

Role of Women – Part 2  
Understanding 1 Cor. 14:34-35

**INTRODUCTION:**

1. Last week, we started looking at the role of women in Paul’s writings...
2. And the question I’m trying to ask and answer is, **“Can people of good conscience who are Bible-believing and God-honoring come to different conclusions on this issue?”**
3. And so I shared with you two basic ways to approach the 2 texts where Paul mentions what women can/can’t do in Scripture (**1 Cor. 14:34-35** and **1 Tim. 2:8**)
  - a. You can start with the texts themselves and work your way OUT...
  - b. Or you can start with the whole panoply of Scripture and work your way IN...
3. And if you start with the texts and work your way OUT (if you run your theology through those passages), you basically come up with a proscriptive theology that says women cannot have a visible role in our churches...
4. But if you start with the whole panoply of Scripture and work your way IN, you might come to a somewhat different perspective.
  - a. So we started in Genesis and started working our way through the Bible to see how God views women.
  - b. We discovered that in both the Old and New Testaments and in Israel and the church, God valued and used women in various leadership and prophetic roles...
  - c. Women were prophets and teachers and evangelists and leaders, used by God in HUGE and small ways...
5. When we left off last week, we’d arrived at **1 Cor. 14**.
6. So what I want to do tonight is lead you through an exegesis of **1 Cor. 14:34-35** and ask the question, **“Can a person be faithful to God and to Scripture and come to a different conclusion on the role of women from 1 Cor. 14:34-35?”**

**-Can you be a faithful, Bible-believing, God-honoring person and come to a different conclusion on gender equality in the church?**

7. Now, it's going to be almost impossible for me to go through this in the detail in which I need to go through it and take questions and have discussion...
8. So if you'll indulge me, I'm going to ask you to hold your questions if you can and just listen...
9. In **1 Cor. 11-14**, Paul is discussing what was going on when the church met...
  - a. Paul acknowledges that both men and women were praying and prophesying when the church met...

**-1 Corinthians 11:4-5 – “Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. <sup>5</sup> And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head--it is just as though her head were shaved.”**

- b. Paul then talks about how men and women equal...

**-1 Corinthians 11:11-12 – “In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. <sup>12</sup> For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.”**

- c. He says in **12:7ff** that every person in the church had been given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good...spiritual gifts discussion...

**-1 Corinthians 12:7 – “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”**

- d. He says in **12:12ff** that every part of the body of Christ is equally important...and that everything should be done to build up the body...

**-1 Corinthians 12:12-13 – “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body-- whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”**

-Goes one from there to have the whole “body” discussion...and the discussion about spiritual gifts...

-The point – ALL are important!

- e. In **1 Cor. 13**, Paul appeals to love as the highest motivation for their relationships in the church...
- f. And then we come to **1 Cor. 14**...

### **I. The Context of 1 Cor. 14 is the Tongues and Prophecy discussion.**

- A. Paul is dealing with questions about Spiritual gifts and in **Ch. 14**, he’s coming to the end of the discussion...
- B. Structure of **Chapter 14** (can be divided into two parts)...
  - 1. **14:1-25** talks about the issue of intelligibility regarding tongues and prophecy...
  - 2. And then **14:26-40** talk about issues of edification (what builds people up)...
- C. Notice the key terms in **1 Cor. 14**...you can tell by the confluence of terms what the chapter is about...
  - 1. “Tongues:” chapter 14 contains 14 of the 19 occurrences in 1 Corinthians.
  - 2. “Prophecy:” chapter 14 contains 8 of the 11 occurrences in 1 Corinthians.
  - 3. “Prophecy:” chapter 14 contains 2 of the 5 occurrences in 1 Corinthians.

4. “Prophet:” chapter 14 contains 3 of 5 occurrences in 1 Corinthians.
5. “Edification” is mentioned 7 times in chapter 14 (14:3, 4 [2x], 5, 12, 17, 26).

-Paul is talking about how prophecy and tongues edify or strengthen or build up or encourage the church...

