

Should Women Be Silent in the Church?

Dedicated to Sandra, Our Women Teachers, Our Wives, Mothers and Grandmothers

1. Introduction

- “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. It was the woman who became deceived and became a sinner. But she shall be saved through childbearing—if she continues in faith, love, and propriety” (1 Timothy 2:11-15).
- “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).

Should women keep quiet in the church? Are they allowed to teach? Concerning spiritual matters, should they be submissive to their husbands? Are women saved through childbirth?

2. The Voice of Women Silenced in the Church

For centuries until this day, these two verses have been used to silence the voices of women in the church.

- In 2019, prominent reformed Baptist minister John MacArthur told Beth Moore, a Southern Baptist, to “go home,” criticizing her ministry because it sometimes reaches men. Likewise evangelist Joyce Meyer’s ministry has been criticized because “she is a woman whose message reaches men.”
- Recently the Mayor of Wylie, Texas (suburb of Dallas), Eric Rogue, also a pastor, requested that only men be allowed to pray at a city council meeting, citing these two verses from Paul’s letters. Rogue also invited a group of missionaries from YWAM, Youth with a Mission, to give the invocation at a city council meeting. The mayor had only one request—that the representatives who prayed were not women.
- Brandon Sutton, leader of “Knowing Jesus Ministries,” writes (06-28-22): “Does the Bible allow women to be pastors? Scripture is clear. Only biblically qualified men can hold the position of pastor in Christ’s church.”
- In 1832, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church declared, “To teach and exhort, to lead in prayer, in public and mixed assemblies is clearly forbidden to women in the Holy Oracles.”
- In 1969, my Father, the Deacon Board Chair, was called before the Board of our Baptist church and told to repent or leave the church because he asked my sister to lead singing at one evening service when he became ill.

3. The Voice of Women Silenced in the Ancient World

Babylonians and Greeks

- **Hammurabi** (1750 BC) discusses the legal rights of women in the section devoted to animals.
- **Homer** portrayed women as objects, war prizes, pawns, and possessions, “the cause of all conflict and suffering” in the world. In his poems women were often portrayed as mythical monsters.
- **Socrates**, the father of Greek philosophy, argued that “being born a woman is a divine punishment, since a woman is halfway between a man and an animal.” He considered women and men to be two separate species.
- **Plato** claimed that cowardly, corrupt men were “transformed, at their second incarnation, into women.... In this fashion, then, women and the whole female gender came into existence.”
- **Aristotle** believed that the female was a “monstrosity,” a “deformed male,” and argued that “the male is by nature superior and the female inferior, the male ruler and the female subject.” Of the sexes, he believed that “equality of the two or rule of the inferior is always hurtful.”
- The Greek poet, **Hesiod**, professed that “woman was created as man’s eternal curse.”
- Women were denied formal education, Greek schools were only for boys.

Judaism in the Time of Jesus: Influenced by the Greeks

- Teaching a woman the Scriptures was considered a waste of time—and worse. Rabbi **Eliezer** (end of 1st century) said, “If any man gives his daughter a knowledge of the Law, it is as though he taught her lechery (lustfulness).”
- The **Jerusalem Talmud** states, “Let the words of Torah be burned up, but do not let them be delivered to women.”
- **Josephus** (90 AD) wrote that the Law declared a wife to be “inferior to her husband in all things.”
- The **Berakhot**, a Jewish instructional book on prayer, said, “Every (Jewish) man is obligated to recite three blessings daily... ‘I thank God that I am not a gentile, a woman, or a slave.’” (Echoing the Greek prayers of Plato).
- During New Testament times, relations between Jewish men and women were so restricted that the **Mishnah**, the first written collection of Jewish legal theory (from 10-200 A.D), warns men “not to talk with women. A man who talks with a woman brings evil upon himself, neglects the study of the Law and, in the end, will inherit hell.”
- The **Mishnah** goes on to completely forbid a man from speaking with a woman whom he has not married: “A man might divorce his wife and not have to return her dowry if she were guilty of speaking to another man; and even the act of speaking to a man in the street might be used as evidence of a bride’s unfaithfulness to her intended.” A woman might

lose her husband and her home if she spoke to another man, and if she spoke to her husband too much, that might send him to hell.

