

Can Women Be Teachers in the Christian Congregation?

(Part 1)

by Raymond C. Faircloth

Why the Issue?

The issue here is the apparent contradiction of the statements by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:5 showing wives to be recognized as “prophesying” i.e. teaching in the congregation and 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 stating that they are to “keep silent” at the meetings. This latter phrase is further enhanced by Paul’s statement in 1 Timothy 2:12 that a woman is not to teach a man. So are women really to keep completely silent as some churches propose?

Prophetesses in Israel

A survey of the Old Testament reveals no prohibition on Israelite women for them to be speakers or teachers in a public setting. A number of women served as teachers in Israel including “**Miriam** the prophetess” (Ex. 15:20), “**Deborah**, a prophetess” (Judges 4:4), “**Huldah** the prophetess” (2 Kings 22:14), and **Anna** is also called a prophetess (Luke 2:36).

The Later Jewish View of Women Was Demeaning

The Talmud in Sota 10a states: “Women are exempt from the study of the Torah...Let the words of the Torah rather be destroyed by fire than imparted to women.” This was because Eve was blamed as being the one who brought sin into the world (a point that Paul corrects in Romans 5:12). So women were regarded as untrustworthy and that they could be much more easily deceived than could men. Additionally, the Apocrypha also blames Eve for the fall into sin: “Of the woman came the beginning of sin, and through her we all die” Sirach 25:24.

Jesus Encouraged the Breaking of the Middle-Eastern Gender Stereotypes

As well as a **willingness to teach women** (e.g. Mary of Bethany (Luke 10:39)), Jesus allowed them to perform activities that were traditionally a male prerogative:

- ❖ “Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment (“*Pure oil of nard*” in Mark), and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table... ‘Why do you trouble the woman for she has done a beautiful thing to me...’”
(Matt. 26:6-13. Also Mark 14:3-9 and John 12:2-8).

Christian Women Were Foretold to Be Prophets

- ❖ “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,... and your **daughters shall prophesy**,...on my male servants and **female servants** in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and *they shall prophesy*” (Acts 2:17-18).

Whether one thinks that the last days have already begun or are yet to begin, it can be seen that God is not negative about women prophesying, which would include expounding of the Scriptures.

The Christian Letters Were Written Also to the Sisters

The Greek plural term “*adelphoi*” is often translated as “**brothers**” or the old fashioned term “**brethren**.” However, a number of the more recent translations recognize that it should be “**brothers and sisters**” according to the context. These versions are: the NRSV, NLT, *The Unvarnished New Testament* and the latest NIV. The REB gives “My friends” and the even more recent *The Kingdom New Testament* by N.T. Wright renders the term as “My dear family.” Also the ESV and NAB have “**brothers and sisters**” in their footnotes. They do this because the up-to-date Greek-English lexicons show this to be correct. For instance, the Danker updated Bauer’s leading lexicon informs us that: *adelphoi* means brothers or “**brothers and sisters**”

So Paul, James, Peter and John, in their letters, are addressing their fellow Christians. These letters were not written just to men. In fact correct translation of the term “*adelphoi*,” as “**brothers and sisters**” clarifies the meaning of certain statements in those letters.

Women in the New Testament Record Who Were Christian Teachers

1. PRISCILLA – A MISSIONARY AND THEREFORE A TEACHER

Priscilla (Prisca) and her husband Aquila were co-workers with Paul in Rome (Rom 16:3), then later in Corinth (Acts 18:2), and later still they travelled with Paul to Ephesus (Acts 18:18). There they instructed Apollos who was:

- ❖ “...an eloquent man, **competent in the Scriptures**. He had been **instructed in the way of the Lord**. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when **Priscilla** and Aquila heard him, **they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately**” (Acts 18:24-26).

Notice that Apollos was already instructed as a Christian and was proclaiming Jesus; yet Priscilla and Aquilla “*explained...the way of God more accurately*” to him. In the Bible record Priscilla appears to be the leading one by the fact that, on most occasions she is named first. This was not because of her supposed higher social standing than that of Aquila, because this was never the Christian basis for the recognition of individuals, but in recognition of her high level of work for the cause of Christianity.