D. And then we get to the last part of **1 Cor. 14:26-40**...

1. There’s a complete unit of thought here that’s bracketed by two verses...(it’s called an “inclusio” or bookends)
  - a. **1 Corinthians 14:26** – **“What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.”**
  - b. **1 Corinthians 14:40** – **“But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.”** (decently and in order)
  - c. So what Paul is talking about is how to do things in an orderly and edifying kind of way
2. Now, what’s interesting is that in between these two verses if you go through and count the number of command (imperatives) you discover there are 14 commands (14 in 15 verses!)...(14:26, 27, 28 [2x], 29 [2x], 30, 34 [2x], 35, 37, 39 [2x], 40).
  - a. So you get the sense that we’ve come to the end of an argument that stretched from ch. 12 to ch. 14...
  - b. And now, Paul is saying, **“OK, now, here’s what I want you to DO.”**
  - c. **“We’ve talked about the foundations going all the way back to Genesis and we’ve connected what you do to love, so now, here’s what to DO so you can strengthen and edify the whole church.”**

- d. And Paul fires off 14 commands...
  - e. So we're at the "to do" part of the discussion...
3. So next, let's zoom in and look at...

## **II. An Outline of 1 Cor. 14:26-40.**

- A. **14:26-35** – Tongues and Prophecy: How to do them so they will be edifying to the church...
- 1. That's the theme: **1 Corinthians 14:26** – **“What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.”**
  - 2. Then, **14:27-28** talk about the proper use of tongues...
  - 3. Then, **14:29-35** talk about the proper use of prophecy...
    - a. **14:29-33** – general directions for orderly use...
    - b. **14:34-35** – specific directions to women for orderly use.
- B. **14:36-40** – Concluding Remarks (with the concluding remark that everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way).

-now...let's zero in a little closer and look at...

## **III. 14:27-28 – General Instructions of Tongues**

- A. **1 Corinthians 14:27-28** – **“If anyone speaks in a tongue, two--or at the most three--should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. <sup>28</sup> If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.”**
- B. **Instructions for Tongue-speakers regarding...**
- 1. **The number:** “two – or at the most three” (v.27)

2. **The manner:** “one at a time” (v.27)
3. **The accompaniment** (what should accompany tongue-speaking): “someone must interpret” (v.27)
4. **The modification** (what if this happens or what if that happens?): “If there is no interpreter”...
  - a. **v.28** - “the speaker should keep quiet in the church” (literally “be silent” – sigao – not a sound; shut up)...
  - b. **v.28** - “the speaker should speak to himself and God” (IOW’s, keep the utterance/speech between you and God)
5. Now, when you get to vv.29-33, you find something very similar...
6. It’s not exactly the same order, but you have the same items or elements...

#### **IV. 14:29-33 – General Instructions regarding Prophecy.**

- A. **1 Corinthians 14:29-33 – “Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. <sup>30</sup> And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. <sup>31</sup> For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. <sup>32</sup> The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. <sup>33</sup> For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints...”**
- B. **Instructions for Prophesiers...**(very similar to instructions for tongue-speakers)...
  1. **The number:** “two or three prophets should speak” (v.29)
  2. **The accompaniment:** “the others should weigh carefully what is said” (v.29)...
  3. **The modification:** “if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down” (v.30)...

-The first speaker should stop (v.30 – literally, sigao – the first speaker should be silent – shut up...not utter another word)

4. **The manner: “you can all prophesy in turn” (lit.: “one by one”)**

Same information so far as for tongue speakers; but Paul gives even MORE information for prophets...

5. **The Purpose of prophecy (v.31)...**

a. **“...so that everyone may be instructed”**

b. **“[so that everyone may be] encouraged.”**

c. There’s more information about the purpose of prophecy in **14:3** – prophecy is for the strengthening, encouragement, and comfort of the church...

d. Then **1 Corinthians 14:5** – **“I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.”**

e. Prophets teach (v.31 – people are being instructed) and encourage and build up the church...

f. All these verbs describe the activities of prophets...

6. **Then, there’s an argument for self-control in 14:32-33...**

a. **v.32** – the spirits of prophets don’t overwhelm the prophets (**“The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.”**)

b. Reason: (v.33) – **“For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.”**

c. IOW’s, God doesn’t give a gift that brings chaos and disorder...

