

Silent Women: A Study of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35

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“Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.” 1 Corinthians 14:34-35

Introduction

In this study, we will consider the position of women in an assembly, and more specifically, to women being silent. We will also consider the use of the Law as referred to by Paul as well as the specific meaning of the word "women".

We will begin our study by asking 4 questions:

1. Who is to remain silent? (i.e. To whom is the narrative directed?)
 2. What is the duration of this activity?
 3. What are they to do? (i.e. regarding their conduct)
 4. Where is this activity to be performed? (i.e. location)

Question 1. Who is to remain silent?

Paul tells us "*women* should remain silent in the churches." That it is to women that this passage refers is clear from the context. However, is it to all women that this dialog is directed? We believe not. The reason for this is found in verse 35, "If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home." Who is the word "they" referring to? It is to *women*. So, we could say, "If women want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home." Notice that women are to ask their own husbands. What type of woman would ask their husband? A "married" woman! Another word for married woman is "wife". This would be perfectly in harmony with Paul's use of the word "husband". Therefore, that these women are "wives" should be clear from the context. If this is so, we could then render the passage as follows:

"As in all the congregations of the saints, 34 wives should remain silent in the churches. Wives are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. 35 If wives want to inquire about something, these wives should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a wife to speak in the church."

Note: As the subject of just who the word women refers to is somewhat involved, we would like to deal with this subject separately. This is provided in an Addendum to this study, entitled, "The True Meaning Of Women". For now, we will accept that it is to wives that this passage refers.

Question 2. What is the duration of this activity?

Paul tells us "*women* should *remain* silent in the churches."

Let us see how the Scriptures use the word "remain":

Note: We will focus on Paul's use of the word as found in I Corinthians.

- § 7:11 "But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband."
- § 7:20 "Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him."
- § 7:26 "Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are."
 - § 13:13 "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love."
 - § 14:34 "women should remain silent in the churches"

In 7:11, we see that if the woman and her husband cannot be reconciled, she is to stay single. In 7:20, various people are to stay in the situation they were originally found in. In 13:13, of all the things that are mentioned in this chapter, only three things will continue (i.e. faith, hope and love). Therefore, Paul is telling the believing women in Corinth to "stay silent" or to "continue in silence".

Question 3. What are they to do?

Paul says, "women should remain *silent* in the churches." Let us see how the Scriptures use the word "silent". There are four verses used by Paul with regards to silence:

- § Romans 3:19 "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God."
- § 1 Corinthians 14:34 "women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says."
- § 1 Timothy 2:12 "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent."
- § Titus 1:11 "They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach--and that for the sake of dishonest gain."

Note: This last verse is interesting in that it refers to what they (i.e. rebellious people, etc.) have been speaking about (teachings they ought not to teach). Because of these teachings, and what these teachings are doing, Paul tells Titus to *silence* them.

Some other verses that use "remained silent":

- § Mark 3:4 "Then Jesus asked them, 'Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?' But they remained silent." (See also Luke 14:4)
- § Luke 20:26 "They were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became silent."
- § Acts 15:12 "The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them."

It would be appear, that from such passages as Romans 3:19, Mark 3:4 and Acts 15:12, that silent means just that "silent" (not allowed to speak).

An interesting verse that teaches the exact opposite of being silent is Acts 18:9 "One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: 'Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent.'" Here Paul is told by the Lord not to be silent, but to keep on speaking. Therefore, the opposite of silence is speaking and the opposite of speaking is silence.

Question 4. Where is this activity to be performed?

We are told, "women should remain silent *in the churches*." Using verse 33b as a reference, we could say that the church is where saints would congregate. With regards to Paul's writings, possibly the best verse telling us what the *church* is would be Colossians 4:16. In this passage Paul tells the Colossians to read a letter, which in turn is to be read by the church in Laodicea. The Colossians would in turn read the letter from the Laodiceans. That more than one person would read each of these letters is clear. To summarize then, we could say that whenever and wherever the church gathered, that women would be silent.

