

# THE APOSTOLIC DOCTRINE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

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Preface: We live in what is undoubtedly one of the most individualistic, freedom-idolizing societies ever to exist. Our crime rates are a standing witness to the anti-authoritarian attitudes which pervade America and the civilization it dominates. This anti-authoritarianism is enshrined in even so revered a document as the Declaration of Independence which declares that all men are created equal and traces all rightful government to the consent of the governed. But such doctrines dominate not only the political, but also the religious thinking of most Americans. For Twentieth Century Americans dominated by such attitudes language about authority, a hierarchy of authority, a hierarchy of authority not grounded in the consent of the governed is alien; so alien that it might as well come from the rings of Saturn. The challenge for us is that the gospel of Christ comes couched in just such a hierarchy of authority. "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ." There may be no clearer test of our resistance to the spirit of our age and of embrace of divine authority, than the clarity of our confession concerning the role of women in the church.

I have entitled the addresses I am charged to give you, The Apostolic Doctrine of Women in the Church. I intend to open up this doctrine under two major headings.

## I. The Divine Order of Male Headship, 1 Cor. 11:3

## II. The Ecclesiastical Implementation of Male Headship, 1 Cor. 14:33b-35

This outline first addresses the general principle of male headship. Then, having examined the general principle, it observes how the Apostle Paul makes specific application of it to the church. This is one reason why I have chosen to concentrate our attention on the data of 1 Corinthians, because Paul addresses there, first, the broader principle in 1 Cor. 11 and, then, its specific application to the church in 1 Cor. 14. I have also chosen to use the material of 1 Corinthians because good expositions of the vital passage in 1 Tim. 2:8-15 are available and the important material in 1 Corinthians has to some extent been improperly neglected.

## **I. The Divine Order of Male Headship, 1 Cor. 11:3**

Introduction: (Read 1 Cor. 11:2-16.)

### **1. The Strategic Importance of 1 Cor. 11:3 in Its Context**

1 Corinthians is an issue-oriented letter. In response to reports he had received from Corinth, Paul addresses one issue after another in 1 Corinthians. Such specific issues are addressed in sections which begin in 5:1, 6:1, 7:1, 8:1, 11:17, 12:1, 15:1. What is the

issue or theme of the section just read in your hearing? Even a superficial reading of this section informs the sleepiest reader that the issue Paul is addressing is "headcoverings." How does Paul lay out his instruction as to headcoverings? What is the flow of thought in this section of 1 Corinthians?

In a very fine preacherly way Paul addresses this issue by means of an introduction and three points.

v. 2 Paul's Introductory Commendation (Note contrast with v. 17's introduction to the issue of the Lord's Supper. Here in v. 2 Paul commends the Corinthians, while there he says that he cannot commend or praise them. Apparently, even though it was troubled by certain restless spirits, the church in the main was abiding by and enforcing the Apostolic tradition on the matter of headcoverings.)

v. 3 Paul's Doctrinal Foundation (Paul begins his instruction as to the issue of headcoverings by stating the foundational, theological issue at stake in this matter by means of three interlocking headships. The key headship is, of course, the middle one, "the man [male] is the head of the woman [female].")

vv. 4-6 Paul's Specific Evaluation (In these verses Paul states his practical evaluation of the specific issue of headcoverings on the basis of the doctrinal foundation of v. 3.)

vv. 7-16 Paul's Further Argumentation (Having stated his doctrinal foundation and specific evaluation, Paul concludes this section with further argumentation in support of his position. He is aware that there are contentious spirits in the Corinthian church. Thus, he finds it necessary to further support his directions by appealing to three authorities. These appeals assume and expand upon the doctrinal foundation stated in v. 3.)

vv. 7-12 His Appeal to the Facts of Creation vv. 13-15 His Appeal to the Teaching of Nature v. 16 His Appeal to the Practice of the Churches

I have taken the time to provide you with this analysis of the argument of the passage for one major reason. Do you see the strategic importance of v. 3 in this context? It is the hinge upon which the entire passage turns. It grounds the instruction of vv. 4-6 and summarizes, the argumentation of vv. 7-16. We do well, therefore, to build our understanding of the divine order of male headship on an exposition of this verse.