- d. The gifts God gives bring instruction and edification and encouragement and comfort...
  - e. If your gift is bringing chaos and disorder to the church then you're not using a gift God gave you...
7. And then, we get to...

## V. 1 Cor. 14:34-35

**“...women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. <sup>35</sup> If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.”**

Two things...

- A. **First, what has Paul been talking about and discussing for the last 5 verses (from v.29)?**
- 1. Paul's been dealing with prophets and prophecy...right?
  - 2. So when we get to v.34, Paul is not bringing up a new issue, he's continuing his discussion of prophecy...
  - 3. It's slightly different, but we're still moving through the two main topics or Tongues and Prophecy...which actually go all the way back to **chapter 11**.
  - 4. Paul acknowledges in **ch. 11** that men and women are praying and prophesying...
  - 5. **Chapter 12** he talks about tongues (and many different manifestations of spiritual gifts)...
  - 6. He mentions tongues and prophecy in **ch. 13** and calls them to let love motivate them...
  - 7. Then we get to this specific discussion of tongues and prophecy in **ch. 14**...



8. So when the subject of women comes up in vv. **34-35**, this is not something new...it's a continuation of the discussion he's already been having...

**B. Second, what Paul says about women is just about identical to what he's said about prophecy and tongues in general...**

1. In v.**28**, we have some folks who are told to be silent (NIV – keep quiet – sigao – total silence; shut up)
  - a. Who's he talking to?
  - b. Tongue speakers.
2. In v.**30**, another group is told to be silent (NIV – “the first speaker should stop” – sigao – shut up; total silence)...
  - a. Which group is that?
  - b. Prophets
3. And then we get to v.**34** and Paul tells the women to keep silent (sigao – shut up; total silence)...
  - a. So this isn't something that's surprising...we've already heard it twice before in the immediately preceding verses...
  - b. The question then becomes, is the issue women... or is the issue the manner in which they were speaking?
4. In fact, the verb “speak” is used in vv.**27, 28, 29, 34, and 35**...
  - a. It's laleo and it's a very general verb for speaking...
  - b. So context determines the kind of speaking that's taking place...
    - v.**27** – “If anyone speaks in a tongue” (tongues)...
    - v.**28** – “speak to himself and God” (sounds like a prayer)...

-v.29 – “two or three prophets should speak” (prophecy)...

-v.34 – we need a context when we read – “they are not permitted to speak” and “it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church” – and I’m arguing that the context is the context that we had when we left v.33 – prophecy (women prophets)

-Instinctively we understand he’s not talking about speech in general...

-Or else women couldn’t speak in classes or sing or say anything in assemblies...

-And we also know that there were women prophets (prophetesses) in the Old and New Testaments and that Paul is acknowledging that women pray and prophesy in the church (ch. 11)...

c. So I’m arguing that it’s the MANNER in which these women prophets speak...

d. In fact, in the Greek, when you use this verb “to speak,” you can use it in a couple of ways...

-You can put this verb in the present tense, in which case it means to continually speak...on and on and on...you’re just a chatterbox...never stopping...it’s a continual action...

-Or, you can put the verb in the aorist tense, where it just talks about the action of speaking in general...

e. Let me illustrate...let’s say you have a child and you’re eating supper with a large group of people and your child is just chattering away, telling you about his day, and he’s just going on and on...

-But there are other people there and you’re trying to have a wider conversation and your child just keeps talking and interrupting and on and on...

-And you recognize that your child needs to learn that other people should be given an opportunity to talk and it's rude to interrupt and other people need a chance to talk...

-So, you could say two things to your child:

“You need to not speak and give other people a turn”  
OR

“You need to just shut your mouth and not speak...”

And he would understand the difference...

-So the child could be speaking and speaking and speaking (present tense)...

-Or the child could be speaking, but taking turns...

f. *So which verb tense do you think this is in vv.34-35...?*

-Is he talking about speaking in general? (aorist tense)

-Or is he talking about continuous, non-stop speaking? (present tense)

-Turns out this is present tense...so the verb isn't forbidding speech in general...it's forbidding the kind of speech that goes on and on and on...