Silent Submissiveness

We would now like to consider *why* women are not allowed to speak in the churches. It would follow, if women were thus commanded to be silent, that they are not permitted to speak. The reason they are not allowed to speak is provided for us in the phrase, "but must be in submission". The word *but* in this verse contrasts what women are allowed to do and what they are not. Because women are to be under submission, they are not allowed to speak. Their being submissive would be demonstrated by their silence.

The question might be asked, "Why must women be in submission?" The answer to this question is provided in the last phrase of verse 34b, "as the Law says." So, women are to be in submission because the Law says so. So, we have this pattern, Law --> submission --> silence". The Law says women are to be in submission and this submission is demonstrated in their being silent.

Observation: If we can understand what the Law says about women being in submission, then we should be able to understand why women must be silent.

This should lead us to ask these five other questions:

1. What is the meaning of the word Law?
2. What specific Law is Paul referring to? (As he makes no mention of what it is.)
3. Why does the Law say that women are to be in submission?
4. What exactly is submission?
5. What does silence have to do with women being submissive?

We would now like to consider Paul's reference to and *application* of the Law as found in 1 Corinthians 14:34b and to provide the answers to these five questions.

Question 1: What is the meaning of the word Law?

The Law can be summed up from the Scriptures as, "the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" (See Luke 24:44). From this, we can say that the whole of the Old Testament was referred to as the Law.

So, the Old Testament = the Law. The Law of Moses would include Genesis to Deuteronomy, the Prophets would include Joshua to Job, Proverbs to Malachi, and then we have the Psalms. Our primary concern here is with regards to what the specific Law Paul was referring to.

Question 2. What specific Law is Paul referring to?

It is worth mentioning; nowhere in this letter to the Corinthians does Paul tell them what this law actually is! So, did Paul expect his readers to know what law he was referring to? Or, did he expect them to know what the law so well that he felt that no reference was needed?

Note: In 1 Corinthians 4:17, Paul tells the believers there that he will be sending Timothy to them with the objective in mind of Timothy reminding them of his way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church." This is significant, as we shall soon see!

Of the four times that the law is mentioned, Paul refers to it as "the Law" (1 Corinthians 9:8,9; 14:21,34).

So, just how are we to find out what specific Law he was referring to? We need to look at all of Paul's writings, especially as it pertains to women and silence. Doing this, we come up with the following two verses:

§ 1 Corinthians 14:34

§ 1 Timothy 2:12

As the first reference is a part of our present study, and since it has made no reference to what the specific

Law is (as we have already noted), we will turn to the passage in 1 Timothy 2:11-14, which reads:

"11 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner."

Let us observe the following:

§ The language Paul is using in 1 Timothy 2:11-14 is similar to that found in 1 Corinthians 14:34.

§ That women are the focus of his discussion should be very clear from verse 11.

§ That women can *learn* is also clear from this verse.

§ However, *how* she learns is significant as Paul says that she should learn "in quietness and full submission." This is similar language to 1 Corinthians 14:34b, "*women* are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission". The illustration used here of women being quiet and submissive should be without question.

§ However, Paul says something in verse 12 that was not mentioned in the passage in 1 Corinthians 14. He says, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man..." and then finishes with "she must be silent."

Note: What it means that women are not allowed to teach or have authority over a man will be covered later on in this study.

§ Paul then concludes with verses 13 & 14, "For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner."

At the outset, we find that in this passage Paul does not use the word *Law* at all. We might assume then that this passage will no more provide us with an explanation of what the Law is any more than the passage in 1 Corinthians 14 did. However, we believe that verses 13&14 of 1 Timothy 2 are very important to our study as they *do identify* the Law Paul spoke of in 1 Corinthians 14:34b. Why we believe this to be so is for the following reasons:

- a) In all of Paul's writings, he makes reference to the Law only four times.
- b) All four of these references are found in 1 Corinthians (see 9:8,9; 14:21,34b). This is very significant!
- c) Three have *direct references* to the Old Testament (9:8,9-Deuteronomy 25:4, 14:21-Isaiah 28:11).
- d) Though Paul does not refer to a *specific* Law in 14:34b, the Law, whatever it is, must speak about women being silent and/or being in submission. (We might refer to this as an *indirect reference*.)
- e) As the passage in 1 Timothy *does* include this information (especially verses 13&14) is very significant.

