

Should Women Speak in Church? How Contextual Study Clears Confusion

Dr. Randy White | 1 Corinthians 14:34-40

- The inept evangelical response to verse 34:
 - This is cultural and can be ignored
 - This wasn't originally written by Paul but inserted later
 - This is only in reference to certain kinds of speech (public teaching, for example).
 - None of these arguments have sufficient merit. Paul's instruction is clear, and yet it would be very hard to find a Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, or Fundamental church that practiced them. Equally hard would be to find one that had sufficient reason for not practicing them.
- Verse 34 suffers from our presuppositions. Paul was writing to believers of a Jewish background who were, with all likelihood, still active in their Jewish communities.
 - When they went to *the assemblies* (literal translation, since **the churches** is an anachronism, with words for *church* not coming about as an exclusively Christian word for several centuries) they needed to recognize that they were in an assembly that practiced the Law, and to ignore it would be in poor taste.
 - These assemblies were Apostolic not Pauline in doctrine.
 - Since Paul spoke strongly about freedom from the Law, why else would he mention a woman's obedience to the Law?
 - If this interpretation is correct, the closing phrase of v. 33 would belong be instructive, speaking about *the assemblies of the saints* (i.e.: Jewish believers), and the punctuation would place 33b with 34.
- Further supporting evidence is that total silence of women would be a contradiction with the following passages:
 - 1 Corinthians 11:5, which gives guidelines for a woman praying or prophesying (presumably in public). Paul doubtlessly is not referring to silent prayer and prophesy.
 - 1 Corinthians 14:5, in which Paul wishes that **ye all spake with tongues** (it would be hard to speak in tongues while being silent).
- Both 1 Corinthians 11:5 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12 (and their context) should be the basis for determining the issue of women in the church, not this passage.
- Items of note:
 - Paul's use of **the law** is in the general sense of the Hebrew Scriptures.
 - In Acts 15 there is a similar circumstance of gentile believers cooperating with the Saints of Jerusalem. These believers are asked to **abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood**, not as a new kind of law, but to work in harmony with Jewish Saints for the evangelism of other Jews.
- Verse 35 - Elaborating and clarifying v. 34, Paul instructs women to ask questions from their husband **at home** rather than *in assembly*.
- Verse 36 –
 - This question of the delivery of **the word of God** seems random without the *Jewish assembly* interpretation of vv. 34-35.
 - The grammatical gender does not allow that Paul is asking *women* if the God's word came **out from you** or **unto you**, so the verse cannot be a chastisement of women speaking. But, if the occasional attendance at an assembly of Jewish saints is in context, then v. 36 is completely in order and not random at all.
 - In such case, Paul is commending them for learning from those to whom the God delivered the Scriptures (compare Rom. 9:3-5 and 3:1-3).
- Verses 37-38 –
 - In vv. 34-36, Paul was speaking to men, providing them leadership guidance for their wives and daughters.
 - Note that he did not say, *let women keep silence*, but **let your women keep silence**.
 - In v. 37 Paul continues his instruction to men, this time concerning **any man** who considers **himself to be a prophet or spiritual**.
 - Such a man is to **acknowledge** that Paul's teaching is authoritative, literally **the commandments of the Lord**.
 - Paul speaks to a man who is **ignorant** and says **let him be ignorant**.
 - I believe that the ignorance is *willful ignorance*.
 - The Greek **let him acknowledge** is ἐπιγινώσκω [epiginosko] and the word **ignorant** is ἀγνοέω [agnoeo], both using the root γινώσκω [ginosko] (to know).
 - Therefore, if any man considers himself to be **a prophet or spiritual** he should *actively pursue to know*, but if he *actively refuses to know* then leave him to his own devices.
- Verse 39 - This clear instruction must be interpreted dispensationally. It was given before prophecies and speaking in tongues ceased (compare 1 Cor. 13:8). If one is a *continuationist*, they should continue to **covet to prophesy** and should not **forbid...to speak with tongues**.
- Verse 40 - Paul gives a summary statement on the use of manifestation gifts for the Corinthians. This statement is true of **all things**, especially those things done under the name of worship.