-So the sense would be, **“If the women prophets are just going to go on and on and on, they should be silent”** (just like tongue speakers and male prophets)...

5. In fact, look at **vv.32** and **34**...

a. **1 Corinthians 14:32** – **“The spirits of prophets are subject [hupotasso – to be under subjection, to submit] to the control of prophets.”**

- b. **1 Corinthians 14:34** – “...women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission [same word: hupotasso – to be under subjection, to submit], as the Law says.”
  - c. Same idea – and ideally your translation should translate the word in exactly the same way so you can see that it’s the same verb...
  - d. So the point is, no matter who you are, you can’t just speak in any way you want...
  - e. And the idea is not so much that women are to be submissive to men...the idea is that men AND women are to be in submission to EACH OTHER when the church meets!
6. And then, finally, it talks about women learning in v.35 (“**If they want to inquire about something**” - literally, “**If they desire to learn anything**” – manthano)...
- a. Same verb for learn in **1 Corinthians 14:31** – “**For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.**” (literally: “so all may learn” - manthano)
  - b. So it’s not surprising to hear this language of learning, being subject, being silent, speaking – because that’s the language we’ve been hearing throughout this passage...
  - c. The whole point of the discussion is reigning in speech that isn’t edifying or encouraging or helping people learn...
  - d. It’s chaotic speech...it’s out of order speech...
  - e. That’s the theme of the whole passage – we’re going to try to do things that are done in a fitting and orderly way so people can be taught and encouraged and built up and comforted.
  - f. So apparently the tongue speakers and the male and especially the female prophets (especially the female prophets) were out of order...they were creating chaos...

- C. So let's go back to the original question...are there some other ways of understanding this passage?
1. And, of course, the answer is yes...
  2. So let's look at...

## VI. Four Options for Interpreting 1 Cor. 14:34-35.

### A. 14:34-35 is a Quotation

1. IOW's, Paul is quoting something some of the Corinthians have said.
2. **1 Corinthians 14:33-40 – “For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the congregations of the saints. [YOU – the Corinthians – say,] ‘Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. <sup>35</sup> If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.’ [And Paul responds] <sup>36</sup> [What?!] Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? <sup>37</sup> If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command. <sup>38</sup> If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored. <sup>39</sup> Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. <sup>40</sup> But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.”**

### 3. Pros...

- a. The passage reads smoothly.
- b. Paul often quotes the Corinthians in this letter (remember that this letter is in response to questions they had asked and situations Paul had been told about)...

-There are no quotation marks in the original Greek; their inclusion is an editorial/translational/interpretational decision of the translators...

-E.g.'s

**1 Corinthians 1:12 (NIV) “What I mean is this: One of you says, ‘I follow Paul’; another, ‘I follow Apollos’; another, ‘I follow Cephas’; still another, ‘I follow Christ.’”**

**1 Corinthians 15:12 (NIV) “But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?”**

**1 Corinthians 6:12-13 (NIV) “‘Everything is permissible for me’--but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible for me’--but I will not be mastered by anything. <sup>13</sup> ‘Food for the stomach and the stomach for food’--but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.”**

-Also from their letter to him: 7:1; 8:1, 4; 10:23.

-From other sources of information available to him: 1:11; 5:1; 11:18; 16:17.

-So it's possible this is a quotation, the issue then becomes, “How likely is it that this is a quotation?”

-When Paul says, “You say” (or words to that effect, it's very possible!)

-Here? Not so sure...

d. Reading this as a quotation certainly doesn't raise any questions regarding reconciling 14:34-35 with 11:5.

e. On the other hand...

4. Cons...

- a. No other quotation in 1 Corinthians is this lengthy – usually they're just catch-phrases or quick sayings or slogans.
- b. The traditional reading of 1 Timothy 2 is still an issue.

## B. An Interpolation

(I.e., **14:34-35** is not part of the original text – which happens – **Mark 16:9-20; John 7:58-8:11**)

-Some scribe or copier later on added this to the text and Paul never actually said it.