## **2. The Initial Objection to 1 Cor. 11:3 because of Its Context**

Our brief study of the context of 1 Cor. 11:3 may have raised in your minds an objection to or problem with our use of 1 Cor. 11:3 as the classic statement of male headship. If we allow 1 Cor. 11:3 a normative significance in this discussion, do we not commit ourselves to the practice of womens' headcoverings? This question must be addressed at the outset. The implication is often present in evangelical feminist writings that 1

Cor. 11 may be written off in this discussion because of its prescription of headcoverings for women.

The proper response to this question is that such a question put at this point and for such reasons is impermissible on religious and spiritual grounds.

The question itself is evil. It assumes that we may allow the feared practical results of a position to influence our assessment of its Biblical validity. Specifically, this question assumes that if a position should commit us to the practice of womens' headcoverings, it could not possibly be correct no matter how clear the Biblical support for it. But this is horrendous for it reveals both theoretical and practical defection from Biblical authority. It betrays theoretical disloyalty to Biblical authority. The one who asks such a question in such a way has made his pragmatic sense of what is suitable conduct his ultimate authority. Such a question, however, also exposes practical defection from Biblical authority.

For such a viewpoint, ethical conduct is dictated by something other than divine revelation. Better, brethren, better by far to permit Scripture to govern us, all of Scripture, than to enslave ourselves to modern pragmatism. May I remind you that Biblical authority is not merely tolerated by God's sons. It is gratefully embraced. It is not filial love for God which suspiciously asks about the practical consequences of submission to divine authority before embracing it.

Now at this point some of you may think you can guess what I believe about headcoverings for women. Your guess may be right, but it might also be wrong. Who knows? There is a series of tapes available from our tape ministry in Grand Rapids which may help you find out how good your guess is.

With these introductory matters behind us, we will now take up the divine order of male headship as it is classically stated in 1 Cor. 11:3. We will take it up under five points.

- A. Its Undeniable Reality
- B. Its Enduring Perpetuity
- C. Its Broad Generality
- D. Its Functional Necessity
- E. Its Underlying Unity

## **A. Its Undeniable Reality**

### **1. The Meaning of Headship Confirmed**

For 20 centuries Christians had assumed that the meaning of "head" in 1 Cor. 11:3 conveyed the idea of authority over someone. Now in the 20th century evangelical feminists (Berkeley and Alvera Mickelsen, Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty)<sup>1</sup> have challenged this and asserted that the term, head, in this passage means source and does not in any way connote male authority over the woman.

I do not intend to dignify this view with a lengthy response. I will briefly state three objections to it. Let me say, first, that Dr. Wayne Grudem in a lengthy appendix to Knight's book, *The Role Relationship of Men & Women*, has shown in a detailed study of 2336 uses of head in Biblical and pre-Biblical Greek that there is no instance in which head means source, but many instances in which it does mean "authority over" someone.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, in each of the 15 times in which head is used figuratively in the New Testament the idea of authority is arguably present. Finally, in this very passage the very term, authority, which means legal power over someone is used in intimate connection with the idea of the man being the head of the woman. Note v. 10. The teaching of v. 10 is that male headship requires a sign of male authority on the woman's head.

### **2. The Idea of Headship Clarified**

What we have just said has already begun to clarify the precise idea we are to attribute to male headship. Male headship is a matter of legal position and objective authority. It is not a matter of mere power or sheer influence. Male headship is not, therefore, embarrassed, by the reality that in a marriage a wife may exercise enormous influence over her husband by her wisdom and counsel. Influence is not authority. Male headship is not abrogated in a marriage by the fact that a woman may be smarter, more educated, or even bigger than her husband. Power is not authority. Headship is divinely constituted authority over someone.

### **3. The Evidence for Headship Collated**

1 Cor. 11:3 in my opinion is the classic passage in the Bible on male headship. It asserts this doctrine with a clarity, fullness, and breadth found nowhere else. Yet it would diminish our appreciation of the Biblical support for and importance of this divine order if we allowed this fact to cause us to forget the mass of other Biblical evidence for it. I can, however, only mention that evidence briefly here.

The major Biblical evidence for this divine order may be found in ten passages. The first is Gen. 2:4-25. Everything in this account of the origin of the woman conspires to support the idea of male headship. Adam is created first. Eve is made out of Adam. Eve is made for Adam. Adam names her. The human race is named Adam, not Eve. After the fall Adam is addressed first. Each of these things imply the headship of Adam over her.

The other passages are Gen. 3:16b; Num. 5:19, 20; 30:1-16; Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18; Tit. 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1-6; 1 Tim. 2:8-15; 1 Cor. 14:33-35.

