

WOMEN SPEAKING IN THE ASSEMBLY

God created His first family as a physical or natural family, with Adam and Eve being formed miraculously. Adam was the first created, as He was made from the earth, and Eve was formed from man. This relationship is explored by Paul in 1 Cor. 11:3 following his statement of authority of God, Christ, man and then woman. Adam and Eve had no birthday, for they came into the world by means of a miraculous creation. Then all their offspring came into existence by a physical birth, through the “seed” of man in the woman. Adam was first created, but Eve, the woman, was the first to fall into transgression by partaking of the forbidden fruit, resulting in their falling out of favor with God the Creator. The future relationship between man and woman was to be with the woman being in subjection to man for the future (Gen. 3:16). Men became heads of the family in future generations, and it was to continue that way.

God's next family was a spiritual family—the church. Some speak of the birthday of the church, but it actually had no birthday, for it, as was with the natural family, came into existence miraculously, as God's new creation. It began with a miracle as God sent His Spirit upon the apostles, and they became the charter members of this spiritual family. Everyone else who has ever come into the family has been BORN into it, by means of the “seed” of the kingdom, which is the word of God (Luke 8:10, 11; John 3:3-5; 1Cor. 4:15). In the New Testament record, Paul refers to the relationship between man and woman as based on (1) The creation, and (2) The fall of man as recorded in Genesis 3. Here, Paul states, *“Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression”* (1 Tim.2:11-14).

In the infant stage of the church, the New Testament was being gradually written by inspiration. Until such time of its completion, the same Spirit that inspired its writing, was working through the apostles to guide them into all truth (John 14:26; 16:13; 2 Pet. 3:15), as Christ baptized the apostles “in the Spirit”. They, in turn, had the power to impart spiritual gifts through the laying on of their hands (Acts 8:17, 18; Rom. 1:11). In worship today, we are to follow the edification from the word which has been written (John 20:30, 31; 2 Tim. 3:16f). In the infant stage of the church, there was the imparting of knowledge through such gifts of faith, prophecy, tongues, etc. (1 Cor. 12:1-11). Certain restrictions had to be placed upon the members of the body during this time of oral transmission of the new testament, as recorded in 1 Cor. 14:26-36—making the message clear and understandable. The principle of woman's subjection to man in the exercise of these gifts fell under the law of the Lord as given in Eden. In the instructions, there was the charge that the women were to keep silence in the churches, and not to “speak”, as based on what the law had said from the fall (v. 34).

To understand the limitation placed upon women in the church, we have to first look at the **IMMEDIATE CONTEXT** of the passage. As stated, this was in the age of the miraculous, as the testament was being given for edification. In 1 Corinthians 12, we have the NAMING of the spiritual gifts, while in 1 Cor. 13, we have the **duration** of these gifts, and in 1 Cor. 14, we have the **regulation** of these gifts. It seems that the church in Corinth, as carnal and divisive as it was, has the ONLY book that goes into such detail. Very little is said about these gifts in any other portion of the New Testament. We need to note that there are two kinds of “speaking” under consideration in 1 Cor. 14. **1st**, there was the speaking of words that would impart God's will, by the tongue speakers,

and the prophets, (v. 27-32). **2nd**, there was to be the absence of words from others who heard. When there were no interpreters, the tongue speakers were forbidden to speak (v. 28). When one prophet spoke, the others were to NOT speak (v. 30). Then, in the exercise of these gifts, the women were to remain silent, and if they had any questions, they were to ask outside of the church assembly (v. 34, 35). THIS was the application of the “law” to which Paul referred in verse 34. Women were NOT to express themselves vocally when tongues and prophetic utterances by men were taking place. Their speaking up might well have been disruptive to the overall purpose of the gathering. The churches (assemblies) were when the whole church came together in one place (v. 23). This is what took place, or was not to take place, in this immediate context of scripture.

