On Conduct in the Churches

Key Passages:

1 Timothy 2:8–13:

⁸ Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension. ⁹ Likewise, *I want* women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, ¹⁰ but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness. ¹¹ A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. ¹² But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. ¹³ For it was Adam who was first created, *and* then Eve.

1 Corinthians 14:33–36:

³³ for God is not *a God* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ Was it from you that the word of God *first* went forth? Or has it come to you only?

Other passages related to this issue:

1 Corinthians 11:5:

⁴ Every man who has *something* on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. ⁵ But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved.

Acts 2:17-18:

¹⁷ 'And it shall be in the last days,' God says,
'That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind;
And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
And your young men shall see visions,
And your old men shall dream dreams;
¹⁸ Even on My Bondslaves, both men and women,
I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit
And they shall prophesy.

Acts 21:9-11:

⁸ On the next day we left and came to Caesarea, and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him. ⁹ Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses. ¹⁰ As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.""

Definition of prophecy:

The word translated prophet comes from two Greek words, *pro* and *phēmi*, and literally means "someone who speaks before." Therefore, a prophet was a man who spoke before the people. They were those who stood up to declare God's message. Paul also seems to indicate that prophecy is something that was spontaneous and involved receiving revelation directly from God. In 1 Corinthians 14:30, a revelation could suddenly be given to a prophet who was seated, and he was then given the floor to speak forth his prophetic word. Therefore, prophecy can either be a word that is declared forth or it can be new revelation given by God to the prophet. A prophet may have a message/sermon/teaching that has already been revealed to the church or fresh revelation. First Corinthians 14:31 also tells us that prophecy was something that was given "so that all may *learn* and all may be *exhorted*" (italics added for emphasis). Although it is not always the same gift as teaching (Rom. 12:6–7), there is an element of teaching and exhortation involved in a prophetic word that was given.

Here is a breakdown of the gift of prophecy. It has two parts:

- 1. It involves "forth telling." It involves taking what God has already revealed and speaking it to others.
- 2. It involves bringing forth new revelation. This aspect of the gift was practiced in the early church as the church did not have the closed canon of Scripture. The church was being built at this time on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20). This aspect of the gift has ceased since the church has been built and the canon of Scripture is closed.

The gift of prophecy would have been practiced both inside the church and outside the church. Agabus was a prophet who gave a prophecy (receiving new revelation from God) to the apostle Paul in Acts 21:10–11 outside of the assembly of the local church.

The Context of 1 Corinthians 11-14:

In 1 Corinthians 10:23, Paul is giving a broad teaching that is not particular to the gathering of the local church. In verse 25 he says, "Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience' sake." In verse 27 he says, "If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eating anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience' sake." In verse 33 he speaks about pleasing "all men in all things" in order to win people to Christ. Paul is clearly not speaking about the gathering of the local church. The context is broader than just the local church.

In chapter 11, verse 2 Paul begins a section in which he praises the believers in Corinth for holding firmly to the traditions that he delivered to them. In verse 3, Paul gives a statement that is broader than just the local church context. He says, "But I want you to understand that Christ

¹ John MacArthur, Speaking in Tongues (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1988), 155.

² Tom Schreiner, Two Views on Women in Ministry, Rev. Ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 278. While Schreiner has a good definition, I do not agree with his narrow definition that disregards bringing forth a message/teaching.

is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ." Christ is Lord of every man, not just believers. Men are also the head of women, not just a husband and a wife. Paul is speaking broadly here about society as a whole. As John MacArthur says, "The principle of subordination and authority applies to all men and all women, not just to husbands and wives. It extends beyond the family to all aspects of society. That is the basic order of creation." Anthony C. Thisleton says, "the issue concerns gender relations as a whole, not simply those within the more restricted family circle." As a general rule in society, men are to be the leaders and women are to be submissive to that leadership.

Paul continues to address this topic of headship in chapter 11 and argues from the creation account in verses 8 through 12. Then Paul alludes to nature itself in verse 14. His conclusion on the matter is that a woman's long hair is given to her as a covering. This is not a reference only to a wife, but to all women. Our modern society continues to understand that a woman who shaves her head or cuts her hair in a way to look like a man is portraying that she doesn't look favorably upon her role as a woman. So, in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16, Paul is speaking broader than just the local assembly of the church.

