

## Let The Women Keep Silence

*"As in all the churches of the saints, let the women keep silence in the church: for it is not permitted unto them to speak, but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law. And, if they would learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home for it is shameful for a woman to speak in the church"* (1 Corinthians 14:33b-35).

This passage, along with Paul's instructions to Timothy (1 Tim. 2:11-12), has been the basis of objections to women teachers and, in some instances, to refuse a woman the right to either ask a question or to answer one. It is good, therefore, that we examine these verses and the issues who have grown out of them. Just precisely what does the apostle forbid?

Is the woman forever relegated to complete silence in the church? The word for silence in the passage (*sigao*) is translated "hold one's peace" in other places, and according to W. E. Vine, means to "keep secret". Does the passage demand that a woman not utter a word? Can she not, before men, confess Christ to be God's Son? Can she not sing? To do either of the aforementioned items would break silence yet surely none would forbid the woman to either publicly.

First Corinthians 14:24-35 is a passage which must, like all scriptures, be explained in the soil of its context. First Corinthians 14 was composed to put order out of the chaos in the Corinthians assemblies. Some were speaking in a tongue unknown to those present and they did not bother to interrupt that tongue. Paul conclusively showed that the tongue gift was a sign to the unbeliever, but would be so ONLY if the unbeliever understood what was said. If he understood, he could thereby be edified. But, not only were tongues misused, assemblies were disorderly in other ways. Prophets were sometimes all speaking at the same time or interrupting others as they were speaking. This was to be corrected by the prophets, not only by limiting the number of those who could speak (two or no more than three); but they were to do so in turn. Furthermore, they were to be courteous to one another, not interrupting while the other spoke, or else giving way to another if a new revelation was given to the one who was listening.

In addition to this, other confusion reigned. Some of the women apparently were speaking and interrupting the speaker and that, too, needed to be corrected. It appears the women of 1 Corinthians 14 were the wives of the prophets who felt that because they were the prophet's wife, they could question their husband about something he had revealed. We reach this conclusion because 1) they were married and 2) their husbands could

answer their questions. These two facts qualify these women to a special category, because it is undeniable true that not all women have husbands and further that, even if they do have husbands, not all husbands can answer questions of a spiritual nature.

Paul appealed to the law which commanded women to be in subjection. In 1 Timothy 2:10-11, Paul states that a women is neither to teach nor usurp authority over the man. Those instructions forbid women preachers, elders, and deacons but does not exclude her from teaching — period. Older women are to teach young women; they are to be teachers of good things (Ti. 2:3-4). Philip had four virgin daughters who prophesied. Prophesying includes teaching, but Philip's daughters had neither husband nor children, they had to teach someone other than their own family.

Women are to be in a subordinate role. The husband is the head of the wife (Eph. 5:23). Further, *"I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God"* (1 Cor. 11:3). Nevertheless the subordinate role of the woman forbids her to teach or usurp authority over the man, but does not exclude her from teaching. First Corinthians 14:33-35 does not forbid the woman either from confessing her faith in Christ, her sins, or singing praises to God. It does not forbid that when she is placed in a situation where she neither teaches nor exercises dominion over him, she may teach. And, be it clearly understood, God expects her to.

-- Jim McDonald