

# Can Women Speak in Church?

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# Introduction

- Much confusion and debate exists among brethren regarding the question of women speaking in church.
- Many falsely conclude 1 Tim. 2:11-12 & 1 Cor. 14:34-35 are identical commands.
  - While similar, they are two different commands given in two different contexts, leading to different implications.
- Our goal is to rightly divide the scriptures to answer this question (2 Tim. 2:15).

# 1 Tim. 2:11-12 & 1 Cor. 14:34-35 Aren't Identical

- Contextually, 1 Tim. 2 has nothing to do with a church assembly.
  - An assembly is never explicitly identified.
  - Nothing is ever said about a church “coming together.”
  - The context addresses daily responsibilities.
    - Prayer (v. 1-4).
    - Godly conduct (v. 2, 15).
    - Modesty (v. 9-10).
  - Don't make the mistake our institutional brethren make in Gal. 6.

# 1 Tim. 2:11-12 & 1 Cor. 14:34-35 Aren't Identical

- Contextually, 1 Tim. 2 has nothing to do with a church assembly.
- 1 Cor. 14:34-35 explicitly identifies a church assembly as the setting.
  - “Women should keep silent in the churches” (1 Cor. 14:34).
  - “It is shameful for a woman to speak in church” (1 Cor. 14:35).
  - The church has “come together” in one place (1 Cor. 14:23, 26).

# 1 Tim. 2:11-12 & 1 Cor. 14:34-35 Aren't Identical

- Contextually, 1 Tim. 2 has nothing to do with a church assembly.
- 1 Cor. 14:34-35 explicitly identifies a church assembly as the setting.
- There is a key difference in language between these two passages.
  - 1 Tim. 2:11-12 = “quietness” (ESV), submission, and authority (the same word is used in 2 Thess. 3:12).
  - 1 Cor. 14:34-35 = absolute “silence” (KJV) in the assembled church; can't even ask a question to learn.
    - Two different Greek words with two different meanings.

# Why It's Important to Recognize These Differences

- Some are too restrictive.
  - By failing to distinguish “quietness” from “silence,” more conservative brethren cannot adequately explain Acts 18:26.
    - Priscilla clearly played a part in teaching a man.
      - Note that the text does not say she was the leader in that situation. Don't argue from the silence of the scriptures.

# Why It's Important to Recognize These Differences

- Some are too restrictive.
- Some are too permissive.
  - 1 Cor. 14:34-35 teaches far more than just the fact that woman can't preach the sermon, lead singing, etc.
    - The passage says she is “not permitted to speak,” not even to ask a question.
    - She must be as silent as a tongue speaker with no interpreter (1 Cor. 14:27-28), i.e. absolute silence (save for singing).
  - 1 Tim. 2:11-12 does not suggest that women can teach over men as long as its not in a church assembly.
    - 1 Tim. 2:11-12 applies “everywhere” (v.8).

# Why It's Important to Recognize These Differences

- Some are too restrictive.
- Some are too permissive.
  - Many appeal to Philips' four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9) to say it's okay for women to speak in church.
    - Where does Acts 21:9 say they prophesied "in church?"
    - 1 Cor. 14:34-35 proves they definitely did not prophesy in church.
  - Women possessed miraculous gifts and exercised those gifts, but never prophesied during a church service.
    - We are not "whittling on God's end of the stick," i.e. speculating. We are harmonizing all relevant passages.
    - God explicitly told us women did not prophesy in church (1 Cor. 14:31, 34-35).

# Why It's Important to Recognize These Differences

- Some are too restrictive.
- Some are too permissive.
- No passage should be used to cancel the other.
- Proper distinctions and harmonization will eliminate false conclusions.

# What Does 1 Tim. 2:11-12 Require from Women?

- Not absolute silence.
- Quiet demeanor that is willing to submit to men.
- Cannot teach authoritatively over men in church.
- Cannot teach authoritatively over men outside of church.
- Women can...
  - Teach men as long as it is not done so from a position of authority (note that Priscilla taught **with** Aquila in Acts 18:26).
  - Teach women (Titus 2:3-5).
  - Teach children.

# When Must a Woman Keep Silent “in Church?”

- When the church sets aside a time to “come together” (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:18, 14:23)
- The church is physically assembled “in one place” (1 Cor. 11:20, 14:23).
- The church is fulfilling a unified purpose (1 Cor. 11:33, 14:26).
- The church acts together at the same time to fulfill that unified purpose (1 Cor. 11:33, 14:26).
- **When Must a Woman Keep Silent “in Church?”** When the whole church has assembled together in one location to fulfill a unified purpose together.

# Can Women Speak During Split Bible Studies?

- Is the whole church assembled together in the same place?  
(e.g. auditorium)
  - If the whole church is together in the same place...
    - Women must remain silent because 1 Cor. 14:34-35 applies.
  - If the church is not assembled together in the same place...
    - Women may speak, ask questions, etc., as long as they do not put themselves in a position of authority over men (1 Tim. 2:11-12).
    - Being in the same building but splitting up into separate classrooms does not mean we are in “one place.”
      - If it did mean that, Bible classes would be unauthorized since we are not permitted to have multiple people talking at once while we are together in one place (1 Cor. 14:23, 26-33).

# Can Women Speak During Announcements?

- Is the whole church assembled together in the same place? (e.g. auditorium)
  - If the whole church is together in the same place...
    - Women must remain silent because 1 Cor. 14:34-35 applies.
- Announcements are not a separate activity occurring outside the assembly if the whole church is together in the same place.
- Remember, announcements are an aid (tool) for worship / edification, specifically prayer (1 Cor. 14:26, 16). Therefore, whatever rules govern the assembly also govern the announcements.

# Can Women Audibly Confess in the Assembly?

- Is the whole church assembled together in the same place?  
(e.g. auditorium)
  - If the whole church is together in the same place...
    - Women must remain silent because 1 Cor. 14:34-35 applies.
- “Not permitted to speak” (1 Cor. 14:34).
- “It is shameful for a woman to speak in church” (1 Cor. 14:35).
  - Where does Paul give an exception to this? No exceptions are listed.
- Women must confess Christ (Rom. 10:9-10) & confess sin (James 5:16), but 1 Cor. 14:34-35 prohibits women from doing so in an assembly.
  - They can confess Christ outside of an assembly just like the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:37) & confess sin just like Simon did with Peter (Acts 8:24).

# Conclusion

- 1 Tim. 2:11-12 & 1 Cor. 14:34-35 complement, not cancel, each other.
  - When both passages are respected, confusion disappears.
  - God's instructions regarding women become clear and consistent.
- Will we accept all that God has said?
- Will we honor His pattern even when it differs from modern culture?
- Will we refuse to add to or take away from His word?
  - We do not honor God by being more restrictive than His word.
  - We do not honor God by being more permissive than His word.
  - We honor God by submitting to His word exactly as revealed (2 John 9).