2. THE OLDER WOMEN WERE TO BE TEACHERS

- ❖ “Older women likewise are to be reverent in behaviour...They are to **teach what is good**, and so to train the younger women to love their husbands and children...and to be...submissive to their own husbands” (Titus 2:3 ESV).

This does not mean that they were to teach only the younger women, but to teach what is good in general and the younger women in particular. The fact that 1 Corinthians 11:5 speaks of women prophesying shows that their teaching was in no way limited.

3. PHILIP THE EVANGELIST’S 4 UNMARRIED DAUGHTERS were “prophetesses” (Acts 21:8-9).

4. JUNIA—AN APOSTLE IN THE SECONDARY SENSE AS A MISSIONARY

- ❖ “Greet Andronicus and *Junias*, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are *outstanding among* the apostles...” (Rom. 16:7 NASB). Other versions with Junias: NJB, Rotherham, and the original NIV.

The REB reads: “Greet Andronicus and *Junia*, my fellow countrymen (“relatives” NRSV and NAB) and comrades in captivity, who are *eminent among* the apostles.” Other translations with Junia: The 2011 NIV, ESV, KJV, NJKV, NRSV, NAB, NEB, Weymouth. Even the A.D. 1534 translation by William Tyndale has Junia.

This has been a male sexist issue of the translators of the past because Junias was taken as a man’s name but Junia is a woman’s name as is Julia. To get a clear picture of which name is correct one needs only to look at the Greek word for Junias. Look now at verse 15 in the Greek which has Julia and ends in *iav*. Now look back at verse 7 in the Greek where Junias also ends in *iav*. So why does Junias have the *s* in English? It evidently should not be there. In fact, regarding this matter, there is much evidence of a male sexist history which ranges from 400-1500 A.D. Clearly the idea of a woman being an apostle was an embarrassment to such translators, which was why some of them wrongly and purposely kept the *s* (this was first added by mistake) to turn her into a male apostle. In fact there is no male name Junias throughout biblical, Greek or Roman literature. So Junias is a concocted name based on the female only name of Junia. N. T. Wright makes the point that: “Not a single historical or exegetical argument was available to those who kept insisting, for obvious reasons, that she was Junias, a man.”

So, correctly taking her as the woman Junia, and likely the wife of Andronicus, how are we to understand the comment that they were: “*notable among the apostles*” (UBS interlinear)? Because Andronicus and *Junia* obviously were not of the twelve, it is most likely that the term is being used in the same way it was used of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14:4—as apostles in the secondary sense i.e. because of their **missionary work** as preachers of the good news. Junia was therefore a teacher of the ‘good news’ to the general public and, along with other women, would have had the privilege of “praying or prophesying” in the congregation according to Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 11: 5. According to a number of commentators, Andronicus and Junia, as sent forth apostles, may have brought the congregation in Rome into existence.

5. WOMEN “PRAYING AND PROPHEYSING” IN THE CONGREGATION – 1 CORINTHIANS 11:5

- ❖ “...and every woman who **prays** or **prophesies** with her head uncovered brings shame on her ‘head.’ It would be just the same if she had her head shaved” (*The Kingdom New Testament – N.T. Wright*).

The term “prophesying” as used in the New Testament primarily refers, not to the predicting of future events, but to **teaching, expounding, and explaining** what is already in the Scriptures. With reference to John the Baptist’s father Zechariah who “*was filled with the holy Spirit and prophesied*” (Luke 1:67) the NIV study Bible note explains that: “Prophecy not only predicts but also **proclaims God’s word**” thereby demonstrating that teaching is often involved in prophesying.

