 2, where he **there** refers to the creation and the fall of man and woman, and **here** where he alludes to the fall. In 1 Cor. 11, he had already referred to women's subjection under the subject of

man being created first—the creation. So, the application regarding the conduct of women in an assembly is applicable in all “the churches.”

Paul states, “as also saith the law.” Here, he is not referring to the law of Moses, but to the **law of God** declared in Gen. 3:16—the universal law of God on the matter of subjection **for all time**. Just as God established marriage law in Eden, He also established the subjection of women **for all time**, in Eden. In the Christian age, Paul refers back to the beginning to establish his point, and does not refer to it as a law that he is giving at this time, or that God is just now revealing. ***Remember this law!*** Just as Jesus refer to “the beginning” in teaching His will regarding divorce and remarriage, Paul also refers to the law to establish the relationship between man and woman, and makes particular application of it for the **assembly of the church**. Not only does Paul refer to “the law” in the matter here, but adds “for it is a **shame** for women to speak in the church”, perhaps meaning that she has failed to be in submission to man by usurping a public role in the church assembly.

The word “silence” in verse 28 and in verse 34, is from the Greek word *sigao*, which is the verb form which simply means “to be silent.” Those exercising spiritual gifts were to control their actions, and at times to “keep silence” or to “hold his peace.” By speaking out in any manner in the context of edification and learning, the voices of women were not to be heard. Would this not include them shouting “Amen”, or even talking out loud to one another, or muttering something aloud? When Jesus commanded the water “Peace, be still”, the wind “ceased” and there was a “great calm” (Mark 4:39). Do you suppose the wind completely “ceased” or just slowed down with a few ripples now and then?

But I think I hear someone thinking, “1 Corinthians 14 deals with conduct where spiritual gifts were practiced, so the silence of women is different today.” Some even say that the Corinthians held special assemblies to exercise their spiritual gifts. **Where is the passage that states or implies such?** Their assemblies were much like ours today, in that they had **preaching** (1 Cor. 15:1-4); **communion** (1 Cor. 11:23-26); **singing** (1 Cor. 14:15); **prayer** (1 Cor. 14:15); and **giving** (1 Cor. 16:1-2). Many of these are discussed in the very context of that of exercising spiritual gifts.

1 Cor. 14:26 is not proof that they had special “gift practicing” services. Three times in the Corinthian epistle, Paul uses the term “when ye come together”, and **every time** the term is used, it is followed by a statement that what they were doing was **not right**, and they were rebuked for it. So it is in this passage. If everyone did want to practice their gifts, at least Paul gives the regulations for such in the following verses.

The order of their worship may not have been the same as ours today, but it involved the same acts of worship. At any rate, the language is just too plain not to see that in both 1 Tim. 2 and 1 Cor. 14, women's conduct is the same in both chapters. Note the following from VINE'S EXPOSITORY DICTIONARY, under PROPHECY, page 492.

With the completion of the canon of Scripture prophecy apparently passed away. 1 Cor. 13:8, 9. In his measure **the teacher has taken the place of the prophet**; (emph. mine, dwt) Cf the significant change in 2 Pet. 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.

The assemblies for worship in the first century differed only in the source from which a “prophet” got his information (by inspiration through spiritual gifts), while today the preacher or teacher get's **his** information from the inspired written word, plus the fact that tongue-speaking was a gift of the Spirit **then** that is not available today.

What about the term “your women” in 1 Cor. 14:34? Some believe Paul is addressing the prophets, and says “your women” or “your wives” (as *gunee* can refer to either women or wives in the KJV) “keep silent” in the churches. So far as the New Testament is concerned, the **only** church having any issues with “tongue speaking” and spiritual gifts was the ONE in Corinth. Yet, Paul writing to the “church in Corinth” and to other churches (those who call on the name of the Lord, 1 Cor. 1:2), and now gives instructions to “the churches” (plural), that all of them were under the same regulations being given here. **IF** Paul is addressing the “prophets” in this passage, were **they** OVER ALL THE CHURCHES? No indeed!! Paul is addressing the “whole church” (14:23), and uses the word “brethren” four (4) times in the chapter, as he writes to them **about** the tongue speakers and prophets. He does not address each group, but talks *about* them to the “brethren”, and then uses the word **“let”** twelve (12) times in the context of spiritual gifts. One of those times is in verse 34, as they were to “let their women” keep silence. We do not minimize the importance or the power of the word “let”, but simply pointing out that the church is to allow or do certain things regarding spiritual gifts.

