

Dear Pastor _____,

We are finally getting to your question about women keeping silent in the Church. The passage you were referring to is below:

“For God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. The women 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. Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only?” (1 Corinthians 14:33-36).

The short version of our position on this passage is that Paul was dealing with disorderliness in the Church – and in particular a disorderly situation with women in the church at Corinth. We should not extrapolate this to all women in the Church. Still the teaching is very valuable when that situation arises, whether men or women are guilty of creating disorder and confusion during service.

We don’t know the exact context of the situation Paul is addressing, and in these situations, we must be very careful about creating Church doctrine. Some people have interpreted this passage to mean that women cannot speak at all or ask questions in Church, while other people throw the passage out completely and ignore it.

As “Bereans,” we cannot ignore or throw Scripture out. So, we try to understand it as best we can in the context of God’s Word. We can see that the context of the passage is about order and disorder in the Church – confusion caused by people speaking in tongues during Service and probably speaking over the authority of the pastor. We can see this from the phrase that women are to “subject themselves” to authority in the Church. Is this unique to women? No, men are also to be subject to the authority of the Elder in the Church. The point here is that women must have been speaking over the Pastor/Elder as if they were the authority or the one that God was speaking through. Perhaps that is why Paul says, *“Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only?”* (1 Corinthians 14:36). These women appear to have believed that they alone had the truth and were speaking as if they were the authority over the Elder, which was improper for them to do.

We know that Paul is not saying that all women must be silent in Church and cannot speak or participate. For one thing, we know there were female prophets in the Church: *“Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses”* (Acts 21:9). *“Even on My bondslaves, both men and **women**, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit And they shall prophesy”* (Acts 2:18). What does a prophet or prophetess do? Well, they speak God’s Word to God’s people. So, how could Paul be saying women couldn’t speak in Church, when women were speaking in tongues and prophesying in Church. Paul also praised some Greek women who had helped him in spreading the Gospel: *“Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life”* (Philippians 4:3). So, in 1 Corinthians, Paul is not telling women to “shut up” and not participate in the Church of Jesus Christ. He must be dealing with a particular issue. For this, we feel we need to look at the Greek culture.

It would appear that Paul is addressing a particular situation at the church in Corinth that occurred DURING service when women were regularly speaking out of turn and disrupting the Service or challenging the Pastor. We must remember that this church was in Corinth, a Greek city. In Hebrew society, Jewish women went to the Synagogue and were in attendance at the Jewish service every Sabbath. They knew the proper order of a service and how to show respect to their leaders, just like the men, so when they became Christians and joined a Church, they knew the proper conduct. This would make sense why none of these teachings about disruptive women appear in the Epistles to the Hebrews and Jews – because these women had grown up knowing what was proper behavior in public.

However, in Greek culture (such as Corinth, Philippi, etc), women were not brought up to engage in public events or services with men. Women were not educated about how to show respect for authority and conduct themselves in public like the men were. They were not allowed to participate in public events with men. So, the freedom of the Gospel was completely new to them: *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”* (Galatians 3:28).

It would be completely understandable for these women to speak out of turn, ask questions during Service, take the spotlight, and cause disruptions and confusion because they didn't know any better or they thought they knew more than the Pastor. We believe this is what is meant by *“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”* (1 Corinthians 14:35). These women were causing disruptions and creating confusion, which is the context of the passage.

You also have to remember that the marrying age in Greece was much younger then, so there were a lot of young women without much life-experience coming with their husbands to church for the first time. They probably would have seen Church as an opportunity to catch up and talk with other women, chat during service, talk about their children, etc, which would be disorderly and rude to us, but they wouldn't have known better.

On a wider note, there appears to have been many challenges with women in the Greek Churches as Paul had to instruct that *“Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored”* (Titus 2:3-5). It would appear that some women in Greek culture were using the freedom of the Gospel of Christ as a cover to do what is dishonorable and dishonor the Word of God.

So, Brother, that is how we interpret this passage. It is a very difficult passage and there are a lot of different views on it, but we feel this makes the most sense in the Spirit and the context of the Word of God. We pray that this makes sense and encourages you in your ministry and the Faith.

Love in the Lord,

Berean Christian Fellowship