Therefore, if we compare 1 Corinthians 14:34b with 1 Timothy 2:11-12, we have the following:

- § women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission
- § A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.

If we summarize these passages we get:

- § women should remain silent, not allowed to speak, and must be in submission
- § woman should learn in quietness and full submission, are not permitted to teach, to have authority over a man, and must be silent

Observe: Both passages include silence and submissiveness.

However, what is very interesting is the phrase "as the Law says". Comparing these two passages again:

- § as the Law says
- § For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner

Observe: Paul's use of "as the Law says" parallels "For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner." (i.e. 1 Corinthians 14:34b parallels 1 Timothy 2:13&14.) Again, comparing our two passages in context we have:

- § women should remain silent, not allowed to speak, and must be in submission, as the Law says
- § a woman should learn in quietness and full submission, are not permitted to teach, to have authority over a man, and she must be silent, for Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner

There are two important words in this passage that should be mentioned. These are the words "for" (verse 13) and "and" (verse 14). The word *for* can also mean "since or because". In reading verse 12, we might ask the questions "Why?" (i.e. Why does Paul not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man? And, Why must she be silent?) In verse 13, part of the answer is provided, "For Adam was formed first, then Eve." We could say, "Since Adam was formed first, then Eve" or "Because Adam was formed first, then Eve." Answering our earlier question we get:

Questions: Why does Paul not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man? And, Why must she be silent?

Answer: "Because Adam was formed first, then Eve."

However, as we stated earlier, we believe that verse 13 provides only *part* of the answer! Why? Because of the use of the word "and" in verse 14. The word *and* can also mean "also" or "furthermore". It is always used to connect or join two things together. In this situation, it is joining verses 13 & 14. So we could say, "Because Adam was formed first, then Eve. Furthermore, Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner."

To summarize, we see that after reading verse 12, and asking the question "Why?" that as a result of what we read in verses 13&14 we indeed, are provided with an answer to our question. Therefore, verses 13&14 are two parts of the same thought. So, to complete our earlier question:

Question: Why does Paul not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man? And, Why must she be silent?

Answer: "Because Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner."

Earlier we mentioned that Paul's use of the Law in 1 Corinthians 14:34b parallels verses 13&14 of 1 Timothy 2. Therefore, if we parallel the two phrases:

as the Law says = For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner

To make sure that we are clear on this point, when Paul refers to the Law in 1 Corinthians 14:34b, he is referring to verses 13&14 of 1 Timothy 2. Thus, verses 13&14 of 1 Timothy 2 answer the question, "What specific Law is Paul referring to?" in 1 Corinthians 14:34b. Therefore we could say, "They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says (i.e. Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner)." Verses 13&14 *do provide us* with the specific Law referred to by Paul. In the next part of our study we will show what passages from the Old Testament Paul is using.

The Old Testament and the Law

As we discovered from our earlier question, What is the Law?, the Law can be summed up from the Scriptures as, "the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" (See Luke 24:44). But what was the *specific* Law that Paul was referring to in 1 Corinthians 14:34b? The answer to this question is found in 1 Timothy 2:13&14. Let us look at the verse again:

"For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner."

Two questions come to mind from these verses:

- a) Where in the Scriptures do we read about Adam being formed first, then Eve?
- b) Where in the Scriptures do we read about Adam not being deceived and the woman being deceived?