## **B. Its Enduring Perpetuity**

By the perpetuity of the divine order I mean, of course, its permanence till the end of the age. You are aware that it has frequently been maintained that male headship while once upon a time the practice of Christians is no longer mandatory. Thus, it is necessary to ask if this order of male headship remains binding upon us in this enlightened age. I will argue for the perpetuity of divine order of male headship because:

1. It is the Order of Creation (and)
2. It is the Order of Redemption

### ***1. It is the Order of Creation***

The divine order of v. 3 is the order of creation, first of all, because of the way Paul argues in vv. 7-12. The repeated reference of the Apostle to the facts and theology of creation in these verses is patent. Further evidence that male headship is part of the created order is to be found in vv. 13-15. The appeal to nature and conscience found in those verses is not an appeal to the cultural sensitivities of the Corinthians. The term, nature, is never used in the New Testament to designate anything so transitory as this. The term, nature, does, however, designate created nature in the New Testament. In fact in 14 uses in the New Testament, it designates the divine nature once, the sinful nature once, and 12 times nature as that which is created by God and, thus, reveals the Creator's will.

Yet further confirmation of the creational character of male headship is given when Paul arguing for the silence of women in the assemblies of the church in 1 Tim. 2 appeals to the facts of creation as his authority. "For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve." (1 Tim. 2:13)

But what is the significance of the fact that male headship is a matter of the created order? Just this: The Bible in general and Paul in particular assume that what was instituted at creation possesses abiding relevance for Christians. What is creational is perpetual. Jesus argued in this way with reference to the subject of marriage. In fact in Matt. 19:3-10 he ascribes a higher, more binding, and more permanent authority to the created order than He does to parts of the Mosaic law itself. "From the beginning," he says, "it was not so" and so saying he assumes that what was from the beginning of creation remains binding until creation itself passes away.

### ***2. Because It is the Order of Redemption***

Male headship is also perpetually binding because it is part of the redemptive order. It might be said, "Creation did not remain in its original state. Under Adam it fell and in Christ it was redeemed. May not this alter the original order?" Much might be said in

response to such a question. We could argue that it is precisely creation which is redeemed by Christ. How could the redemption of the created order by God be intended to annul the will of God as expressed in creation? It is sufficient, however, to note in response to this question that the divine order asserted in v. 3 is plainly the order that obtains under the auspices of redemption. Several considerations make this conclusion unavoidable.

The order of v.3 is an order in which Christ has his place. The double mention of Christ, the one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, is sufficient to tell us that the order of v. 3 is the order of redemption.

We must also press the fact that the order of v. 3 is the present order. The order of v. 3 comes to us in the present tense; "is," "is," "is." It is not, therefore, an order which obtained prior to redemption. It is rather the order of redemption itself.

Furthermore, we must never forget that when headship is attributed to Christ in the New Testament it is always headship which he possesses in virtue of his redemptive death and glorious exaltation to the right hand of God, {Matt. 28:18, Eph. 1:19-23, Col. 2:9, 10). The headship over every man attributed to Christ in v. 3 is, therefore, a headship which he possesses in virtue of his redemptive work. It is, thus, a headship which is an integral part of the order of redemption.

Finally, we must not miss the fact that the order of v. 3 is the practical basis of the redemptive community, the church. Note v. 16. The plain and indisputable meaning of this verse must be that Paul is demanding of the Corinthians the practice which existed in all the other churches. Paul's last word to the contentious is that it is not the custom of the churches of Christ to permit the practice for which the contentious spirits at Corinth were arguing, the practice that is to say, of permitting women to go without headcoverings.

The question which must be answered, however, is this: What authority does Paul ascribe to the churches by this appeal to their practice or customs? Is Paul appealing, in a catholic fashion to the authority of the church? No! That would be a complete misunderstanding. He is appealing to apostolic authority. The key word in v. 16 is "we." We have no other practice. This is clearly a reference to Paul and His fellow apostles. (Cf. 1 Cor. 4:9f., 15:9-11.) The custom of the churches was significant because it reflected the teaching of living apostles. Apostolic authority was at stake, then, in this custom. But apostolic authority is the authority of Christ himself. It is authority, therefore, rooted in the redemptive order itself. There is no higher authority, no more binding authority for the Christian than the authority of the divine, redemptive order under which he is saved.

Practical Application: That the divine order of v. 3 is both the order of creation and redemption is conclusive against a number of evangelical feminist objections against male headship and the subordination of women. Let me mention three.