Women as Ones “Praying and Prophesying” in the Congregation

Although the context of 1 Corinthians 11:5 shows that wives are the subject here this does **not preclude single women** from “praying or prophesying.” This is because Joel’s prophecy as quoted in Acts 2:16-18 applies these activities to all ages, genders, and varying marital status groups: “*your sons and your daughters will prophesy...I will pour out my spirit in those days, equally on men and women, and they will prophesy.*”

THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS WERE **FOR EVERYONE** IN THE CONGREGATION

- ❖ “There are various distributions of gifts, but the same spirit. ⁵And there are various distributions of ministries, but the same lord; and there are various distributions of activities, but the same God activating all of them in everyone. To each person is given the gift to display the spirit for the benefit of all...¹²It’s like this: just as the body is one unit, but has many parts, and all the parts of the body, although being many, make up one body, so it is with the body of the Messiah. Certainly, in one spirit, we have all been baptized as incorporated into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond-servants or freemen—and we have all been watered with one spirit...²⁷Now you are Messiah’s body, and individually parts of it. In the community of believers, God has placed: apostles first, prophets second, teachers third, then the performance of powerful activities, then gifts of: healings, assistance, guidance, and varieties of languages. Not all are apostles, are they? Not all are prophets, are they? Not all are teachers! Not all are workers of powerful activities! Not all have gifts of healings! Not all can speak in other languages! Not all can translate such languages!” (*1 Cor. 12:4-7, 12-13, 27-30 KGV*).
- ❖ “But **the one prophesying** speaks to people for their spiritual strengthening, encouragement, and consolation...¹²It is the same for you. Since you are zealous for spiritual things, you must keep striving, so that you may excel in helping the assembly of believers to grow...¹⁸I thank God that I speak other languages more than all of you, ¹⁹but in an assembly of believers I would rather speak five words with my conscious mind so that I can **instruct others** than ten thousand words in another language...²³If, therefore, the whole assembly of believers gathers together and **all speak** in other languages, and people who don’t understand or unbelievers enter, won’t they say that you’re out of your minds? But if **all prophecy**, and an unbeliever or a person who doesn’t understand enters, they will be called to account by everyone...²⁶What, then, should you do, brothers and sisters? When you gather together, each person has a psalm, or a teaching, or a revelation, or another language, or an interpretation. Let everything be done for the purpose of strengthening everyone spiritually...³¹So **you can all prophecy** one by one, so that everyone may learn, and everyone may be encouraged” (*1 Cor. 14:3, 12, 18-19, 24, 26, 31 KGV*).

Although not all will have exactly the same gifts as other brothers and sisters, nowhere in this passage does Paul make a distinction between what men are allowed to do and what women are allowed to do in respect to teaching. Additionally Paul’s encouragement, when he wrote his first letter **to the Corinthians** in **AD 55**, was for both men and women to “*desire the higher gifts.*”

THE SAME ARRANGEMENT FOR THE WOMEN IN **ROME** IN **AD 57**

Two years later Paul wrote to the Romans and showed that the gifts were still available to all:

- ❖ “...I say **to every one** ... ⁴For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if **prophecy**, in proportion to our faith; ... the one who **teaches**, in his teaching; the one who **exhorts**, in his exhortation” (*Rom. 12:3-8 ESV*).

These three gifts of **prophecy, teaching, and exhortation** were clearly available to knowledgeable, talented women as well as to the men.

THE SAME ARRANGEMENT FOR THOSE PETER WROTE TO IN AD 61

❖ “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God...” (1 Peter 4:10-11 ESV).

Peter clearly worked harmoniously with Paul (2 Pet. 3:15) and showed that the gifts were still available to all, both men and women and in terms of the predictive aspect of prophecy may have been available up to AD 69 when Jude spoke of “*the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people*” (NIV). So there is no reason to imagine that suddenly women were no longer to express themselves as teachers in congregations.

Resolving the Apparent Contradiction between 1 Corinthians 11:5 and 14:33-35

Paul clearly recognizes positively that there would be wives or other women, including widows in the congregation who would be “**praying or prophesying**” (1Cor. 11:5). But how do we reconcile this with the apparent meaning of statements in the later chapter 14 of the same letter to the Corinthians, where it says that wives in church are not allowed to speak?