The answers to these questions are:

- a) Genesis 2:18-25 - referring to creation
- b) Genesis 3:1-19 - referring to the fall and its subsequent judgment

Note: These are the only two verses found in the Law referring to the context of 1 Timothy 2:13&14! This is very significant! These verses are found in Genesis chapters 2&3. Therefore, we can say that when Paul refers to the Law in 1 Corinthians 14:34b (along with the parallel in 1 Timothy 2:13-14), he is actually referring to Genesis chapters 2&3.

Observe: Considering 1 Timothy 2:11-14, Paul is actually providing a commentary on Genesis chapters 2&3.

Question 3. Why does the Law say that women are to be in submission?

As we have found out so far in our study, women should be in submission as the result of the Law mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14:34b. We also found that the Law being referred to is taken from Genesis chapters 2&3. We will now consider the *reasons* behind why the Law says women are to be in submission.

Note: From the observation we made earlier, if we can understand what the Law says about women being in submission, then we should be able to understand why women must be silent.

In Genesis 2:18 we read, "The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." From this verse we discover that the Lord decides to make a suitable helper for the man. The key phrase in this passage is *a suitable helper for the man*. Does this verse infer that woman should be in submission to man? Possibly, in the sense that as a helper, they would be serving or meeting the needs of those whom they are to be helping. It may also be worth noting that in verse 20b, we find that no suitable helper could be found among the other living creatures. As a result, the man was put to sleep, had a rib removed to make the woman. As a result of this, Adam says, "she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." The idea of *being taken out of* may have some significance in determining the submissiveness of women. However, the best reference we might have in understanding why a woman is to be submissive is found in Genesis chapter 3.

Note: Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, refers to this passage in 11:8-9, "For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; 9 neither was man created for woman, but woman for man." It is enough to note the importance Paul places on the created order.

Genesis 3:1-19

The context of this passage is the account of *the fall*: the story of Adam and Eve's disobedience and the subsequent judgment that came upon them as a result of their disobedience. In 3:16, the Lord pronounces judgment on the woman telling her that childbearing will now be a painful event, her desire will be for her husband, and that her husband will rule over her. Our main focus will be on the phrase "her desire will be for her husband, and that he will rule over her."

As the result of sin, the true relationship that existed between man and woman has been irreparably damaged. In the Genesis passage, God tells the woman that as the result of her sin, she will now be under the rule of man, which in turn means that she will be "submissive" to him. Women will now be subject to man, or be in subjection to him. The extent of this submission is clearly taught by Paul in 1 Timothy 2:11 "...and full submission." The woman's submission should be "full". One translation has put it this way, "And though your desire will be for your husband, he will be your master." And yet another, "In spite of this, you will still have desire for your husband, yet you will be subject to him."

To summarize then, the Law referred to by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:34b and further explained in 1 Timothy 2:13&14 is the passage of Scripture found in Genesis chapters 2&3. Though Paul refers to creation (in that Adam was created first), the key to these passages is the judgment that came upon women and that women will now be in subjection to man.

Question 4. What exactly is submission?

To properly understand submission, it will be of help to see how the Scriptures define it. The whole idea of one being in submission to another is clearly taught in Scripture (both men and women included, see Romans 13:1&5). Even the Lord Jesus was subject to the Father (see 1 Corinthians 15:25).

Probably the best picture we have of submission is found in Genesis 16:1-15. Sarah could not bear Abraham children so she gave her maidservant Hagar to him. Afterwards, Sarah mistreats Hagar because she felt that Hagar despised her. Because of this mistreatment Hagar runs away. She is later found by the angel of the Lord who then says to her, "Go back to your mistress and *submit* to her." The reason Hagar left in the first place was on account of her fear of Sarah, and now she is commanded to return and

"submit" to Sarah again (having no idea if more ill treatment was in store for her). Regardless, she is commanded to return to Sarah and submit to her.

Note: Another interesting passage is 1 Peter 3:5-6, where we read, "For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were *submissive* to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and *called him her master-vs.6*. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear." As this verse mentions Sarah, and her relationship (i.e. being submissive) to her husband Abraham is significant.

Question 5. What does silence have to do with women being submissive?