1) "Subordination is rooted in the fall and removed by redemption." Speaking of the curses brought upon mankind by the fall and especially the curse of Gen. 3:16 upon the woman, Patricia Gundry remarks:

But if we interpret these pronouncements as the natural consequences of the upset in the world caused by the Fall and the entrance of sin (including its chain reaction effects), they do make sense, for all these things happen to humankind and would not happen but for the Fall. And all these things are modified or changed by God's grace and provision. So, we should not interpret these pronouncements as God's decree that it must be so, but as His informing Adam and Eve that this was the direction things would go. These were the far-reaching effects of what they had done.<sup>3</sup>

The conclusive response to such argumentation is that the subordination of women is not rooted in the fall and its curse, but in that order of creation which was pronounced very good by God himself. Furthermore, that subordination is not removed by redemption, but confirmed and maintained by it. Now, therefore, in back of male authority stands the authority of the exalted Christ.

2) "Subordination was a necessary and prudent concession to first century cultural attitudes, but ceased to be normative when those cultural attitudes changed."

The conclusive response to such argumentation is again the divine order. The New Testament nowhere roots male headship in a concession to passing cultural attitudes, but rather in the orders of creation and redemption. These orders, every Christian must surely agree, transcend passing cultural fashions. What is creational and redemptive is not transitory or in that sense cultural.

3) (This third objection is related to the second objection and in reality is a specific application of it.) "The subordination of women like slavery was purely a matter of regulating first century practices without sanctioning them." Knight summarizes this objection very concisely, "If the New Testament requires wives to submit to their husbands, then it also sanctions slavery."<sup>4</sup> Paul K. Jewett develops this objection in commenting upon Eph. 5:21ff. Having noticed that the command to women to submit in Eph. 5:21 is paralleled by the similar commands to children and slaves, Jewett argues:

Now if one were to press the subjection of the wife to the husband in the home because of Ephesians 5:22, then he should, by parity of reasoning, press the subjection of the slave to his master because of Ephesians 6:5f.



Indeed, in antebellum America, southern slave owners, as well as prominent Christian divines in both the North and South, did just that.<sup>5</sup>

Much more, very much more, deserves to be said in response to such argumentation than I am able to say here. Let me mention only two things. First, this argument naturally implies that children are not bound to obey their parents. (If 5:22 is cultural and 6:5 is also cultural, why not 6:1?) Are the feminists ready to assert this? Now, they may say, "That's different!" We say, "Exactly! That brings us to the main response to this argument.

Secondly, therefore, we must say that a very important distinction is being overlooked by the feminists. Two questions must be sharply distinguished. What is my duty if I am a slave? And, Is slavery itself divinely instituted? It is the duty of slaves to submit to their masters, just as it is the duty of children to submit to their parents or wives to their husbands. This does not mean, however, that slavery is divinely instituted. That, you see, is a different issue. Marriage and the family are clearly instituted in the creation order and maintained by the redemptive order. Slavery has no such explicit sanction. Slavery is merely regulated. Marriage and the subordination it involves is both regulated and divinely instituted.

### **C. Its Broad Generality**

When I speak of the broad generality of the divine order of male headship stated in v. 3, what do I mean? I am saying that this order has a broad or general importance for human life, which cannot be limited to one specific relationship of human life like that of marriage. The assertion, "man is the head of woman," is not limited to the marriage relationship. Though marriage is the central expression and most common expression of this order, male headship has a general significance for all of human life. Upon what basis do I make this assertion? We could refer to 1 Tim. 2 and 1 Cor. 14 where Paul vindicates this assertion by actually applying this relationship outside the strict bounds of the marriage relationship to church relationships. But evidence for this assertion is to be found closer to home. Though some interpreters have assumed that Paul is speaking exclusively of the marriage relationship in v. 3, such an interpretation cannot be sustained in light of the context. It is quite clear that in this context Paul is thinking more generically. There is a great deal of evidence for this assertion in this context, but I only have time to state the most conclusive. The conclusive evidence for this assertion is found in vv. 11, 12. Verses 11 and 12 cannot be applied to the marriage relationship. A husband does not come through, is not born of his wife. The reference is obviously generic. Men in general are born of women.