Now, we come to a **TOTAL CONTEXT** of scripture, as we consider 1 Cor. In light of other passages that do NOT necessarily involve the miraculous activity as was obvious in the church in Corinth. Certainly, the PRINCIPLE of “subjection” by the women in the church was set forth by Paul, especially in 1 Tim. 2:12 where Paul forbids women to teach or usurp authority over the men. Following that injunction, the reasons FOR this are enumerated—the CREATION, and the FALL. These two reasons will always be true for the church. This means that women are not to usurp authority over the man, or involve themselves in the public preaching of the word of God—as is practiced in many Protestant denominations today. The action of Aquila (a man), with his wife Priscilla (a woman) in privately helping a man who was teaching error (Acts 18:25, 26) was in keeping with this principle of subjection. In Acts 21:9, we are told that Philip had four daughters who prophesied, but their prophetic work would NOT have been over men anywhere—else it would have been a violation of the scriptural relationship between men and women. It is not stated or implied that they prophesied publicly, or over men.

In 1 Cor. 14:34, women were forbidden to “speak” under certain circumstances, but surely they were allowed to “speak” under other conditions. For instance, what if a woman wanted to “confess with her mouth” her faith in the Lord, would she not have been allowed to do so? ALL were to “speak” in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19), and were thus “teaching” one another—even the men (Col. 3:16). However, their singing together was NOT usurping authority or taking a leading role over the men. If women are not to speak “at all” today, when does this prohibition begin? Does it mean she cannot speak INSIDE the church building? Does the prohibition begin the moment the announcements are finished? Can she whisper an “amen” following a prayer? Can she respond verbally when the preacher greets the congregation with a “Good Morning”, or is she not allowed to utter a sound? We know she CAN sing, and confess faith, or confess sins. In the infant church when the will of God was being expressed through the prophets and tongue speakers, the women were not to say anything that might disrupt the speakers, and that principle should follow today.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul is dealing with a matter where the message from God was being presented by the inspiration of the tongue-speakers and prophets, while today the message is by uninspired men, but it is **from** the inspired revelation of scripture where edification is taking place. The principle of subjection is the same.

The men are to “speak”, exhort and teach with ALL AUTHORITY (Tit. 2:14). Peter wrote, “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11). This is not dealing with the sex of the speaker, but ANYONE who ever teaches—whether it be a male or female in their specific roles. Peter did not use the word aner (male) or anthropos (human being), but tis (anyone). Women should respect this regulation, and

never allow themselves to be in a situation where their voices are disruptive. Neither can they be “given” authority BY the elders to engage in doing something the Lord has already prohibited. Elders have no right to delegate such authority.

Godly women are not going to aspire to be elders, deacons or preachers, but should support the men in their roles. If there is EVER a question of whether a woman should speak up in the assembly where preaching is taking place, women should follow the admonition, “*If in doubt, DON'T*”. In special classes, whether in the building, the home, or in private outside the public assembly, women have every right to ask questions if necessary for a better understanding of God's will. Reference is made to this in 1 Cor. 14:35 in their quest for knowledge. May God bless Christian women today who have respect for God's word, and for the roles of both men and women in the church.

It is common in some congregations for women to speak up during the presentation of God's word, or to mumble or chatter such terms as “That's right” or “Amen” to the disturbance of some trying to listen to and meditate on the sermon. There are instances where preachers actually encourage this kind of response, by asking questions from the pulpit, inviting women to publicly respond. One preacher's wife has been known to publicly answer her husband's rhetorical questions from the pulpit, and when her answer was incorrect, he would correct her in a public way, though in kindness, as he would if a male had answered him.

Men are to lead the prayers when women are present or not. In 1 Tim.2:9, Paul uses the word aner (male) in reference to prayers. Protestant churches today (along with some congregations among us who are now using women preachers, elders, and deacons, need to BEWARE. They are violating the word of God, and the participants of members are also violating the scripture. The Lord warned against doctrines of men that might claim to authorize such actions (Matt. 15:9), and He also stated that if the blind lead the blind, BOTH shall fall into the ditch (v. 14). Those who want to please God should not be involved in any arrangement or practice where sin is taking place.

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