To answer this question, we need to look at little deeper into verse 14 of 1 Timothy. As we have established a parallel between "as the Law says" and Genesis 3:16b which provides us the reason for women being subject to men, it does not yet fully answer the question as why women are to be silent. Looking again at verse 14, "And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner." The key word in this verse is "deceived". Paul is making reference to *deception* and more particularly, to whom it was that was *deceived*. What is his reason for doing this? Whatever notions we might have of why a woman should be silent, it must be for the reasons that Paul gives us based on his understanding of Genesis 3. A breakdown of verse 14 of 1 Timothy 2 might be of help here:

§ 14a And Adam was not the one deceived

§ 14b it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner

It should be readily apparent that whoever it was that was deceived "it was not Adam"! The woman, however, *was* the one who was deceived. There can be no wrestling with these clear words of Scripture! Why was the woman deceived and not the man? Can it be that she is "the weaker partner" (1 Peter 3:7). In Genesis 3:13, the Lord asks her, "What is this you have done?" And her reply, "The serpent *deceived me*, and I ate." The fact that she openly acknowledged her deception is very significant!

In order for deception to take place, some form of dialogue must also take place. That the women dialogued with the serpent in Genesis 3 is without question, as verses 2 & 3 will affirm. To dialogue means "to speak" or to take part in some form of "discussion". Therefore, the very fact the women *spoke* should be important enough for us to take notice of it. That she spoke, and this led to her being deceived (as a direct result of the discussion), she is thus commanded to "be silent". Since it was her dialogue that led to her being deceived, she would forevermore be silent as a result of it. This would be the everlasting penalty for her sin.

Note: It may be interesting to observe that the reason for the Lord's judgment on man was as a direct result of him *listening* to his wife. Here again, some form of dialogue must have transpired between the man and the woman.

What we are not saying

We are not saying that only the woman is at fault. God *cursed* all of those that were involved: the serpent, verses 14 & 15; the woman, verse 16; and finally the man, verses 17-19. It might be more than suggestive, that due to the extent of man's curse that he actually received the *greater* portion of it (which he indeed should have.) As our focus in this study is on women and their responsibility for being silent and in submission, we would like to make it very clear that we are in no way negating man's responsibility for his actions.

Summary

We believe that the primary reason why women are to be silent is as a result of her being the one who was *deceived*. This is due to the fact that she spoke with the serpent, being the one who was deceived and became a sinner. As punishment, she is now to be subject to man and to demonstrate her submission by being silent. This is clearly taught by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:34b, "They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says."

Returning to our passage in 1 Corinthians 14:34b, we see that the woman being silent is an outward demonstration of her being in submission, as commanded by Law. This, as we have seen, is as a result of her sin in being the one who was deceived. Her penalty is being silent and having the man rule over her.

We would now like to turn our attention to the last verse of our study, paying particular attention to disgraceful speaking.

Disgraceful Speaking

In the last phrase of verse 35, Paul says that for a woman to speak in the church is disgraceful. As we have discussed earlier, the use of woman here is in reference to *wives*. It could then be stated that it would be a disgrace for wives to speak in the church. Regardless of who the object is with regards to the woman, the fact of it being disgraceful is very significant. The question might be asked, "Who is the target of this disgrace, the man or the woman?" Since the object could be either the husband or the wife, we could say that it would be a disgrace to him (in the sense of it being injurious to his reputation). Since the center of Paul's discourse is with regards to an "inquiring wife", it could be a disgrace for him to have his wife ask him questions, or, possibly even worse, to have her inquire of another man. Thus, Paul's command for them to "ask their own husbands at home", and, "to be silent".

Also, the result of man's sin of *listening* to the woman could be reason enough for her to be silent (especially in spiritual matters). Why? As a result of the very dialogue itself, especially in public! Maybe this is the understanding behind "for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church." Eve's tongue beguiled Adam, so maybe there is always the possibility of it being repeated today.