Now the broad generality of the divine order of 1 Cor. 11:3 raises a number of questions. I cannot pause to address them here. Let me only stress that it is impermissible to limit the order of v. 3 to marriage. Paul intends for it a broader application. But let me insert a caution here. In certain areas the Bible does not explicitly delineate what that application is. Where the Bible is not explicit, we will do

well to be less dogmatic. However, the Bible does make very clear what the specific application of male headship is in two fundamental institutions of human life, marriage and the church. We must be very careful to abide by its specified applications of this principle to those institutions. Its application to the church we shall look at in the second hour.

#### **D. Its Functional Necessity**

What I am saying here is this. The fact that this general order exists between men and women is not arbitrary in character. This order is not an arbitrary arrangement intended to help two identical beings live together in harmony. It is not that somebody must be the boss. Somebody must have the final say. So God arbitrarily chose the man.

Even conservative writers have tended to soft-pedal on this issue. They have been so anxious to avoid the charge and even the appearance of teaching that women are inferior to men that they have been almost silent on it. I am not saying, of course, that women are inferior, but I am saying that the differences between men and women are such that it is better that headship in the family and the church be exercised by men. The functional necessity of male headship is the implication of:

##### **1. A Wise Creation**

If men are called to be heads and women are called to be helpers, it only makes sense that God would fit them by creation for their differing roles. God would not make a fish in a universe with no water. Even so He will not call a woman to be a helper and yet fit her by creation to be a head. That would be both foolish and cruel and, thus, doubly unworthy of God.

##### **2. 1 Pet. 3:7**

Peter in calling the woman in contrast to the man in 1 Pet. 3:7 "the weaker vessel" (the fragile vase) indicates explicitly that a woman's duty to be in submission to her husband is related to her being created by God as the weaker vessel.

##### **3. 1 Tim. 2:14**

This verse reads, "And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression." There are many things which this verse is not intended to teach. It does not teach that Adam did not sin, that Eve was a worse sinner than Adam, or even that women in no sense make good teachers. It does teach, however, that woman is prone to deception on religious matters when she takes a leadership role in violation of male headship. This proneness to deception reflects the reality that the nature of the woman as created by God makes male headship necessary.

#### **E. Its Underlying Unity**

I conclude this exposition of the general principle of male headship on a qualifying note. I have chosen the phrase, "underlying unity" to describe this qualification carefully. You will notice I have chosen the word, "unity," to describe this qualification, not the word, "equality." I have rejected the word, equality, not because I do not

believe that in important respects men and women are equal, but because I believe the term, unity, more precisely describes the Biblical concept at stake. It is not equality so much as it is unity which is the Biblical concern. This becomes clear in the crucial passages on this subject. Those passages are 1 Cor. 11:11, 12; Gal. 3:28, 1 Pet. 3:7. In 1 Cor. 11:11, 12 Paul says that the woman is not without the man, neither is the man without the woman. They need each other. There is this essential unity between them. There is interdependence and mutual dependence between man and woman. This is also the point of Gal. 3:28, "There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Here is explicit emphasis on the unity of men and women in Christ.

Conclusion:

Male headship does not mean, nor does it imply the independence of the man. Men need women. They are not sufficient unto themselves. Their headship is not in this respect like the headship of God. It is a headship which is rooted in the indissoluble unity of men and women. It is a headship inseparable from their essential dependence upon women not only for life itself, but also for their many other precious and vital influences.

## **II. The Ecclesiastical Implementation of Male Headship,**

1 Cor. 14:33b-35

Introduction:

As we take up the Apostle Paul's application of the general principle of male headship to the church, let me review our outline.

I. The Divine Order of Male Headship, 1 Cor. 11:3

II. The Ecclesiastical Implementation of Male Headship, 1 Cor. 14:33b-35

Now in opening up 1 Cor. 14:33b-35 there are two matters which must be dealt with:

A. Its Correlation (with 1 Cor. 11:2-16) Explored

B. Its Prohibition Expounded

### **A. Its Correlation (with 1 Cor. 11:2-16) Explored**

#### **1. The Problem Stated**

1 Cor. 11:2-16 seems to permit women to pray and prophesy in public, while 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 appears to contradict this by forbidding all speaking by women in the church.

## 2. The Solution Explained

There are, at least, ten proposals as to how we are to resolve this seeming contradiction between 1 Cor. 11 and 1 Cor. 14. I do not, however, have time to refute each of them in detail. I will simply state what I believe the proper solution is to the problem and then give evidence to support it. The solution I have adopted is that of Lenski, Grosheide, and many others.<sup>6</sup>

It is this. 1 Cor. 11:2-16 is giving general guidelines for the public speaking of women. In 1 Cor. 11:2-16 Paul is not addressing himself to the church situation, but is speaking more broadly. 1 Cor. 14:33b-35, however, addresses itself more specifically to the assemblies of the church. The combined teaching of 1 Cor. 11 and 1 Cor. 14 may be summarized as follows. While in general women may pray and prophesy if properly covered, in the church they may not speak at all.

