

ASSEMBLIES & THE SILENCE OF WOMEN

The Assembling of all the Members of a Local Church

(The formal, public, corporate gathering –when all the assembly members come together)

1 Cor. 14:34-35

We believe the prohibition for women to speak comes in a specific context, namely, *“in the churches”* (1 Corinthians 14:34).

Let your women keep silence in the churches (v34).

This is a restriction of, and an exception to verse 31, that all might prophesy; in which would be understood of men only, and not of women; and is directed against a practice which seems to have prevailed in this church at Corinth, allowing women to preach and teach in it; and this being a disorderly practice, and what was not used in other churches, the apostle Paul forbids and condemns, and not without reason.

For it is not permitted unto them to speak (v34).

That is, in public assemblies, in the church of God, they might not speak with tongues, nor prophesy, or preach, or teach the word. All speaking which carries in it direction, instruction, government, and authority is forbidden.

1 Tim.2:8-14

1 Tim. 2.8-14 teaches, as we understand it, that Paul directs Timothy as to how he should instruct the believers in the churches [in every place] as to the way their corporate gathering should be conducted.

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 (v.11-12).

Made up as they are of males and females the public exercises of prayer and teaching were restricted to men, and the women were to be silent. The whole passage is part of

Paul's directions as to how people should behave in the house of God, which is the church of the living God...3:15.

The Non-assembling of all Members of a Local Church

(The informal, more private natured, any time-any place gatherings (i.e. Bible studies)—when not all members of a particular assembly are grouped together)

1 Cor. 11:3-16

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul does not begin addressing the Corinthians in the context of their local assembly until verses 17 and 18. From verse 17 to the end of the chapter the phrase *when ye come together in the church* occurs seven times.

Therefore, especially in light of 14:34–35, it's very likely that Paul's reference to praying and prophesying in 11:4-5 is not intended to be understood in the context of the corporate gathering.

Women, during the apostolic days, were able to exercise their instructive gift of prophecy outside the assembled church.

And even today, we who believe that women should not teach or exercise authority over men in the church meetings, nevertheless every opportunity for gifted women to teach children and other women (Titus 2:3–4) is to be made. Teaching in a children's ministry or leading a women's Bible study does not violate 1 Tim. 2:12.

We would like to add, that from the time when the apostolic age ended, prophesying in the sense of speaking direct revelation is no longer an active gift for anyone, men, or women. We discern the use of the term "to prophesy", today simply means to speak forth God's word (i.e., to preach or proclaim).

Appendix: The Head Covering

Whatever the nature of the meetings, formal or informal, women should wear their head covering. The core purpose for the symbol, whether they are silent or vocally worshipping, praying or speaking God's word, is that it is a manifestation of their submission to their husbands, and God's designed order in creation—God, Christ, man and then woman (1 Cor.11:3).

The women are to wear head coverings for two reasons. One reason is to make known God's authority, as conceded to man and the other reason is for the shielding of man's glory. No glory or authority, but God's is to be displayed at the gatherings.

A Final Word of Grace

Let each be fully persuaded in his own mind: we must respect the consciences of the Lord's people and not despise them if we disagree with them, neither condemn them.

Harry Ironside believed the occasions at which women could speak were different from the official meetings of the church at which they were to be silent. **[Note: Harry A. Ironside, Addresses on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, pp454-55. Cf. Wiersbe, 1:616.]**