However, in verse 17, there is a change in Paul's language. Instead of praising the Corinthians believers, he says, "I do not praise you." The context now shifts to address the local church when they assemble together, and Paul has some things to correct in the assembly of the local church. He says in verse 17, "because you *come together* not for the better but for the worse." He also says in verse 18, "when you *come together as a church*." In verse 20 he says, "when you *meet together*." Then in verse 33 he says, "when you *come together* to eat" and in verse 34 he says, "so that you will not *come together* for judgment" (italics added for emphasis). It is clear from these verses that beginning in verse 17, Paul is no longer addressing general Christian living but is focused on proper conduct in the gathering of the local church.

Explanation of Praying and Prophesying in 1 Corinthians 11:5:

Paul says that women who pray and prophesy must do so with their head covered. The head covering was a symbol of authority in which a woman was to wear to show that she was not stepping out from under the authority of a man.

Regarding prayer, we must look at what Paul says about prayer in the church in 1 Timothy 2:8. In verse 8, Paul instructed the men to pray in the gathering of the local church. He says, "I want the *men* in every place to pray . . ." (italics added for emphasis). The phrase "in every place" refers to the assembly of the local church. MacArthur says, "The phrase 'in every place' appears four times in Paul's writings (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 2:14; 1 Thess. 1:8). All four times it refers to

³ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1984), 253.

⁴ Anthony C. Thisleton, The New International Greek New Testament Commentary: The First Epistle to the Corinthians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 822.

the official assembly of the church."⁵ Paul also gave his purpose for writing to Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:15 where he says, "*I write* so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." Paul was instructing Timothy on the conduct in the local church. Paul was clear that it was the responsibility of the men to lead the prayer in the local assembly. Therefore, the prayer of the woman that is spoken of in 1 Corinthians 11:5 cannot be her prayer in the local assembly of the church. Her prayer in that context is happening outside of the assembling of the church as she prays for friends, family, or fellow church members who have prayer requests.

Prophecy was a gift that was given to both men and women. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul continues to impress the need for prophecy in the church above speaking in tongues. Although prophecy is distinct from teaching, it has an element of teaching and exhortation when it is given (see prophecy definition above). However, 1 Timothy 2:12 prohibits women from teaching or practicing authority over a man. Many scholars believe that 1 Corinthians 11:5 allows women to pray or prophesy in the local church service. If Paul was allowing this, then he would be contradicting what he stated in 1 Timothy 2:12 regarding teaching over men and would be contradicting himself regarding women being silent in the churches (1 Corinthians 14:34-35). Therefore, what is addressed in 1 Corinthians 11:5, namely praying and prophesying, cannot be in the context of the local church assembly but is taking place outside of the assembly of the church.

It is my view that the praying and prophesying in 1 Corinthians 11:5 was not done in the context of the local church but was practiced outside of the local gathering of the church. R. C. H. Lenski says,

"An issue has been made of the point that Paul speaks of a woman as prophesying as though it were a matter of course that she should prophesy just as she also prays, and just as the man, too prays and prophesies. Paul is said to contradict himself when he forbids the women to prophesy in 1 Corinthians 14:34-36. The matter becomes clear when we observe that from 11:17 onward until the end of chapter 14 Paul deals with the gatherings of the congregation for public worship and with regulations pertaining to public assemblies."

MacArthur also states,

"The mention here of women's praying and prophesying is sometimes used to prove that Paul acknowledged the right of their teaching, preaching, and leading in church worship. But he makes no mention here of the church at worship or in the time of formal teaching. Perhaps he has in view praying or prophesying in public places, rather than in the worship of the congregation. This would certainly fit with the very clear directives in 1 Corinthians (14:34) and in his first letter to Timothy (2:12). The New Testament has no

⁵ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Timothy* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1995), 74.

⁶ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937), 436-7.

restrictions on a woman's witnessing in public to others, even to a man . . . Women may have the gift of prophecy, . . . but they are normally not to prophecy in the meetings of the church where men are present."⁷

Scripture gives an example of prophecy being given outside the gathering of the local church. Agabus, in Acts 21:10–11, gives a prophecy concerning Paul outside of the local church assembly. He received direct revelation from God outside of the gathering of the church. I believe this type of prophecy, receiving direct revelation in the context of being outside of the gathered church, was practiced by women during this time too (Acts 21:9).