You may visualize the relation of 1 Cor. 11 and 1 Cor. 14 by means of two concentric circles with the outer circle being the public situation in general where women may speak if covered and the inner circle being the church situation where women are forbidden to speak.

## 3. The Solution Supported

There are two broad considerations which demand that we adopt the solution described above as the proper solution to the problem under discussion.

The first broad consideration is this. The prohibition of speaking in 1 Cor. 14 is a broad prohibition which must include the prohibition of tongues' speaking (often a form of prayer) and prophesying. This is simply to say that 1 Cor. 14 does forbid precisely what 1 Cor. 11 assumes is legitimate.

The term, speak, used twice in 1 Cor. 14:34, 35 is elsewhere in 1 Cor. 14 alone used 22 times. If we expand the context and take into account its usage in 1 Cor. 12 and 13, it is used an additional 4 times. This means that it is used a total of 28 times in these three chapters. Even though the word, speak (laleo), is in itself a very nondescript word, we need not be in doubt of its meaning in vv. 34, 35. That meaning has been defined by its repeated re-occurrence throughout these chapters. In those other occurrences the word, speak, has been used repeatedly of both tongues' speaking and prophesying. It has been used 16 times of tongues' speaking. Tongues' speaking was a form of public prayer, 1 Cor. 14:13-17. It has been used 3 times of prophesying, (14:3, 6, 29). Whatever else was included in this prohibition of speaking, clearly women prophets and women tongues' speakers were forbidden to speak in the assembly.

There is another contextual consideration which points in this direction. In vv. 34, 35 the terms, keep silent and speak, are used in tandem. But this is not the first time they have been used together in ch. 14. In the immediately preceding context Paul has twice used these words in tandem; once in his directions to tongues' speakers in vv. 27, 28 and again in his directions to prophets in vv. 29- 33a. This re-enforces the conclusion

that whatever else is included in the prohibition of speaking, speaking in tongues and prophesying are included. The whole thrust of the context and word usage demands this conclusion. So I repeat. 1 Cor. 14 does forbid precisely what 1 Cor. 11 assumes is legitimate. 1 Cor. 11 assumes the legitimacy of women praying and prophesying, while in forbidding women to speak 1 Cor. 14 prohibits it. There is, indeed, the most pointed contrast between the two chapters. This brings me to the second broad consideration.

The second consideration is that 1 Cor. 14 clearly has the assemblies of the church in mind as the defined scope of its prohibitions. In vv. 33b-35 this defined scope is emphasized by the repetition of the word, church, three times. Each time the reference is to an assembly of the church. The rest of 1 Cor. 14 confirms this reference. Ekklesia is used 9 times in 1 Cor. 14 and each time a meeting of the church is in view.

There is at this point the greatest contrast in 1 Cor. 11. The term, church, is mentioned only once (in v. 16) and then the reference is not to a meeting of the church but to the church as an institution. Further, it has often been assumed that the mention of prayer and prophesying indicates that a meeting of the church is in view. This assumption is built on the faulty premise that Christians only prayed and prophesied in church. Furthermore, though it is often argued that 1 Cor. 11:2 marks a transition to issues dealing with public worship, there is no indication at v. 2 of such a transition. There is the clearest indication of such a transition, however, at v. 17 where Paul explicitly mentions their coming together and repeats these words again and again in the verses following v. 17. The words, "in the first place," occurring in v. 18 may, in fact, be an explicit indication of just such a transition. Lenski remarks, "Paul thus marks with great plainness that the disorders of which he now speaks occur in the public assemblies of the congregation. In the section regarding the head covering for women no mention is made of public assemblies." Lenski goes on to say that the section beginning in 11:17 extends through 14:40 and has for its general theme subjects related to the assemblies of the church.<sup>7</sup>

#### **4. The Implication Expanded**

Before we pass on from this discussion, there is an implication in this whole question of the relation of 1 Cor. 11 to 1 Cor. 14 which must now be briefly elaborated. These passages assume that women may speak, may pray and prophesy, outside the church in public. This is the patent assumption of 1 Cor. 11. It is the implicit assumption of Paul's thrice repeated qualification, "in the church," in 1 Cor. 14.