1 Corinthians 14:31-35 (NASB):

❖ “For you can all {or “all who” NLT} prophesy **one by one**, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; ³³ for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, *as in all the churches of the saints*. ³⁴ The wives are to **keep silent** in the churches: for they are **not permitted to speak**, but are to *subject themselves* just as the Law also says. If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home: for it is **improper for a woman to speak in church**.”

ARE WIVES TO BE EXCLUDED FROM PARTICIPATION AT MEETINGS?

There are several possible ways that verses 33-35 might be understood. Bearing in mind the general statements and examples in the Scriptures concerning women as teachers can anyone really take 1 Corinthians 14:34 as an outright command to prohibit **all** women at **all times** from teaching? Logically such a view would then prohibit women from any participation at a meeting including **singing or responding to questions** asked. Not only is this unreasonable, but clearly also unbiblical.

POINTS CONCERNING LANGUAGE

- The Greek word for “to speak” (*lalein*) does **not** always mean a **formal speaking** but can also mean, talking or chattering or calling/shouting out. *The New International Bible Commentary* p. 1380 states: “The verb *lalein* (to speak) is too general to refer to any particular kind of speaking...so general is the word that the suggestion that Paul is merely referring to irregular speaking, be it chattering...or interjecting a remark or query cannot be ruled out. “
- The Greek word for “keep silent” also means the less strident thought of “keep quiet.”
- As shown earlier the plural Greek word *adelphoi* means “brothers and sisters” in most cases in the letters written to Christians, as is also evident in most modern translations.

POINTS TO NOTE FROM THE CONTEXT:

1. In 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 Paul was dealing with a local particular problem of significant **disorderliness** at the meeting in the Corinthian house-churches.
2. Because 11:5 shows “praying or prophesying” to be a legitimate activity of the women in the congregation meeting “this prohibition must refer to the **abuses of** such freedom” according to *The New International Bible Commentary*. p. 1380
3. The wives were **not the only ones instructed to keep silent**.

- ❖ “If any person speaks in **another language**, there should be **only two, or at the most three**, each **in turn**, and someone must interpret. ²⁸ But if there is no interpreter, that person should **keep silent** in the church and speak to himself and to God. ²⁹ **Two or three** prophets should speak, and the others should evaluate. ³⁰But if something has been revealed to another person sitting there, the first prophet should **be silent**”

1Cor. 14:27-30 (HCSB.)

So those speaking in another language should keep silent if there is no interpreter. Also the prophets should be silent “if something has been revealed to another person sitting there.” So the wives are the 3rd group asked to keep quiet. This indicates that for the women it may also have been a matter of **temporary silence** that was requested. This also indicates the likelihood that the women were to **keep quiet in regard to their speaking in the foreign native languages**.

4. Just as Paul had told those who prophesy: “*The spirits of prophets are **subject to prophets***” (1 Cor. 14:32), that is, to control themselves, so, too, it is possible that he meant that these women were to “*subject themselves*” to their own self-control. There is no mention here of any subjection to husbands. Alternatively it could mean that they were to subject themselves to God.
5. 1 Corinthians 14:39 encourages: “*Therefore, my brothers and sisters, **be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues***” (NIV). And the GOD’S WORD Translation renders it as: “*So, brothers and **sisters, desire to speak what God has revealed, and don’t keep anyone from speaking in other languages.***” So the sisters were encouraged to speak.

POINT TO NOTE FROM THE BACKGROUND

In the culture of the time **not too many women were well educated**, so that many women would fail to understand the meaning of certain things being said during the meetings. They may well have called out questions or got a little bored and so began chattering to each other until it got so loud as to disrupt the meeting (being very expressive is a characteristic of women in some Mediterranean countries) at which point they would have to be publicly asked to be silent. So Paul is now advising these wives to wait until later, at home, for their questions to be answered by their husbands.

To Which Law Is This a Reference?