The ASV does not use the word “your” at all, but simply says, “let the women keep silence in the churches.” IN the ASV, the middle of verse 33 begins a new paragraph, and it ALL reads thusly: “As in all the churches of the saints, let the women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law.” The NKJV uses the term “your women” but has a marginal notation that the word for “your” is not in some manuscripts.

It is interesting also to note that **if** Paul is addressing the prophets directly (which would be strange indeed since he is addressing the church, “the brethren”), that in verse 35 he says “let them ask their husbands at home,” instead of “let them ask **you** at home.” Is Paul only addressing the prophets in one verse and in part OF the directions addressing the church? I think not! Did Paul err in using “their” instead of “you?” **Think about this matter.** When Paul gave instructions to Timothy regarding the women keeping silence, he did **not** allude to “prophets”, but to learning when teaching was taking place. Paul said, “let **them** ask **their** [3rd per. pl.]” husbands at home., **not** “let them ask **you**,” if they were their wives.

One argument (?) sometimes presented that this does not allow for single women to be involved here, for they are to ask their “husbands at home.” The fact that Paul gives only one alternative, does not exclude the possibility of there being other alternatives. For instance, in 1 Cor. 11, Paul rebukes the brethren for allowing feasting while the communion is going on, and says in verse 22 that they have “houses” in which to eat and drink. What about other places? What about a public eating place, such as a restaurant? The point is, there are other places to eat and drink, and other places to inquire about what the prophets said.

Just because the admonition for women to “keep silence” is given right after the

discussion of “prophets” doesn't mean that the admonition for “silence” is only for the prophets wives, for it is also after instructions to tongue speakers. Would the reference to “the law” **only apply** to the wives of prophets? Certainly not, for Paul goes on to say “for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.” If the women of verse 34 is for the “wives” of prophets, are they the **only** women affected by “the law” to which Paul makes reference? THINK ABOUT IT! The spiritual gifts were exercised by **men** of the congregation, and their **women** were to keep silent—having no part in these gifts.

Incidentally, the words “ye” and “you” are used in addressing “brethren” in general throughout the chapter. No need to make “your” mean “only prophets” in verse 34, except to justify previous convictions or justify improper roles for women.

One more point of importance, that of “permit” and “permission.” Paul said, “I suffer not a woman.....” (KJV). The ASV says “permit not” in 1 Tim. 2. Paul, as an apostle speaking for the Lord, simply would not allow it. Then, in 1 Cor. 14:34, he says, “it is not permitted.” Then he reminds his readers that what he is saying is the command of the Lord (v. 37). In both 1 Tim. 2 and 1 Cor. 14, the same “permitting” is invoked upon the women. What is forbidden in 1 Cor. Is forbidden in 1 Tim. 2, and if one has ceased, why not the other? If one is binding, why not the other? Women CAN speak in the assembly **what God has authorized** (confession and singing). **Nothing else is authorized.** Consider the words of Solomon, which are most appropriate to these matters, “A time to keep silence, and a time to speak” (Eccl. 3:7).

In summation of both chapters, we see the obvious connection, as we place these two epistles by the same apostle inspired by the same Spirit, side by side.

### **1 Tim. 2:8-14**

*apostolic instruction. v. 7*  
*males lead prayers. v. 8*  
*women learning in silence. v. 11*  
*with all subjection. v. 11*  
*not permitted to teach. v. 12*  
*not teach/have authority over men. v. 12*  
*Reasons: Creation & Eve's sin. v. 13-14*

### **1 Cor. 14:23-35**

*church assemblies. v. 23, 26; 11:18*  
*avoid confusion. v. 34*  
*for all churches. v. 34; 1-2*  
*not permitted to speak. v. 34*  
*commanded to be under obedience. v. 34*  
*part of God's "law", v. 34*  
*shame to speak in assembly. v. 35*  
*Reasons: Creation (11:1-9) & Eve's sin.*  
*v. 34*  
*Commands from the Lord. v. 37*

The basic difference between these 2 passages is the use of “spiritual gifts” in Corinth, and teaching in general in the church in another passage. Let us strive to keep our worship orderly, and according to the truth of scripture.

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