

## **Based on Paul's prohibition for women to speak in church, does God devalue women?**

Scripture:

1 Corinthians 14:34-35 (Also see 1 Timothy 2:11-15)

These verses raise several questions. Does God devalue women in the church? What is taught here? What is the proper place for ladies in the workings of the church?

God is the Creator and He established order as part of His design. Consider the function of gravity, the behavior of light, and the characteristics of water. We depend on these aspects of creation to unfold in predictable ways. In the order of creation God made man then woman. God established a leadership hierarchy for the home. Does this then imply that women are second-class citizens? Scripture refutes that idea.

1. Consider this partial list of women who appear in Scripture. Each played a pivotal role in God's kingdom. God valued these ladies, relied on their faithfulness, and valued their service.

- Rahab - protected Israel's spies (Joshua 2)
- Deborah - leader and Judge in Israel (Judges 4-5)
- Jochebed - mother of Moses (Exodus 6:20, Numbers 26:59)
- Hannah - Samuel's mother (1 Samuel 1-1)
- Ruth - (Ruth)
- Esther - (Esther)
- Abigail - (1 Samuel 25)
- Mary the mother of Jesus - (Luke 1:26-28)
- Mary and Martha - (John 11)
- Mary Magdalene - First person to speak with Jesus after His resurrection (John 20)
- Women who followed Jesus - ministered to Him while He ministered to others (Matthew 27:55)
- Lydia - opened her home to serve as Paul's base in Philippi, instrumental in spreading the Gospel to Europe (Acts 16)
- Phoebe - served the church at Cenchrea and Paul shared a glowing testimonial on her character (Romans 16:1-2)
- Euodia and Syntyche - at Paul's side in bringing the Gospel to Philippi. (Philippians 4:2-3).

2. Consider God's invitation to join His family. God's invitation is extended to whoever will come, not just males. (John 1:12, John 3:15-16, Matthew 12:50, Romans 10:13, 1 John 4:15, 1 John 5:1) Note that on the Day of the Pentecost, when the Spirit came upon the believers, the group of 120 included "the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus" (Acts 1:14).

3. Consider the special role given to women in relation to children. No one can replace Mom. Timothy's background included a godly mom and grandmother who imparted truth to his tender heart (1 Timothy 1:5). Samuel's life stands in sharp contrast to Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas. Hannah played a major role in giving Samuel the spiritual foundation that led to his leadership role. Jochebed, mother of Moses, was entrusted by Pharaoh's daughter to take the baby home and care for him. Jochebed had a God-given opportunity to teach her son God's truth.

John MacArthur, in his study Bible notes for 1 Timothy 2:15, explains that “mothers have a unique bond and intimacy with their children, and spend far more time with them than do fathers, they have far greater influence in their lives and thus a unique responsibility and opportunity for rearing godly children.”

4. Consider that women were included in church business. Read Acts 6 where the congregation chose deacons to address shortcomings in the care of widows. Acts 15:22 states, “Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch.” The entire congregation participated, not just the males. Colossians 3:16 teaches that members should practice “teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.”

Context must be considered for accurate interpretation of Scripture. Paul is explaining the proper workings of the public service in 1 Corinthians 11-14, and how the gifts of the Spirit apply. The number of problems addressed indicate that the worship service at Corinth was chaotic. The purpose behind these chapters is stated in 1 Corinthians 14:26, “...Let all things be done for edification.” Building the congregation by building individual members, both men and women, was the intended goal. The word edification refers to erecting a structure, and a solid structure requires a foundation, good materials, skill and wisdom in the construction.

Here’s a surprise. In 1 Corinthians 11:5 Paul acknowledged that, subject to the limitations specified, women could pray and prophesy in the public meeting. How do we explain that in light of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35? Did Paul change his mind four chapters later?

Or do we need a better understanding of the word speak? Every major translation of Scripture uses the same word, *speak*, and word study experts suggest these meanings:

- to utter a voice or emit a sound
- to use the tongue or the faculty of speech
- to talk
- to tell
- to use words in order to declare one’s mind and disclose one’s thoughts
- to talk at random

Disagreement permeates Christianity when it comes to Paul’s meaning. Conservatives combine Paul’s words here with those in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and hold to the belief that the teaching offices of the church are limited to spiritually qualified men. John Piper writes, “...men should bear primary responsibility for Christ-like leadership and teaching in the church.” Woman can teach other women, teens, and children, but men should fill the pulpit. Please note the qualifications for elders include “able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2) and “holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:9).

John Piper continues, “We would say that the teaching inappropriate for a woman is the teaching of men in settings or ways that dishonor the calling of men to bear the primary responsibility for

teaching and leadership. This primary responsibility is to be carried by the pastors or elders. Therefore we think it is God's will that only men bear the responsibility for this office."

Satan entered God's perfect creation determined to spoil it. He did not approach Adam. Instead, he turned to Eve and the result was disastrous. The account does not indicate a particular weakness on Eve's part, but it does show Satan's diabolical technique of violating God's established leadership order. Investigate churches that have female pastors or denominations where women are ordained. Study their doctrine and public beliefs. Many have gone on to embrace teachings and beliefs that would have been anathema 100 years ago. Declaring that one part of Scripture is culturally specific and no longer binding leads to a crumbling of the biblical foundation on which these groups once stood.

John Piper writes that Christians should view "...the Biblical guidelines for what is appropriate and inappropriate for men and women not as arbitrary constraints on freedom, but as wise and gracious prescriptions for how to discover the true freedom of God's ideal of complementarity." Piper suggests that instead of focusing on the roles withheld from women attention should be turned to the myriad opportunities where their unique contribution is sorely needed in the Kingdom.

References for further study:

John Piper has expanded this list of issues to include fifty+ questions on the subject of biblical womanhood and manhood in his free booklet:

<http://www.desiringgod.org/books/50-crucial-questions-about-manhood-and-womanhood>

Piper also offers a full-length book on the subject for those interested in deeper study:

<http://www.desiringgod.org/books/whats-the-difference>

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