

WOMEN KEEPING SILENT IN CHURCH – PART 1

1 Corinthians 14:34 ... “Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the [Jewish] law also says.”

This will be a difficult topic, so please allow me to present it in two parts before you condemn the teaching or voice your disagreement.

Today's verse might seem clear (and harsh). But the topic about women speaking in church is fairly complicated and involves: cultural practices of Paul's era, particular problems in the church at Corinth (to which this letter was sent), tension between Jewish law and the new Christ followers, misuse of spiritual gifts, recognition of authority, and disrespect. This topic covers a vast expanse of scripture from chapters 11 to 14. I will try to summarize the key points, but I encourage you to study these chapters yourself.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church after he received reports of chaos and confusion in their worship services, which we find in verse 33. Everyone spoke at the same time, the pastor's authority was ignored, people were speaking in tongues without interpretations, and prophesying without considering if the prophecy was from God. Paul cautioned that everyone (not just women) who was out of order, should be silent.

Cultural issues then and now influence many things. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 11:4-5, Paul mentions the practice of that day in which men did not cover their heads in church, but women were expected to cover their heads. This was not a spiritual issue, but a cultural practice. When I was younger, it was still considered respectful for men and boys to remove their hats while in church, but today that seems to be no longer practiced. Since head coverings among Christian women are no longer the norm, we might consider other forms of dress to be a sign of respect, such as dressing modestly. But, then again, everyone has their own definition of modesty.

Paul's prohibition against women speaking in church may have been targeted specifically at the church in Corinth, which was having problems. Equally possible, is that Paul was referring to the authority God gave men to be the leaders in society, the home, church, and in the spiritual lives of their families. Paul makes it clear (at least to the Corinthians) that women had the freedom to express their views and even to publicly pray or prophesy (1 Cor. 11:5), but he did restrict them from having authority over men in the context of church, and challenging men in worship services. They were, however, free to discuss their views with their husbands (or fathers) at home (1 Cor. 14:35).

Sorry to leave you dangling, but we will continue this topic in the next devotional.

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