What is the law in the phrase “*as the Law also says*”? Certainly, it seems very unlikely that Paul would be referring to the regulations of the Mosaic Law which never give any such prohibition on the speaking of women. However, the other parts of the Hebrew Scriptures indicate the respect a wife should show her husband in keeping to her role as a wife. Moreover, the Greek word rendered “law” also very often means: “**A procedure or practice that has taken hold, a custom, rule, principle, norm**” according to Bauer’s lexicon. This could then include “the law of the spirit” i.e. a law without ordinances, a rule made concerning the orderliness of the congregation members. However, it is most likely a general rule or custom because Hellenic women were not allowed to interrupt the proceedings. It is also possible, even likely, that Paul was referring to the Jewish Oral law as Adam Clark proposes because this was something that most Jews took notice of in those times.

Possible Understandings of this Passage

1. THE PASSAGE WAS NOT ORIGINAL TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

This is the view presented by Professor emeritus Gordon Fee who says:

On the whole, therefore, the case against these verses is so strong, and finding a viable solution to their meaning so difficult, that it seems best to view them as an interpolation. If so, then one must assume that the words were first written as a gloss in the margin...Since the phenomenon of glosses making their way into the biblical text is so well documented elsewhere in the NT (e.g., John 5:3b-4; 1 John 5:7), there is no good historical reason to reject the possibility here.

The NICNT - The First Epistle to the Corinthians p.705.

MY CONCLUSION: That the passage was not original seems to be speculative and is lacking in any background information, in spite of the credentials of Gordon Fee. This view just seems to be an easy way out of the issue.

2. A CULTURAL ISSUE NOT APPLICABLE TO THE 21ST CENTURY

In contradiction of the above view, Professor Fee also gives an explanation with Paul as being the actual author of the passage. Then he notes that the prohibition for all women not to speak at all applies only in cultures where it is considered a shameful thing i.e. “improper” (vs. 35) and so not in 21st century Western culture or most other cultures.

MY CONCLUSION: This view has some merit because there certainly is evidence that it was contrary to the custom of the times for women to participate in public deliberations. However, other reasons may carry more weight.

3. A CULTURAL MATTER CONCERNING ONLY CORINTH. In many translations the phrase “*as in all the churches of the saints*” is used to start the new paragraph concerning “the women...to keep silent...” as if women are to keep silent “*in all the churches of the saints.*”

However, some scholars and the following translations: NASB, latest NIV, Charles Williams, NLT, Young’s Literal, Amplified, Rotherham, Darby, Weymouth, KJV, NKJV, and Easy to Read Version all show that this phrase completes the previous paragraph, thereby leaving the door open to the possibility that verse 34 applies only to those in Corinth. Also the Catholic NAB study notes state: “Verse 33b may belong with what precedes, so that the new paragraph would begin only with verse 34. Verses 34-35 change the subject.”

If this view is correct, then the conclusion to be drawn is that Paul’s words are **not establishing a rule for all congregations concerning women**, but only for Corinth.

If on the other hand the phrase “*as in all the churches of the saints*” should properly start the new paragraph concerning “the women...to keep silent...” then we can understand that it still applies to any biblically uneducated women who become disruptive **in any congregation**. This is because, although Paul is dealing with the problem in Corinth, the lack of biblical education for women existed throughout that culture and time. In view of the fact that from verse 39, Paul encourages: “*therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy,*” it is evident that the wives who are to be silent are of a particular group, notably those who are disruptive to the good order of a meeting.

So we see that whichever paragraph the phrase “as in all the churches” is connected to, Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 apply to disruptive wives and cannot be taken to mean that no women could ever speak or teach in some capacity in the congregation. They too could have the gifts of the spirit for teaching. Also “praying or prophesying” is exactly what some women should do according to 1 Corinthians 11:5.

MY CONCLUSION: This is a very difficult issue. It is very uncertain as to whether the phrase “*as in all the churches of the saints*” should be placed in completion of the previous paragraph (vss. 26-33) or placed later. So it leaves the issue wide open concerning whether Paul’s comment on the wives concerns wives in all congregations or only in Corinth.