Philip's daughters may have been an example of receiving direct revelation outside of the church. MacArthur says,

"In contrast to the apostles, whose doctrinal revelation was foundation to the church (Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:20), the message of the prophets was more personal and practical. They sometimes received new revelation from God concerning matters that would later be covered in Scripture . . . Luke records no details regarding Philip's daughters' prophetic ministry. It is therefore impossible to know how often they prophesied or even if they did so more than once . . . It is likely, therefore, that they [Philip's daughters] prophesied by receiving direct revelation, rather than preaching sermons. It is also possible that they spoke instructively to individuals rather than to congregations."

It is also interesting to note that these women did not prophesy on this occasion in Acts 21. Agabus is the only one recorded giving a prophetic word to Paul. Speaking of Philip's daughters, Hermann Olshausen says,

"Women were to be submissive to their husbands in all things, and to learn, but not to teach. To what purpose, we may then ask, were they endowed by God with the gifts, if they were prohibited from exercise of them? We read in Acts 21:9 that the four daughters of Philip had the gift of prophecy. To this we answer, they might apply these gifts to their own private edification, or employ them in the same manner to the advantage of others, but not in public assemblies."

Philip's daughters were sources of valuable information for the early church. The historian Eusebius notes that the church Father Papias received information from them (see Eusebius *Church History* 3.39.9)¹⁰. It is also possible that Luke received information from them and used them as a source for writing his gospel and Acts.

It is clear that women did have the gift of prophecy in the New Testament. Women can also have the gift of teaching. However, there is no example in the Bible where a woman ever prophesied

⁷ MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, 256-57.

⁸ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Acts 1-12* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1994), 240.

⁹ Hermann Olshausen, *A Commentary on Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis, MN: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, 1984), 233.

¹⁰ Cruse, C.F., trans. *Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History*. New Updated. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 105. https://archive.org/details/eusebiusecclesia0000euse_v9k8/page/n7/mode/2up. Accessed 3/14/24.

or taught in the gathering of the local church. Scripture does give us an example of women prophesying, in the teaching sense, outside of the gathering of the church. Lois and Eunice taught Timothy (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15) and Priscilla was with her husband, Aquila, when "they took him [Apollos] aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:24-26). Philip also had four daughters who were known to be prophesying (Acts 21:9 NET). Just because someone has the gift of prophecy, or the gift of teaching, does not mean that it was always practiced in the assembly of the local church service. It was to be practiced in the proper context in which God allows it to be practiced.

Explanation of 1 Corinthians 14:33-35:

Beginning in 1 Corinthians 14:26, Paul addresses order in the worship service of the local church. There was most likely chaos that had erupted in the worship service in Corinth and Paul wanted them to understand that God commands order. In verse 26, Paul gives the main objective as, "Let all things be done for edification." He then begins to address those who had different speaking gifts and who wanted to speak before the congregation. He also addresses those who must be silent in the church as well. The Greek word for "silent" means "to be silent, to say nothing, keep still, or keep silent." This word is used three times in this passage referring to 1) a man with the gift of tongues who has no interpreter; 2) a prophet who was speaking but yields to another prophet who received a revelation; and 3) women in the church.

In verse 27, Paul addresses those men who had the gift of tongues. Only two or three men with the gift of tongues were allowed to stand up and speak and there must be one interpreter for their tongues. But if there was no interpreter, then the man with the gift of tongues "must keep silent."

Paul then moves to address prophecy in the church and says that prophecy must be one by one, but no more than three prophecies can be given in the service. If one prophet was declaring something that had been previously revealed to the church and another prophet gets new revelation, the first prophet must sit down and "keep silent" so that the second prophet can speak forth the new revelation to the church.

We can see that in this passage, there are two groups of men who are commanded to "keep silent" in the church, the man with the gift of tongues who has no interpreter and the prophet who yields the floor to the prophet receiving new revelation. We can see from this that it was not only the women who were to keep silent in the church, but men were to keep silent in certain situations as well. The purpose of this was to keep the peace and order in the church.

In verse 33, Paul moves on to address another group who were to "keep silent" in the churches—the women. Paul speaks to "all the churches of the saints" in verse 33. In fact, "as in all the churches of the saints" should begin a new sentence that addresses the women. Robert L. Thomas says, "It is preferable to put a period instead of a comma after 'peace,' to begin a new

¹¹ Walter Bauer, Walter, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 922. (Hereafter, *BDAG*).

sentence with 'As in all the churches of the saints,' and to place a comma instead of a period after 'saints.' A new sentence and a new paragraph thus begin in the middle of the verse." What Paul begins to address regarding the women is a universal command to all the churches, not just the church in Corinth.