- Jewish education was provided only for boys and men. Rabbis had only male disciples.
- In NT times, even though there was a legal process for divorce, Jewish men usually bypassed it, simply by commanding the wife to leave the house and never return. This process, called “putting away,” deprived her and her children of all means of support. This process was condemned by Jesus.

4. The Voice of Women Is Not Silenced in the Bible

Women Speak, Instruct, and Lead in the Old Testament

- **Miriam:** The first female leader we see in Scripture is Moses’ sister, Miriam. God said to the prophet Micah, *“I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam.”* (Micah 6:4). Miriam was chosen by God to go before God’s people. She is identified in Scripture as a prophetess, chosen by God to lead the people, and she leads the entire nation in worship after the parting of the Red Sea (Ex 15:20-21). Miriam is a leader and a prophetess.
- **Tamar** (Gen 38) is described as more righteous than her father-in law Judah, after whom the southern kingdom of Israel was named.
- **Deborah:** Deborah is identified as a judge and a prophetess, positions of leadership in both the government and the Hebrew religion (Judges 4:3-5; 5:31). The Biblical account is clear—Israel was *“saved from the hands of their enemies all the days”* by Deborah. Under her reign as Israel’s highest-ranking leader, the nation was victorious and *“the land had peace forty years”* (Judges 5:31). The Bible shows Deborah to be esteemed, enthusiastic, and confident in these leadership roles.
- **Huldah:** During King Josiah’s reign, the long-forgotten Book of the Law (maybe Deuteronomy) was found by the high priest Hilkiyah, and was brought to Josiah (2 Chron 34:21). He asks Hilkiyah to find someone who can interpret it for him. Hilkiyah finds the prophetess Huldah, who explained God’s word to Josiah. The king, in turn, made a covenant with God and *“then he had everyone in Jerusalem and Benjamin pledge themselves to it.”* (2 Chron 34:32). Such was the effect of one godly woman's fearless prophecy. Her words changed the course of the nation. Moreover, she is viewed as the first person to consider the Torah to be authoritative Scripture, through which God’s speaks in ways that govern our lives.
- **Rahab:** A prostitute in Jericho is grafted into the lineage of Christ through her obedience (Joshua 2, Mt 1:5).
- **Ruth:** A foreign widow, birthed King David through her offspring. (Mt 1:5). OT book named after her.
- **Esther:** An orphan girl, God made her Queen, saving all of Israel through her. OT book named after her.
- In Genesis 1, both women and men are “created in the image of God,” Eve is created as a partner, not as a subordinate. The word used to describe Eve, “helper,” is used 28 times in

the OT—27 times it refers to God—it’s not a subordinate term. It implies that men and women were perfectly suited for one another.

- Godly women were considered industrious, prudent, wise and understanding, compassionate, respectable, kind, trustworthy, favored by God, praiseworthy (Proverbs 11:16, 31:10-31). “She speaks with wisdom and faithful instruction is on her tongue (31:26). **She is wise and she is teaching.**

Women, Speak, Teach, and Lead in the New Testament

In the New Testament, we see many examples that conflict with the idea that women are not to speak, teach, or minister in the church.

The Meaning of “Prophecy” in the New Testament

- Along with prayer and singing spiritual songs, prophecy is the central part of worship and could be delivered by men and women. “**Prophecy**” means to speak to God’s people on God’s behalf. For the first Christians. “prophecy” described both “preaching” or “teaching.” In worship, prophecy is spoken in human words (not “tongues”)(1 Cor 14:3,29; Acts 21:4,11), spoken to the gathered believers (1 Cor 14:4), inspired by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 14:30; Luke 7:39, 22:64; John 4:19), for the purpose of edification, encouragement, consolation, conviction, teaching, and guidance (1 Cor 14:3, 24-25; Acts 21:4; 16:6-10), and, most importantly, spoken in a spirit of love (1 Cor 13). Prophecy is not necessarily free from error (“we know in part and we prophesy in part”) (1 Cor 13:9), and thus needs assessment (1 Thess 5:19-20; 1 Cor 14:29), which occurs in worship in an orderly way (2-3 respondents, one at a time, 1 Cor 14:26-33), again, in a spirit of love (1 Cor 13), evaluated based on apostolic teaching (1 Cor 14:36-38; 2 Thess 2:1-3), and mature spiritual wisdom (Col 1:9). **Paul ranks prophets as second behind apostles** in his list of church leaders, followed by evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Eph 4:11).