4. UNEDUCATED WOMEN WERE INTERRUPTING THE EVALUATING OF PROPHECY

So who are the women who are to keep silent? Professor of New Testament Craig S. Keener explains the background to 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35 as involving the **lack of education of women in those times**. He says:

While addressing the topic of church order, Paul briefly digresses...to address the interruptions of some women occurring during the teaching period of the church service...his general statement about women’s silence in church addresses only the specific issue of their challenges in verse 34a. The issue here is thus their weakness in Scripture, not their gender...Biblical law includes no specific text that enjoins silence or submission on women. ...

Informed listeners customarily asked questions during lectures, but it was considered rude for the ignorant to do so. Although by modern standards literacy was generally low in antiquity (less so in the cities), women were **far less trained in the Scriptures** and public reasoning than men were. Paul does not expect these uneducated women to refrain from learning (indeed, that most of their culture had kept them from learning was the *problem*). Instead he provides the most progressive model of his day: their husbands are to respect their intellectual capabilities and give them private instruction. He wants them to stop interrupting the teaching period of the church service, however, because until they know more, they are distracting everyone and disrupting church order. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, p. 483.

So here Paul is admonishing *the uneducated wives in Corinth* to cease their disrespectful and disruptive out-of-turn calling or shouting out of questions or chattering without consideration to the orderliness of the meeting. Perhaps this disorderliness was even during the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

In *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* James Dunn states:

1 Cor. 14:33b-36, if original, appears to exclude any contribution from women, but a less rigorous interpretation is possible (for example, it forbids only their **interrupting the process of evaluating prophetic utterances** (14:29-33a) by asking unnecessary questions), and should probably be accepted in view of 1 Cor. 11:5 which clearly envisages women prophesying. p.130

This view would therefore bring to bear many of the points stated earlier concerning the general lack of literacy and biblical education of the women of the time and their disruptive calling out in the meetings, and their need for explanations from their husbands at home. So here Paul's prohibition on their talking must be temporary and applied in particular to Corinth, but would also be applicable anywhere else and at any future time if such disruption started in a congregation.

Certainly, in view of Paul's statement in the very same letter that in Corinth women also would be praying or prophesying (1Cor. 11:5) at their allotted scheduled times, it is evident that 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35 does not mean that no women can engage in formal speaking in the church. This is as N.T. Wright observes in his comments on verses 34 and 35 that: "What the passage cannot possibly mean is that the women had no part in leading public worship, speaking out loud, of course, as they did so."

MY CONCLUSION:

This indeed is the most likely view if the passage is narrowed to those wives only in Corinth. It brings in the known background information. So it seems likely this view is basically correct. If this is the actual situation then the word *lalein* is likely to be rendered as "talking", "chattering", or "speaking/calling out."

5. IN VERSES 34-35 PAUL QUOTES AN EARLIER STATEMENT RECEIVED FROM THE CORINTHIANS

It is evident that on a number of occasions throughout 1 Corinthians Paul is responding to specific questions asked by the Corinthians in a letter that they had sent him. On occasion he quotes from their letter as the beginning of his response. This may be the case with this issue in verses 34-35. So the paragraph that they may have sent to Paul and as quoted by him read as:

*"The wives are to **keep silent** in the churches: for they are **not permitted to speak** (talk), but are to subject themselves just as **the Law** also says. If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home: for it is **improper for a woman to speak (talk) in church.**"*

Because there was no punctuation in the Greek there is no reason why this should not be presented as a quotation and some translations have enclosed with quotation marks other passages which they believe Paul is quoting from the Corinthian writers as for example in 7:1:

- ❖ 'Now, about what you wrote: "It's good for a man not to have sex with a woman"' (CEB, The Kingdom NT, ESV, HCSB, NIV and the Lexham English Bible).

Helen Barratt Montgomery presents verses 34 and 35 as a quotation in her New Testament translation and this view has been advocated by W.C Kaiser and several other commentators. If these verses are actually a quotation it would seem to have come from the Judaizers within the Corinthian congregation.