Now I am aware that some of the commentators have attempted to reconcile 1 Cor. 11 with 1 Cor. 14 by asserting that Paul never intended to give women permission to pray and prophesy publicly in 1 Cor. 11. The problem with this is that many other passages of Scripture confirm that women were permitted to speak the Word of God in public. Note the example of the women of Israel in Exod. 15:20, 21; Deborah in Judges 4:4-6; Huldah in 2 Kings 22:12-20; the daughters of Israel in Joel 2:28, 29; the female followers of Christ in Acts 2:14-18; Priscilla in Acts 18:24-26; and the four virgin daughters of

Philip in Acts 21:8, 9. We may want to say that women ought never to take official, religious teaching positions over men even outside the church. I think we must say that. But we must not forbid women to speak the Word of God to men in general public situations for to say that would be flatly contrary to the repeated emphasis of the Word of God and the clear intention of the Holy Spirit in giving women gifts of prophecy. Women may and must speak the Word of God to those around them with boldness, clarity, and directness. There are many appropriate speaking ministries for women outside the church which do not violate the Word of God. Men must be ready to receive the Word of God in such situations even from a woman.

## **B. Its Prohibition Expounded**

### **1. The Context of the Prohibition**

#### *a. Analyzed*

The larger context is ch. 12-14. Those chapters have for their subject, spiritual gifts. The flow of thought in these chapters illustrates this.

Chapter 12 - The Unity of the Spirit and

Spiritual Gifts

Chapter 13 - The Superiority of Love and

Spiritual Gifts

Chapter 14 - The Regulation of the Assemblies and Spiritual Gifts.

This brings us to the nearer context of our passage, ch. 14. As we have just indicated this chapter has for its peculiar theme the regulation of the spiritual gifts in the assemblies of the church. Paul structures this chapter around the two principles which are to regulate the exercise of these gifts in the assembly.

Verses 1-26 apply the principle of edification to their exercise.

Verses 27-40 apply the principle of order to their exercise.

Notice how Paul concludes each of these parts of the chapter by succinctly stating the principle upon which he has been enlarging. Note v. 26 and v. 40. The gatherings of the church are to be governed by the twin principles of maximum edification and sensitivity to the divine order.

This brings us to the immediate context of our passage, vv. 27-40. The theme of this section is the orderly use of spiritual gifts in the assemblies of the church. Note vv. 27, 33, 40. The movement of thought in this section is as follows. In vv. 27-35 there are the particular applications of the principle of order to tongues' speakers (vv. 27, 28), to prophets (vv. 29-33a), and finally to women (vv. 33b-35). In vv. 36-38 there is the



vehement enforcement of the principle. Finally in vv. 39, 40 there is the concluding summary of the principle.

Notice how both in 1 Cor. 11 and 1 Cor. 14 the subject of the conduct of women is dealt with in conjunction with a discussion of order, the divine order. The divine requirement is that everyone keep rank, keep in step with the divine drummer. That is the connotation of the word, *taxis*, translated in v. 40 order.

### ***b. Applied***

Why have I taken the time to lay out the context of 1 Cor. 14:33b-35? For several important reasons:

The context of 1 Cor. 14 demonstrates that its teaching is appropriately applied to the exercise of gifts in the gathering of the church by women. It is precisely the question of spiritual gifts, precisely the question of the regulation of church-gatherings, and precisely the question of the exercise of such gifts by women at church-gatherings which 1 Cor. 14:33b-35 is addressing in its context. In so applying the passage we are not taking it out of context.

There is the greatest contrast between this use of 1 Cor. 14 and the use of which the evangelical feminist make of Gal. 3:28. That passage is not addressing the question to which feminists attempt to apply it. As its entire context makes evident, it is addressing the question of grace, not gifts; justification, not leadership in the assemblies of the church, the common salvation of all Christians, not the special duties of some.

Another point of interest flowing out of this overview of the context of 1 Cor. 14 is this. Certain feminists have argued that Paul gave the instructions of 1 Cor. 14 because women in his day were so ignorant and uninstructed that they could not speak to the general edification of the church. They, of course, go on to add that in our day when women are more well- instructed, Paul's words do not apply. There are many cogent objections to this theory, but perhaps the most cogent is that the context of 1 Cor. 14 contradicts it. These verses do not occur in the part of 1 Cor. 14 dealing with the principle of edification, but in the part dealing with the principle of order. It is impermissible, therefore, to make the primary reason for the directives of these verses anything to do with the principle of edification.