As Paul addresses the women in "all the churches" verses 34 and 35, he speaks of their silence in three different ways. He says in verse 34, "the women are to keep silent in the churches." Then he says, "for they are not permitted to speak." Then in verse 35 he says, "for it is improper for a woman to speak in church." In fact, if a woman had a question about something that was being taught, Paul says, "let them ask their own husbands at home." They were not permitted to speak out during the church service, not even a whisper to ask their husbands a question. Paul even goes so far as to say that it is "improper" for her to speak. That word "improper" is the Greek word *aischros* which means "ugly or deformed." For a woman to speak in the church is a deformity of God's intention—a perversion of beauty into ugliness. 14

Looking deeper into verse 35, Paul says, "for they are not permitted to speak." The word "permitted" means "to allow someone to do something, allow, or permit." The word "to speak" is the Greek verb *laleō* which means "to utter words, talk, or speak." It is clear that Paul says women in all churches are not allowed to speak during the gathering of the local church.

Since Paul's conclusion is that women are to keep silent in the church, the tongue speakers and prophets in verses 26 through 32 can only be men. Lenski says, "Paul's prohibition of all public speaking of women in the churches is in the nature of an appendix to his direction about the public use of tongues and of prophecy. All that he says in v. 26-32 applies only to men." ¹⁷

Early church father, Tertullian (c. 155-220), in his *Treatise on Baptism*, uses these verses to argue against women baptizing and teaching in the church. He quotes Paul's words in verses 34 and 35 and says Paul gives no license for women teaching or baptizing. Tertullian says, "For how credible would it seem, that he who has not permitted a *woman* even to *learn* with over-boldness, should give a *female* the power of *teaching* and of *baptizing*! 'Let them be silent,' he says, 'and at home consult their own husbands." Even from the time of the early church, it was understood that women were to keep silent in the assembly of the local church.

Explanation of 1 Timothy 2:11–13:

¹² Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Verse-by-Verse Study of 1 Corinthians 12–14, Rev. Ed.* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999), 114.

¹³ MacArthur, Speaking in Tongues, 161.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ BDAG, 384.

¹⁶ Ibid, 582.

¹⁷ Lenski, 614.

¹⁸ Tertullian, *On Baptism*, trans. by the Rev. S. Thelwall, Chapter 17 – Of the Power of Conferring Baptism. https://ccel.org/ccel/tertullian/baptism/anf03.vi.iii.xvii.html. Accessed March 6, 2024.

As was stated earlier, Paul gave his purpose for writing his letter to Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:15 where he says, "I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." Paul was instructing Timothy on the conduct in the local church. After addressing the men who were to lead the prayer in the local assembly in 1 Timothy 2:8, he moves on to address the women in verse 9. He focuses on women's dress in the congregation and then speaks to the issue of how a woman is to learn in the local assembly. In verses 11 and 12 Paul says, "A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet." The word "quiet" in verses 11 and 12 is the Greek word *hēsuchia*. It means "state of saying nothing or very little, silence." In his commentary on 1 Timothy, John Calvin writes, "After having spoken of dress, he now adds with what modesty women ought to conduct themselves in the holy assembly. And first he bids them learn quietly; for quietness means silence, that they may not take upon them to speak in public. This he immediately explains more clearly, by forbidding them to teach."²⁰

After addressing a woman's silence and submission in the local assembly, Paul then prohibits them from teaching or practicing authority over a man. His argument is not based upon any social status or education, but on the created order. Paul continues in verse 13, "For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve." The reason a woman must remain silent, under submission, and not allowed to teach is because of God's design in creation.

Conclusion:

By stating twice in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and three different ways in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 that women are to remain silent in the gathering of the local church, Paul makes this overarching statement because it was only the men who were to be speaking during the gathering of the church. According to 1 Timothy 2:12, it was the men who were to be teaching and practicing authority in the church. This has nothing to do with a man being superior or more educated than the women, this has to do with their God-given roles in the church.