VERSES 36-40- PAUL'S REPLY TO THE CORINTHIANS' STATEMENT

- ❖ "Did God's word originate with you? Are you the only ones it has reached? Whoever thinks that he speaks for God or that he is spiritually gifted must acknowledge that what I write to you is what **the Lord commands**. But whoever ignores what I write should be ignored. ³⁹So, brothers and **sisters, desire to speak** what God has revealed, and don't keep **anyone** from speaking in other languages. Everything must be done **in a proper and orderly way**" (*God's Word Translation*).

The grammar involved in the first two rhetorical questions requires a 'no' answer from these Judaizers in Corinth. So clearly Paul wants an opportunity for all "**to speak** what God has revealed," in other words to prophesy just as he had stated in 11:5. In fact he says it is "what **the Lord commands**" and is the very opposite of what the Oral Law stated (later in written form as the Talmud). So, in this view, Paul is correcting the Judaizers and showing that their premise is wrong and that the women can speak in the congregation including speaking in foreign languages if they have that ability.

So if these words in 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 are not Paul's own words, but rather are a quote from the Corinthians expressing their view of women's position in the congregation, and which Paul then corrects then once again they cannot be taken to mean that no faithful, biblically educated, capable women could ever speak or teach in some capacity in the congregation. However, the backing for view 2 is very limited and is presented as a quotation in no other translations than that of Helen Barratt Montgomery.

MY CONCLUSION: This concept lacks any lead in statement such as: "You say..." but nevertheless seems to fit the context well, including providing harmony with the thought in 1 Corinthians 11:5.

Summary

In 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 Paul was dealing with a local particular problem of **disorderliness** at the meetings in the Corinthian house-churches and so this passage is **not entirely about women**, by any means. Therefore the admonition is also for the orderliness of the men so that they are in speaking “**in turn**” and “**one by one**” (vss. 27, 31) because “Everything must be done **in a proper and orderly way**” (vs. 40).

The solution to this issue seems to concern how one renders the Greek word for “to speak” (*lalein*), because it does **not** always mean a **formal speaking** but can also mean, talking or chattering or calling/*shouting out*. *So I have rendered this passage in 1 Corinthians 14:32-35:*

❖ “The inspired speaking of prophets is to be controlled by prophets,³³ because He is the God, not of disorder, but of peace.

As in all the congregations of God’s holy people,³⁴ the wives should **keep quiet** in the congregation meeting. They are not permitted to **interrupt**, but should be willingly submissive, as the **rule** also says.³⁵ If they want to find out about something, they should ask their husbands at home, because it is disgraceful for a wife to **speak out** in the congregation meeting.”

However, I do recognize that the phrase “as in all the congregations of God’s holy people” could easily and legitimately be placed at the end of the previous paragraph and so making this issue an issue only at Corinth.

So whichever of the above explanations of 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 is correct it is clear that these words cannot be taken to mean that **all** women at **all times** are forbidden to speak or teach in some capacity in the congregation. Indeed, Paul’s words do not contradict the rest of the biblical view which is that: Christian women could also have the **gifts of the spirit for teaching** (1Cor. 12:4-7, 12-13, 27-29, 31; 14:3, 12, 19, 24, 26, 31-32; Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Peter 4:10-11) and for “**praying or prophesying**” (1 Cor. 11:5) as with the women in Hebrew Scripture times, and as was prophesied for women in Joel 3 and quoted in Acts 2, and as was the reality in first century Christian women such as Priscilla, Junia, the older women, Philip’s 4 daughters, and Phoebe.

Clearly, in the 21st century, the vast majority of Christian women in many countries are totally literate and well educated. Indeed many are very knowledgeable about the Bible and are perfectly competent to teach it. So what a waste of their talents and knowledge it would be if they were denied opportunities to teach in the Christian congregation.

The next study will consider the issue raised by Paul’s statement in 1 Timothy 2:12, and the further subject of head-coverings for Christian women.

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