Summary

We have covered a lot of ground here and would like to summarize what we have gleaned thus far. We have endeavored to establish the reasons behind a woman being silent focusing on the passage from 1 Timothy 2:11-14. Our purpose in doing this was to answer our earlier question regarding Paul's use of the Law and the context in which he was using it.

We saw that the Law Paul referred to is the passage found in Genesis chapters 2&3. To illustrate the principle of masculine leadership, Paul cites the order of creation, as establishing the man's natural headship (see also 1 Corinthians 11:8-9).

We would like to provide the following rendering of these verses using the context of both passages (1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14):

"As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, because as Adam was formed first, then Eve, so Adam was not the one deceived but it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. Therefore, a woman should demonstrate her submissiveness by learning in quietness and being silent. And since it was the woman, not the man, who was deceived, and sin was the result, it is a disgrace for her to speak in the church."

Closing Comments

That women should be silent and in submission should be clear from our study. That once being given light, we must now "walk in the obedience that comes from faith" is hopefully as clear. As a result of the fall, that we have from the very beginning been "pointing fingers" and "passing the buck" is also sadly and painfully clear. In this context, as much as women are to be silent and submissive as a result of the fall, it is for men to be more vocal and assertive in return. That both men *and* women are guilty of negating this responsibility is only too painfully obvious as is being witnessed in society today. Man has abdicated his God-given responsibility to be the protector and provider and as a result of a lack of it, women have taken up this position (possibly out of frustration or necessity). God wants and desires men to be men and women to be women. May we only be as willing to do so.

Addendums

The following addendums will address the following concerns:

Addendum 1: "The True Meaning of Women".

Addendum 2: What does it mean that women are not allowed to teach or have authority over a man?

Addendum 3: What is a woman permitted to do in the church?

Addendum 1: "The True Meaning of Women".

In our passage in 1 Corinthians 14, we found that the word women can be used in reference to *wives*. However, can the same be applied to the passage in 1 Timothy 2? In reading the context of this chapter, there is absolutely no indication of who the *women* actually are, other than women in a *generic* sense. In verse 8 Paul says that he wants men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer. That men, in contrast to women, is clear. In verse 9 he says that he also wants women to dress modestly, etc. Paul now addresses women in contrast to men! So, along with *women* dressing modestly, with good deeds and its appropriateness, he now says that they (i.e. women) should learn in quietness, full submission, not being permitted to teach, or to have authority over a man and being silent.

In summing up 1 Corinthians 14 then, an inquiring wife should not ask her husband questions during a meeting of the saints. Women, on the other hand, which would include married, unmarried women, separated and widows are to learn in quietness and full submission and are not permitted to teach or to have authority over a man. Women, in general, are to be silent.

Note: This does not *necessarily* demand that a woman be *absolutely* silent at church (as we shall see in Addendum 3).

Unmarried daughters

The Scriptures refer to unmarried women as either "unmarried daughters" (Acts 21:9), virgins (1 Corinthians 7:34) or to women who have been separated from their husbands (1 Corinthians 7:11). As the Scriptures do not differentiate between these various "stages" of womanhood, not much can be discovered here.

With regards to *unmarried daughters*, we can understand from verses like Ephesians 6:1-3 and Colossians 3:20 that children (which would include both boys and girls) should obey their parents in everything. This would also mean that unmarried girls would be under their father's authority.

With regards to widows, in all of the writings of Paul, nowhere is it suggested that a widow would have *speaking* permission within a church meeting. (See 1 Corinthians 7:8; 1 Timothy 5:3-6,9,11,14,15) Granted 1 Timothy 5:5 does mention that the widow prays, however there is no mention of an actual time or location.

Single Women

With regards to single women, some may argue that although a "wife" could not teach a man, a single "woman" may. As a single woman is not under the authority of a husband, she may not be obligated to remain silent in the churches. In considering Scriptures that refer to "single women" we found only one passage that is addressed to "unmarried women" (1 Corinthians 7:34). Since the Scriptures are silent on the use of "single women", how else is she to be addressed? In today's society, an unmarried woman would be referred to as a "spinster", "virgin" or "single". Not intending to use contemporary usage as a basis for understanding Scriptural truth, we believe that substituting "unmarried" for "single" is not out of line here.

