

**Everyone in the Ekklesia Has a Voice**

I Corinthians 14:34-35

*"As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but they should be subordinate, as even the Law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church."*

In this text, I believe Paul is "quoting" the views of the Judaizers in these two verses, not expressing his own views, in order to correct their false teaching. Judaizers in the Corinthian church sought to bring the synagogue traditions into the Christian assembly. These Judaizers were "zealous for the Law," or the teachings of the Talmud (Acts 21:21) and caused all kinds of problems in the early church. Paul is blunt about them in II Corinthians 11, calling them "false apostles" and "deceitful workers" (II Cor. 11:13), and telling the Christians at Corinth to resist the false practices of the Judaizers and stand firm to the New Covenant "traditions" that Paul had taught them (see I Cor. 11:2). Paul taught that all the members of the assembly, both male and female, could participate in congregational worship (see I Cor. 14:31 and 14:39), and it is expected that women in the church will publicly pray and teach just as men publicly pray and teach (see I Cor. 11:5). The entire discourse of the New Covenant Scriptures is that God's priesthood is composed of males and females, slave and free, Jews and Gentiles. There is no separation of race, nationality, gender, or color in God's New Covenant priesthood. Each of us is a priest (Rev. 1:5) and we all form a royal priesthood (I Peter 2:9). So, the startling prohibition of I Corinthians 14:34-35 seems discordant and unconnected to the rest of the New Covenant Scriptures. There's a reason for this -- it is discordant and unconnected. Paul is quoting the views of the Judaizers regarding women in I Corinthians 14:34-35. He quotes it in order to correct the Judaizers' false views which were being imposed upon the Christian churches, including the church at Corinth. The Judaizers taught four things about the role of women from synagogues that they wished to bring to the church.

**1. The Jews believed women were not qualified to be learners in the synagogue because the Talmudic literature forbade them from learning.** Their presence in the synagogue was tolerated, but they were to be unobtrusive and silent, never interfering with the work of the men. The Judaizers wished this tradition to be carried over into all the churches. But Paul argues throughout I Corinthians for full participation of women within the assembly (see I Corinthians 14:31 and 39).

**2. The Jews recognized that a woman in the synagogue might at some point wish to move from passive attendance to actually learning something in the synagogue, but this was viewed as an exceptional occurrence and not the norm.** Therefore, on the rare occasion a woman desired to ask a question in order to learn, she was instructed to maintain her silence in the assembly and wait to ask her husband after leaving the synagogue and returning home. The Judaizers wished to keep the same passivity of women in the early Christian churches. But Paul expects women to pray and prophesy, the two acts of worship in the assembly, in the same manner that men pray and prophesy. Women compose half the priesthood (see I Corinthians 11:5).

**3. There is the assumption in the synagogue that all Jewish women would be married; it was even expected by leaders in the synagogue that Jewish women would marry.** The Judaizers believed the same thing should be true about all women in the early church. But Paul argues his preference that Christian women remain single for the purpose of ministry (see I Corinthians 7:34).

**4. The Jews believed, and it was reinforced by the Talmud, that only the males should receive religious instruction. Jewish husbands were the source of their wives learning.** Women should remain silent within the context of the synagogue. The Judaizers carried this tradition into the early churches and taught just as firmly that all Christian women should be silent in the churches. But Paul has taught that the priesthood of God is composed of both males and females, and there is an equality within the priesthood in both role and function (see I Corinthians 11:11 and Galatians 3:28-29)

Paul states the Judaizers beliefs about women in I Corinthians 14:34-35 to only refute it. In other words, the "women keep silent" passage is not God's commandment, but corrupt teaching about to be exposed! Gilbert Bilezikian writes:

"It is worth noting that in 1 Corinthians more than in any of his other Epistles, Paul uses the é particle to introduce rebuttals to statements preceding it. As a conjunction, é appears in Paul's Epistles in a variety of uses. But the list below points to a predilection for a particular use of é which is characteristic mainly of 1 Corinthians."

The verses Bilezikian listed I also list below, in the order they appear, with a notation indicating the appearance of the é particle, in each case translating it as "Nonsense!" as Bilezikian did to indicate its flavor: 1 Cor. 6:1-2—"If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? (é Nonsense!) Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases?"

Likewise, in I Corinthians 14:34-35, Paul states a belief that he then refutes using the Greek eta. I Corinthians 14:35 states: "If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church." Now look at I Corinthians 14:36: "What! Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached?" The "What" is the Greek eta, the conjunction Bilezikian points out that Paul uses throughout Corinthians to refute false teaching. There are actually two of these eta particles in this text, so Paul is expressing his disbelief (a compounded disbelief) that anyone would think that men only are the mouth pieces of God and that women should be silent in their presence. Paul states his objection to that kind of thinking very clearly.

A few years ago, I taught from this I Corinthians 14:35-36 passage, and as always, we had a question and answer time after the study. A woman about seventy years of age who had been a life-long member of a traditional SBC church in Nevada, desired to comment about what I had taught. She was seated next to her husband, and she raised her hand to be recognized and was called upon, she spoke and disagreed quite strongly with my interpretation. She believed I Corinthians 14:33-35 was a COMMANDMENT FROM GOD and after explaining her reasoning, she concluded emphatically that God wanted women to be silent "in church." When she was finished I gently suggested that if she believed my interpretation of I Corinthians 11:34-35 was wrong and her view was right, then she should have never raised her hand to be recognized, she should have never voiced her beliefs in the assembly, and she should have waited until she and her husband arrived home before she asked a question of HIM or made a comment to HIM about what I had taught. That is what the text says! So, either she must believe that what I'm teaching is right and then she is FREE to ask questions of her pastor, at any time, any place, for any reason the assembly is gathered, or she must be true to and consistent with her beliefs and remain absolutely silent in church. I think everyone present agreed that my view of Scripture was healthier.