In the New Testament, Christian women “prophecy”:

- **Pentecost** (Act 2:4). The Holy Spirit falls on 120 disciples, men and women, gathered in Jerusalem causing them to prophesy in other languages. Peter sees that the larger crowd is perplexed by this (“Why are women are prophesying?”), and quotes the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-29) in response: “God says, ‘In the last day, I will pour out my Spirit upon all people, and your sons and daughters will prophesy. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit, and they will prophesy” (Acts 2:17-18). For **Peter**, woman can prophesy.
- **In 1 Corinthians 11:1-11** and throughout the letter, Paul addresses his comments to “brothers and sisters” and instructs both men and women about proper attire for praying and prophesying in church, because he expects that both men and women will be praying and prophesying in church. For **Paul**, women can prophesy in church.
- **Consider these New Testament women, who had a God-inspired voice:**
 - **Mary** is the first to testify about Jesus (the Magnificat, Luke 1:46-55).

- **Anna** was a prophet who “never left the temple but stayed there day and night” (Luke 2:36). She prophesied there when she met Jesus: “This child is the one whom we have been waiting for expectantly. Through him, God will rescue Jerusalem” (vs. 38). She was one of the first evangelists to testify about the Good News in Jesus.
- **The women at the tomb** were the first to witness and testify to Christ’s resurrection (Luke 24:1-10).
- **Priscilla** is called Paul’s “co-worker,” he acknowledges the church in her home in Rome. Seven times in the NT, she and her husband Aquila were commended by Paul. Contrary to the Roman custom of naming the man first, five times Priscilla’s name comes first. John Chrysostom, an early Christian Church Father, writes this: “Paul does not do this without a reason. He acknowledges a greater godliness for her than for her husband. What I said is not guess-work, Priscilla took Apollos and she instructed him in the way of the Lord and made him a teacher brought to completion” (Acts 18:18-28).
- **Chloe** is mentioned as a leader of the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 1:11). Members of her household wrote to Paul to inform him of issues in the church there; he writes his letter in response.
- **Phoebe** is commended by Paul; he calls her a “deacon” (he uses the same term to describe Jesus Christ and other ministers), and entrusts her to carry his letter from Corinth to the Roman church (Romans 16:1). On the role of letter carriers, see Acts:15:31-32 (they deliver and explain the letter).
- **Junia** is acclaimed by Paul as an outstanding apostle (Romans 16:7), she was a Christian before Paul was and had been imprisoned with Paul. “Apostle” in Greek means “someone sent on a mission” (missionary).
- All four of **Philip’s daughters** prophesy (Acts 21:9). An early church father Papias, writes that they provided information about Jesus to Luke that he used in writing his Gospel, and to himself (Papias), as he wrote his history of the church.
- **Mary** is described as a co-worker (Romans 16:5), along with **Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis**, who are “working hard for God.” Another woman mentioned here is **Julia** (16:15).
- In Philippians, Paul mentions **Euodia** and **Syntyche**, “women who have worked by my side, with Clement and the rest of the co-workers, whose names are in the Book of Life” (4:2-3).
- Paul thanks God for **Lois and Eunice**, Timothy’s grandmother and mother, for teaching Timothy about Jesus and nurturing him in the faith (2 Tim 1:5).
- Jesus **sees** women, speaks with them, dines with them, instructs them, offers the love of God to them and they speak to him, even challenging him (“Even the dogs eat the scraps beneath the table” Mt 15:27).
- Paul writes that in Christ there is no distinction between men and women, and so he consistently treats women as such, writing to “brothers and sisters,” and commending the early church’s female leaders as “co-workers.” In marriage he insists on mutual

submission, a reciprocal relationship (1 Cor 7:1-5; Eph 5:21-21, “the two shall become one”). **No one in the world was talking about and treating women as positively as Paul.**

5. Should Women Be Silent in the Church?

On the one hand, we have these two passages (1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians 14) that say that women should be silent in the church and not teach, and then, on the other hand, we have all this conflicting evidence in the rest of the Bible (OT, Gospels, Acts, and Paul’s letter including 1 Corinthians 11) that say that women can speak in church, prophesy, teach and lead churches in their homes. What’s going on? How do we reconcile these differences?