Considering it from this perspective then, we find that an unmarried woman is concerned about the Lord's affairs. And how is this "concern" demonstrated? By being devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. It may be worth contrasting what the Scriptures say about unmarried women with married ones.

Unmarried woman	Married woman
Concerned about the Lord's affairs	Concerned about the affairs of this world
Aim to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit	How she can please her husband

As a married woman is to please her husband, so an unmarried one is to please the Lord. Both share a common concern, the only difference being the object of that concern. This is significant in that the unmarried (i.e. single) woman is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. Her spirit would be that spoken of by Peter, "the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit which is of great worth in God's sight" (1 Peter 3:4).

Therefore, would a single woman violate Scripture by doing those things that would be displeasing to the Lord to whom she is to be devoted? Also, as we have mentioned earlier, that an unmarried woman would be under the authority of her father (see Ephesians 6:1-3 and Colossians 3:20). This would mean then that unmarried girls would be under their father's authority until the time she would be married which would then put her under her husband's authority (see Genesis 2:24).

1 Corinthians 11

This passage has many references to *women* and from the context can refer to married women. However, as this is in no way conclusive, it cannot be used to substantiate that women would be allowed to speak in a church gathering.

Addendum 2: What does it mean that women are not allowed to teach or have authority over a man?

For a woman to teach or to have authority over a man means that this would place her in a position *above* the man. Notice that teaching and authority go hand-in-hand! Teaching places the teacher in a position of authority over another. A person in a position of authority is responsible for teaching (or instructing) others. However, full submission declares, "Not permitting a woman to teach or to have authority over a man". And, "They are not allowed to speak, she must be silent."

In harmony with what the apostle taught elsewhere (1 Timothy 2:12), the woman is not to speak or teach in any way that violates her gender role. Therefore, she is not to take up the position of a public teacher, in such a manner as to stand before the church and function as a teacher (or even a co-teacher), especially in a group containing men. In assuming this position, she has stepped beyond what she has been commanded to do, which in turn would violate scripture.

Addendum 3: What is a woman permitted to do in the church?

In this addendum, we are endeavoring to provide Scriptural warrant for what women are permitted to do when they come together as a church in a mixed congregation. We will be considering passages that refer to women speaking, praying or prophesying, as a prophetess, contender and fellow worker, and their conduct with regards to submission and teaching. Lastly, we will look at passages that could refer to both men and women in a church setting.

Women Speaking

There are a number of verses in the New Testament that record women speaking yet none of these verses provide any support for helping us to understand what women are permitted to do in the church. These verses are: Luke 11:27; 22:54; 24:1-11; John, chapter 4:4-42; 20:13-18.

Praying or Prophesying

There are also a few verses in the New Testament that mention women praying. Acts 1:14 tells us that "along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus", that "they all joined together constantly in prayer".

Before we comment on this verse, we would like to draw your attention to who "they" are. We are told that those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew;

James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James." These were they, along with the women, who joined together constantly in prayer. Notice, with the exception of Jesus' brothers, the men are mentioned by name, with Mary being the only women mentioned.

In 1 Corinthians 11:5 we are told that every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head. Here we are clearly told that a woman "prays or prophesies". To prophesy is to give a message that the LORD has spoken (see Deuteronomy 18:22). Thus, prophesying is definitely "vocal". However, the context of this passage is not focusing on *what* a woman is saying, but more so on *HOW* she is speaking. Whenever she speaks she should not do it with her head uncovered. It is also worth noting that there no indication of exactly where the woman is at the time she is praying or prophesying. To support women prophesying in church, we will need to look elsewhere.

Prophetess

Probably one of the strongest passages in the Scriptures in support of women prophets is found in Judges chapter 4:4-14. This is the account of Deborah and Barak. Deborah was a prophetess, and indeed, as the Scriptures record, spoke as a prophet (see verse 6).