### 1. Pros...

- a. The passage reads pretty smoothly...

**1 Corinthians 14:29-40 – “Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said.<sup>30</sup> And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop.<sup>31</sup> For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.<sup>32</sup> The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.<sup>33</sup> For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints. [then jump to v.36].<sup>36</sup> Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?<sup>37</sup> If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command.<sup>38</sup> If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.<sup>40</sup> But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.”**

- b. There are actually some Greek manuscripts that move 14:34-35 to after 14:40, so there IS some evidence of Scribe treating those two verses as a completed thought unit and moving them elsewhere.

### 2. Cons

- a. Even tho there are some mss that move these verses, there is no textual basis for their omission; that is, no manuscript omits 14:34-35 altogether (I think that's a deal-breaker).
- b. The text can be read coherently with the passage intact the way we have it.

### C. A Rule for All Time

-That is, Paul is communicating a command/rule for all churches for all time that speak to the idea of women speaking in church...

-Paul is speaking to gender rules and roles in the church and this applies to all people all the time.

-This is the traditional interpretation we pretty much all grew up with.

#### 1. Pros

- a. The passage reads pretty smoothly that way...
- b. It also fits with the traditional reading of 1 Timothy 2.

#### 2. Cons

- a. The prophesying by women in 1 Corinthians 11 is a problem

-So what happened between Ch. 11 and Ch. 14? Why did Paul change his perspective?

-Also this seems to ignore the other passages regarding women in general (e.g., Gal 3:28) and women speaking in particular (e.g., as prophetesses) elsewhere in the OT and NT and in the wider and immediate context (11:5; 14:26 – “What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, *everyone* [doesn't that include women?] has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.”).

-Do women not have gifts?



-Must they be completely silent?

- b. Not only that, but a strict reading of 1 Cor. 14:35 (the mention of “husbands” in 1 Cor. 14:35a) is a restriction on speaking that would apply only to “wives” only.

**-1 Corinthians 14:35 – “If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own (what?) husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.”**

-If we’re talking about husbands, then “the women” in v.34 are what? Wives.

-So, v.34 would need to be translated “wives” and not “women”

-So, none of this would apply to single women; they would be free to speak

#### D. Specific Instructions for a Specific Problem

-IOW’s, there was a problem that was specific to the Corinthian church

-There were women who were speaking and speaking and speaking...

-Before God, they had a right to participate and speak up and speak in tongues and prophecy, just like men, but they were abusing their rights and were creating chaos in the assembly...

-And so were some tongue speakers – going on and on and on...

-There were also male prophets who were doing the same kind of thing...

-And so Paul says, “If tongue-speaking and prophecy isn’t going to edify and build up and encourage and comfort – if it’s causing more harm than good – then just be quiet. Just hush up.

#### A. Pros

1. The passage reads smoothly...

2. **14:34-35** fits the closer (**1 Cor 11**) and wider (**Gal 3:28**) context of Paul's instruction and thought elsewhere and in the OT and NT...

B. BUT...Con...The traditional reading of **1 Timothy 2** is still an issue.

### CONCLUSION:

1. Now, back to the original question...
2. Is it possible to be God-honoring, Bible-believing, honest, sincere people and come to different conclusions on this issue?
3. And the answer is yes...
  - a. The folks in the third camp say, **“The Bible says ‘Women keep silent,’ and we’re trying to be faithful to scripture” and they do.**
  - b. And people in group 4 say, **“We’re looking at Scripture and it looks like there were women and men who were speaking in ways that didn’t encourage and edify and build up and so the important thing is the principle that Paul is addressing – so anytime anyone uses their gifts in such a way that people aren’t being edified, they need to just be quiet.”**
  - c. Both groups believe they’re being faithful to scripture and they love God and they want to honor Him and they’re sincere...
4. So...
  - a. I think we need to keep studying...
    - We need to study contextually taking history and grammar into account and we need to determine which interpretation deals better with the context in the Bible and in the NT and specifically in Paul’s writings...
  - b. I think we need to stop being dogmatic...
    - Sometimes, we want to make rules where they’re might not be rules, so we need to be careful.