6. The Importance of Context in Understanding the Bible

Context. Whenever we try to interpret a difficult passage of Scripture, it’s importance to consider the context. Read the following statement and tell me what it means:

“With the hocked gems financing him, our hero bravely defied all scornful laughter that tried to prevent his scheme. “Your eyes deceive,” he had said. “An egg, not a table, correctly typifies this unexplored planet.” Now three sturdy sisters sought proof. Forging along, sometimes through calm vastness, yet more often through turbulent peaks and valleys, days became weeks as many doubters spread fearful rumors about the edge. At last, from nowhere, welcome winged creatures appeared signifying momentous success.” (Hint: Submuloc)

Three elements of context are important for understanding these verses:

- Historical context: What’s going on in Ephesus (1 Timothy) or in Corinth that provides insight into the meaning?
- Literary context: What has Paul said in the rest of the letter that provides clues about the meaning of these verses?
- Linguistic context: What is the meaning of the Greek words and sentences that are here translated into English? Might there be better alternatives (and why?)?
- **New tool** (not available to translators of modern translations), Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (TLG), contains a digitalized version of every Greek text from the 8th cent. B.C. (Homer) to 600 A.D., and others up to 1453 A.D. Provides evidence of the meaning of 110 million Greek words at the time the word was written. In the NT (5437 words used multiple times = 138,162 total words in the NT), hapax legomena are words only used once in the NT. How do we know what such words mean? This tool provides evidence. This tool is helpful for understanding the meaning of the words Paul uses in these verses.

7. 1 Timothy 2:11-15

The Greek Text has been translated this way. . .

“A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. It was the woman who became deceived and became a sinner. But woman shall be saved through childbearing—if she continues in faith, love, and propriety.”

Historical Context (Paul writes 1 Timothy concerning issues in the House Churches of Ephesus).

What going on in Ephesus?

- The Cult of Artemis (Goddess of Childbirth, of Animals, and the Hunt). The Ephesian Temple of Artemis is one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and had a tremendous influence on the whole region of eastern Asia Minor, including Ephesus. Maintained that women are superior to and responsible for the creation of men. Artemis was the child of two Greek gods, Zeus and Leto. Instead of taking one of the gods as her husband, Artemis sought instead the company of a human male, Orion—thus making her and all her female adherents like gods, superior to men (Festival, Lord of the Streets in Ephesus). As she assisted her mother in giving birth to her twin brother Apollo, she was considered the Goddess of Childbirth and the “originator” of man.
- Widespread practice and acceptance of sexual infidelity among women and men. Dio Chrysostom (Greek historian, 40-115 AD) (Or. 7: 141-142) on women in western Asia Minor at the end of the first century: “Men condone even the matter of their wives’ adultery in a somewhat magnificent fashion and the practice of it finds great and most charitable consideration, where husbands in their simplicity do not notice most things and do not admit knowledge of some things but even suffer the adulterers to be called guests and friends ... inviting them to their table at festivals ... and display but moderate anger at actions that are most glaring and open—where, I say, these intrigues of the married women are carried on with an air of respectability. Such infidelity was opposed by the Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 7:1-5) and by Caesar, who provided incentives for bachelors to marry and create a family rather than hook up with women and instituted punishments for husbands who ignored their wives’ extramarital affairs.
- Widespread practice of abortion. Juvenal (born 50 AD) (*Satires* 6.593ff.), “Childbirth hardly ever occurs in a gold-embroidered bed since abortionists have such skills and so many potions, and can bring about the death of children in the womb.” Ovid (*Amores*, 2.14.5-9, 27-28, 35-38), inveighs against the practice: “Can it be that, to be free of the flaws of stretchmarks, you must scatter the tragic sands of carnage? Why will you subject your womb to the weapons of abortion and give dread poisons to the unborn?”
- Extravagant dress and hairstyles among women. Juvenal (*Satires* 6:458-59, 6:501-3) commented on the hairstyles and accessorizing of contemporary Ephesian women: “So

important is the business of beautification; so numerous are the tiers and storeys (*like a three-story building*) piled one upon another on her head! There is nothing that a woman will not permit herself to do, nothing that she deems shameful, when she encircles her neck with green emeralds, and fastens huge pearls to her elongated ears.” Fancy dresses and gold were the two accoutrements of the hetaerae (high-class priestess prostitutes) in the cult of Artemis.