Other verses that use 'prophetess' are: Exodus 15:20 (Miriam), 2 Kings 22:14 (Huldah, also 2 Chronicles 34:22), Nehemiah 6:14 (Nodiah), Isaiah 8:3 (no mention of who the person is), Luke 2:36 (Anna) and Revelation 2:20 (Jezebel).

In Acts 2:17-18, we are told that the Lord will pour out His spirit on all people resulting in daughters prophesying. This fact is confirmed in Acts 21: 9 where we find Philip the evangelist who had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

It may be worth noting here that in all of the above examples from the Old Testament, that *what* the woman is speaking (i.e. prophesying) are not words of *her own authority* but rather they are words of *the Lord's authority*. She is simply reiterating what was told her to say at that time by the Lord. She is *His mouthpiece* so to speak (as indeed a male prophet would be). In a situation such as this is may be more appropriate to say that we should not get the *words of God* mixed up with the *word of God*. Those "daughters" who would prophesy in the New Testament would follow this pattern of speaking only what they had been told to say.

Contenders, fellow workers

Another interesting passage is Philippians 4:2. Paul mentions two women here namely, Euodia and Syntyche. He says that Euodia and Syntyche have "contended at my side in the cause of the gospel".

Indeed, he calls them fellow workers. But does this anywhere indicate that these women actually contended for the gospel itself? It merely says, "contended at my side in the cause of the gospel", nothing more, nothing less.

Submission and Teaching

In the following passages we have recorded situations where women are commanded to teach other women. In Titus 2:3-5 we read, "Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. 4 Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, (vs5) to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God."

Paul tells Titus that the older women are to teach what is good and then goes on to explain what this good teaching consists of. Good teaching would consist of them training the younger women to:

- § love their husbands and children
- § to be self-controlled and pure
- § to be busy at home
- § to be kind
- § and to be subject to their husbands

This is probably one of the most *positive* verses we have in Scripture regarding women in a teaching capacity. Paul is telling Titus that older women, rather than partaking of certain activities should instead "train the younger women to love their families, to be self-controlled, etc." It may be interesting to note that it is *older women* who are to do the training, while the younger ones are "in training". It would seem then that the younger women are to be "busy at home" doing the things that the older women had been training them to do.

Also, Peter commands *wives* "to be submissive to your husbands" and then tells her how she is to make herself beautiful. This beauty is found in her "inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit" which he goes on to say "which is of great worth in God's sight." He closes his discourse with "You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear." (1 Peter 3:1-6)

Other Passages

Here are Scriptures that could refer to both men and women in a church setting:

Ephesians 5:19-20 "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The phrase "speak to one another" must refer to those to whom this letter was written, namely, "To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 1:1). Whatever is meant by the word "speak", as we have stated before, the woman is not to speak in any way that violates her gender role.

Another passage is Colossian 3:16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."

Again, though this verse makes reference to teaching and admonishing, this can in no way contradict Paul's words to Timothy. As Paul is also the writer of this letter, would it be consistent of him to allow an activity here that he strictly forbids elsewhere? However, it would not be considered incorrect to consider this from the perspective of a woman teaching and admonishing another woman.

Summary

In our studies we have not been able to find any Scriptural support for women taking an active part in the teaching ministry of the church, especially in a mixed congregation. That women (especially older women) can teach other women is clear from the passage found in Titus.

Two principles have been introduced in this study that may be used by women in understanding their conduct in such matters which have been presented in this study. These are:

§ Principle #1: That a woman should not speak or teach in any way that would violate her gender role.

§ Principle #2: That we should not get the *words of God* mixed up with the *word of God* (regarding women and prophecy).

Lastly, it just may be that when it comes to matters where the Scriptures are *silent* on areas that would be considered *unreasonable or unfair*, that we must take the words of Paul to heart, "If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice--nor do the churches of God." And in doing so, both respectfully and honestly, we should leave it at that.

Amen