Therefore, based upon the Scripture above, while women did have the gift of prophecy, in that they were able to declare direct revelation from God, they did not practice it in the gathering of the local church because they were not to teach or practice authority over a man (1 Tim. 2:12) and were also prohibited from speaking in the gathering of the local church (1 Tim. 2:11-12; 1 Cor. 14:34-35). While women did have the gift of prophecy, they were to practice that gift in the right place at the right time. The assembly of the local church was not the right time or place.

Regarding prophecy and receiving direct revelation from God, this gift ceased at the close of the apostolic era with the completion of the Bible. The non-revelatory gift of preaching and teaching God's Word in the church has been taken over by evangelists, pastor-teachers, and elders (Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:2). In fact, in the pastoral epistles, Paul's final letters, Paul does not refer to

¹⁹ BDAG, 440.

²⁰ John Calvin, *1 Timothy*, https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom43/calcom43.iii.iv.iv.html. Accessed 3-14-24.

prophets at all. Instead, he tells us that the teaching is to be done by the elders (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9). This lack of references to prophets is significant especially since Paul's final letters were largely devoted to the structure of the church (1 Tim. 3:15). This would further support Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12.

Application:

What does this look like in the church today? As we have seen, God calls on the men to be the leaders in the church. That is how He has ordained His church to function. We have also seen that women are to keep silent in the church, but in what areas are they to keep silent? First, the context of 1 Corinthians 14 has to do with speaking in tongues and prophecy. This would be the teaching in the local assembly. Paul also says women are not to practice authority over a man in the church (1 Tim. 2:12). Anytime a man is in front of the congregation teaching/preaching God's Word, the women are to remain silent. Paul also addresses women asking questions in verse 35. This means women were not allowed to interrupt the teaching to ask a question to the man who was teaching. The women were to save their questions and ask their husbands at home. This also means they were not to ask their husbands during the teaching time in the worship service. They are not to whisper to their husband and begin a side conversation with him while the Word is being taught.

Second, although women are never to speak or ask questions in the worship service, this does not mean that a woman is prohibited from ever asking a question. A woman who is not married is to ask a believing father, brother, or guardian that she may still be in subjection to. A woman who is widowed, divorced, or who has an unbelieving husband should ask another member of her family or the elders of the church but should only do so outside of the time designated for the corporate gathering of the church. However, a woman who is married to a believing husband should always seek the answer from her husband first. This will encourage her husband to be the spiritual leader God has called him to be.

There is also nothing wrong with women asking questions in small group Bible study or in times of fellowship or in a time designated for questions and answers. Women can also pray during designated prayer meetings in the church but during the assembly of the local church where prophecy, learning, and edification are taking place, women and men who are not leading in teaching (as we saw with tongues speakers and prophets above) are to remain silent. This will encourage order in the church, which Paul says is the goal in 1 Corinthians 14:40, "But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner."

The Bible does not deny that women have speaking gifts (Acts 21:9). However, their speaking gifts are not to be used in the gathered assembly of the local church. They are to be used only in circumstances where God merits them to be used. This would include a woman teaching other women at a women's event or a women's Bible study where men are not present. Women can also teach children in Sunday school, or a VBS. Women should speak the Word of God in evangelism to family, friends, and neighbors as well.

To be clear, silence does not mean that women cannot give a personal testimony before the congregation or sing during the service. Singing is a congregational act in which the whole body

together sings to the Lord. All believers are commanded to sing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; James 5:13). There are no limitations given on singing in the New Testament. However, the time of singing should be led by a man since there is authority that is given to the music director. The congregational singing should always be under the authority of the men who lead in the church. Women should never be put in a position of practicing authority over a man (1 Tim. 2:12).

Finally, women have been created spiritually equal with men as both men and women have been created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). God has given both men and women a unique role to play within His creation. The man has been given the role of leader, provider, and protector while the woman has been given the role of a helpmate to compliment the man. The woman's role also consists of submission to the man and together the man and woman, fulfilling their God-given roles, bring glory to God. Women are never to be seen as inferior to men. In fact, in some instances, a woman may be more educated or practice greater wisdom than a man. This, however, does not give a woman an excuse to usurp the authority God has established over her and begin to act in a role that God has not given to her.

The role of a woman is be honored and admired by all as it is an important role that she is to use to the glory of God. God created women with a special role that He has designed for them to fulfill in His church. As each man and woman seek to live out the role that God has designed for them, they will bring glory and honor to His name, which ought to be the goal of every church member.