- Disruptive chattering, gossip and arguments among both men and women. Juvenal (Satires, 6:448-56), “But most intolerable of all is the woman who as soon as she has sat down to dinner commends Virgil, pardons the dying Dido, and pits the poets against each other, putting Virgil in the one scale and Homer in the other. The grammarians make way before her; the rhetoricians give in; the whole crowd is silenced: no lawyer, no auctioneer will get a word in, no, nor any other woman; so torrential is her speech that you would think that all the pots and bells were being clashed together. She lays down definitions, and discourses on morals, like a philosopher; thirsting to be deemed both wise and eloquent.”

Literary Context: What’s Going on in the Ephesian House Churches?

- False teachers are influencing the men and women in the house churches of Ephesus (1:3; 6:3). Paul labels the content of their teaching as “myths and genealogies” (1:4) or “myths” (4:7) or “demonic doctrines” (4:1-2). There is an explicit reference to opposition leaders, Hymenaeus and Alexander (1:20). These teachers are causing disruption, arguments, and disputes (6:4; 2 Tim 2:14; cf. Tit 3:9). Paul describes the morality of the opponents as liars and hypocrites (4:2), impious and immoral (2 Tim 3:1-5; cf. Tit 3:1-5), and motivated by greed (6:5-10; cf. Tit 1:11). About 50% of 1 Timothy’s content discusses false teaching.
- These false teachers are targeting women and widows (5:11-14; 2 Tim 3:5-9), who are helping them spread their teachings (2 Tim 3:6-9; 1 Tim 5:11-15): these women dress immodestly (1 Tim 2:9-10), “live for pleasure” (verse 6), “their sexual desires overcome their dedication to Christ” (5:11), “going about from house to house” talking foolishness, contrary to the truth, they are busybodies, saying things they “ought not to” (5:13); by doing so, they bring the Gospel into disrepute (5:14); and some have “already turned away to follow Satan” (5:15; cf. 2:14 and 4:2).

Paul’s Response

- The practices and ideas of false teachers are taking hold among members of the Ephesian Church in ways that threaten to destroy the public reputation of the Gospel and the church. Order, respect and quietness must define Christian services of worship. At the center of everything is Paul’s commitment to spread the Gospel (1:12-17).
- Therefore, Paul tells Timothy to facilitate prayer and worship in the Ephesian Church in ways that enhance rather than discredit the Gospel (1:18-20). Paul wants Timothy to address disruptive issues with both men and women.

1 Timothy 2:8-15: Paul wants Timothy to address disruptive issues with both men and women.

- **With men:** “Men are to pray, lifting up hands forsaking anger and conflict” (1 Tim 2:8), and should be “peaceful and **quiet** (2:2), the same word is used in Vs. 11), in all godliness and holiness,” for the sake of the Gospel, “because God desires all to be saved.”
- **With women:**
 - “*Likewise*,” Paul says, women in prayer and worship are to “dress modestly, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or expensive clothes”; implicitly, “Don’t transgress the boundaries of traditional respectability, dressing like the priestess prostitutes of Artemis or her followers (2:9-10). Why? “People come into church see this ‘immodesty’ and think that our women are like the prostitutes, which distracts from the cause of leading people to Christ.”
 - **1 Timothy 2:11-14**, “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or assume authority over a man she must be silent.” What does this mean?
 - Most important: “**A woman must learn**” (the only verb in this entire section in the imperative voice, meaning “must”). We often miss this main point. Nowhere else in all the ancient world was this a possibility. Women were not allowed to learn. In Ephesus and throughout Paul’s churches, “Women must learn!” How?
 - “In quietness and full submission.” Within Judaism and early Christianity “quietness” (*hesychia*) is standard posture of both men and women who were learning authoritative teaching. It means “receptiveness to teaching characterized by peaceful, respectful attention.” The same word is used in relation to men nine verses earlier (2:2). This word does not mean “in silence,” meaning “the absence of speech.” Paul was saying, “no arguing in church” (there can be respectful discussions, as 1 Cor 14:26-33: “For God is not a God of disorder, but of peace”). This stands in contrast to the arguing of some women Paul identifies later in 1 Tim 5. There was very likely opposition to teachers or prophets during worship voiced by women or a woman in the Ephesian Church that Paul thought was not only inappropriate, but also bad theology. This is confirmed in the following verses.
 - “**I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man**” or “I do not permit a woman to teach that she is the originator of man.” The word “authority” (*authentein*), in all the New Testament is used only here. What does it mean? It has been translated “authority.” However, based on TLG, mentioned above, in all Greek literature, the word does not mean “authority” until 300 years after Paul writes this! In the 1st century, it meant “**originator**.” Given what the cult of Artemis was teaching about Artemis, that, as the goddess of childbirth, **she was superior to men and the**

originator of men, this passage makes sense as saying, “I do not permit a woman to teach that a woman is the originator of man. For Adam came first, then Eve.” The emphasis here is not to silence women or prevent them from teaching, but to correct a false teaching that is being argued in worship by women or perhaps by a particular woman being influenced by false teachers.

- Then in 2:13-14, Paul says by implication, “**As Eve was deceived**, some Ephesian women have been deceived by the false teachers and have fallen into sin. But if you now continue in faith, love, and holiness with propriety you will be saved.” And what “propriety” looks like for Christian women in Ephesus is “fidelity in marriage, **bearing and raising children (instead having abortions to avoid stretchmarks)**, dressing self-respectfully, learning as good students do, and serving others.”
- Paul does not forbid women to speak in church, he argues against “a woman (singular), causing arguments in worship about who came first, woman or man. Paul’s words did not solve the problem, for during the 2nd century, the primacy of Eve was taught by Gnostic Christians (Apocryphon of John re-writes Genesis).

8. 1 Corinthians 14: 34-35

“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.”

Historical Context: Corinth

The Temple of Aphrodite, famous for the prostitution of courtesans, whose acts of prostitution were dedicated to Aphrodite and their service to her. Euripides, (quoted by Strabo, Geography 12.3.36) says, ‘I am come, having left Akrokorinthos that is washed on all sides, the sacred hill-city of Aphrodite in Corinth. On account of the multitude of courtesans (priestess prostitutes), who are sacred to Aphrodite, men come in great numbers and indulge. And the merchants and soldiers who go there squander all their money so that the following proverb has arisen in reference to them: 'Not for every man is the journey to Corinth.'”

Veils as a symbol of respect, keeping women from being objectified, based on their sexuality.



Elite women in ancient Mesopotamia and in the Greek, Persian and Roman empires wore the veil (entire body covered) as a sign of respectability and high status. The earliest attested reference to veiling is found a Middle Assyrian law code dating from between 1400 and 1100 BC. “A wife-of-a-man or widows, or women who go out into the main thoroughfare [shall not have] their heads bare. A prostitute shall not veil herself; her head shall be bare. Whoever sees a veiled prostitute shall seize her, secure witnesses, and bring her to the palace entrance. Slave-women shall not veil themselves, and he who should see a veiled slave-woman shall seize her and bring her to the palace entrance: they shall cut off her ears.” In Greek and Roman times, hair was a signal of female sexual potency, appropriate only for her husband to see. Lifting the veil by the husband at weddings is a remnant of Roman practices that place sexual intimacy solely in the context of marriage.

Literary Context

Paul gets a letter from members of the household of Chloe, that informs him of moral issues, divisions and conflicts in the in the Church at Corinth. Paul had previously written them about these issues (in a letter that is lost, 5:9-10), but because of a misunderstanding, he now finds it necessary to clarify his instruction in this letter and insist on immediate action. Paul addresses these issues:

- Division and disputes in the church (1:10-4:21)
- Sexual immorality (5:1-6:20)
- Litigation in pagan courts (6:1-8)
- Instructions on marriage (7:1-40)
- Instructions on eating meat offered to idols (8:1-11:1)
- Abuse of the Lord’s Supper (11:17-34)
- Instructions on public worship (11:2-16; chapters 12-14)
- Instructions on the Resurrection (15)

Throughout the letter, women play an important role. They are leaders of House Churches (Chloe, Phoebe). Priscilla has been the teacher of Apollos. Women are told to prophesy in worship “wearing the veil, with their head covered” (1 Cor 11). The veil is their “authority” to speak as an equal to man in worship, because in Corinth (Aphrodite), the veil keeps them from being objectified because of their sexuality. It would be the same as if you women here today wore your bathing suits to House Church—particularly if you were teaching—it would be a distraction!

Linguistic Context: 1 Corinthians 14:34-35

- Women are to remain silent.” For “silent,” Paul could have chosen the verb “*phimoo*” which means “forcing someone to be silent,” or *hesuchia*, as in 1 Timothy, which means “quietness and stillness,” but he didn’t. Paul chose the verb *sigao*, which means “a voluntary silence.” ***Sigao is the kind of silence requested before disorder and clamor.***
- Likewise, when Paul said “it is disgraceful for a woman to speak or teach in the church,” he could have chosen any one of 30+ Greek verbs that he uses in other places to refer to “speaking in ministry.” Five of these specifically denote preaching, teaching, or proclaiming, and twenty-five others can be translated ‘speak,’ or ‘teach.’ Paul doesn’t use any of these verbs, rather, here he uses the verb ***laleo***, which is the only one of these verbs that simply means “to talk or converse.” “Don’t be having a conversation with your friends during worship. It’s disruptive.
- Most interpreters of this verse conclude that Paul was telling women to stop chattering during what had become very unruly services. The original Greek verb choices as well as the context of order, which is the clear theme of the entire chapter, support this interpretation. The silence required in 1 Corinthians 14 is a **voluntary silence in accordance with the need for order in the church service**. It was not intended to silence women outright.

9. Does Scripture Restrict Women from Speaking, Teaching, or Exercising Authority in the Church?

God certainly didn’t restrict women when it came to Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah. The New Testament was birthed in the Holy Spirit’s baptism which fell on men and women who prophesized. Mary and Anna are the first evangelists to testify that the Messiah had come. Women are the first Christians to testify about the resurrection. Paul himself commends the teaching ministry and leadership of Priscilla, Phoebe, Chloe, and Junia and he says that in Christ, there is no difference between men and women, all are one.

Nevertheless, throughout church history, Christian women have been restricted and silenced. A strong argument can be made that this is not God’s doing. It is the doing of men.

Florence Nightingale wrote this:

“I would have given the Church my head, my hand, my heart. She would not have them. She did not know what to do with them. She told me to go back and do crochet in my mother’s drawing-room; or if I were tired of that, to marry and look well at the head of my husband’s table. ‘You may go to the Sunday School if you like it,’ she said. But she gave me no training even for that. She gave me neither work to do for her, nor education for it.” (Florence Nightingale in a letter to Dean Stanley, in 1852)

How many Nightingales has the Church lost?

Perhaps the church should be busy setting women free to use their gifts like God did with these incredible women in Scripture, instead of creating a dogma to keep women silent out of four verses that stand alone in stark contrast to so many others.

When confronting any text of Scripture, we must ask ourselves which words apply to us today and which words are limited to their historical contexts.

- Jesus tells his disciples to wash each other's feet (John 13:14-15), most Christians do not believe this applies to them.
- Paul commands believers to "Greet each other with a holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26). We feel free to apply this differently in our culture (possibly, a warm handshake).
- There are other verses in 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians, that Christians feel free to ignore because of cultural relevance:
 - Paul tells women to wear veils, not to care about their hairstyle and fancy jewelry. Do we follow this today?
 - How many churches today support their widows over sixty years of age who are distinguished by good works but have no family to support them (1 Tim. 5:3, 9-10) and how many churches bring members under discipline for not providing well for relatives in this category (5:8, 16)?
 - Should widows stay unmarried (1 Cor. 7:8; cf. 7:20, 24, 26-28, 34-35, 39-40) or should widows marry, have children and manage their households (1 Timothy 5:14)? The Apostle Paul could give different advice to the churches depending on different circumstances.
 - Do we believe today that slavery should be allowed to continue (1 Timothy 6:1-2)?

10. Conclusion

What Paul cared about most was advancing the Gospel. Women were indispensable coworkers with Paul in spreading the Gospel, church-planting, evangelizing, praying, prophesying, teaching, and informing him about issues in the church. The role of women in ministry and leadership in Paul's ministry stood out over against the traditional norms of Jewish and Greco-Roman culture. It was only tempered by special circumstances that could have hindered the advancement of the Gospel, like those he addresses in Ephesus (1 Timothy) and in Corinth.