## **2. The Universality of the Prohibition**

Verse 33b, as some of the modern versions and the consensus of interpreters indicate, is to be connected with vv. 34 and 35, not with v. 33a. Verse 33b, therefore, indicates that the directives of verses 34 and 35 govern the universal practice of the apostolic churches. This contradicts the frequent feminist argument that the silence commanded of women in the meetings of the church at Corinth arose from purely local circumstances. There is nothing purely local about the directives of these verses!

### 3. The Basis of the Prohibition

The basis of the prohibition found in these verses is contained in the words, "but must be in submission as the law says." It is a matter of "subjection," or subordination.

Such subordination, Paul says, is the requirement of the universal divine order taught in the law. The mention of the law has provoked much debate. What part of the law does Paul have in mind? It is likely (given the way Paul argues in 1 Cor. 11:7-12 and 1 Tim. 2:13) that he has primarily Gen. 2 in mind.

Interpreters have asked, where does the law teach that women should be silent in church? The answer is, of course, no place. It is not the directive of silence which Paul asserts that the law demands, but the principle of subordination to male authority. The requirement of silence is the apostolic application of that principle to the meetings of the church. 1 Cor. 14:33b-35 is the authoritative, apostolic application of a general moral principle to a specific situation.

### 4. The Scope of the Prohibition

We have already noted the emphatic statement in these verses of the defined scope of the directives it contains. That scope is "the church," i. e. the assemblies of the church. This precise meaning of the term is confirmed by the use of the plural in v. 34. There was only one church in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2). Hence, the reference to the many Corinthian churches must be a reference to their many gatherings as a church.

This emphasis on the scope of these directives requires that we have a clear idea of what is and what is not an assembly of the church, if we are to faithfully apply these directives. The use of this term in 1 Cor. 14 enables us to formulate such a clear conception of an assembly of the church. Negatively, we may say that the church is not just any meeting that happens to take place in the church building. The church is not the church building. The church is not every gathering of Christians. It is not even every gathering of Christians for religious purposes. Sunday School classes, Elder's Meetings, Bible Studies are not meetings of the church. Clearly, the gathering of the whole church for the purposes of corporate worship (praying, singing, proclamation, the Lord's Table, discipline, etc.) is what Paul and the New Testament mean by an assembly of the church. It is in this context that Paul regards the principle of the general subordination of women as requiring the silence commanded here. Male headship and womanly subordination must come to their most pointed expression in the solemn, formal assemblies of the church.

Clear ideas as to what is church and what is not church are not only crucial to the implementation of the Biblical directives to women in the church, but also foundational to the implementation of the regulative principle as whole. The regulative principle is the regulative principle of the church and its worship. May I urge you not to tolerate foggy ideas on this subject in yourself or in your church!



## 5. The Enforcement of the Prohibition

Paul enforces the prohibition by calling its violation, a shame, *aiskron* (v. 35b). This word may mean according to BAG, ugly, shameful, base, disgraceful. Some have seen the use of this word as implying that Paul has merely cultural values in mind when giving these directives. They think that he is speaking simply of some cultural impropriety. This idea is contradicted by the entire force of these directives, but by the use of this word in the New Testament. Never does it imply in the New Testament a shame rooted in merely cultural values. Cf. its use, Eph. 5:12, Tit. 1:11, 1 Cor. 11:6 and the use of its compound words, 1 Tim. 3:8, 1 Pet. 5:2, Col. 3:8, Eph. 5:4. It is used of obscene speech, abusive language and sordid gain, hardly things that are merely cultural in their shamefulness. Clearly, shame is related not to mere cultural values, but to manifest and ugly deviation from the divine order.

## 6. The Significance of the Prohibition

What is the significance of this prohibition? What precisely is included in and forbidden by it? We must allow the words themselves as they are used in this context to answer these questions.

Both the words, keep silent and speak, are nondescript words deriving their peculiar connotations from their context. This contextual usage, as we have seen, in 1 Cor. 12-14 is quite sufficient, since "speak" (*laleo*) is used 28 times in these chapters. To ignore this contextual usage in exegeting the significance of these directives is inexcusable. Such inexcusable exegesis, however, has been committed not only by those in the feminist camp, but also those in what is called the traditionalist camp. Incredibly, one such traditionalist concludes that by speaking Paul means the activity of judging the prophets mentioned in v. 29. This conclusion is drawn in spite of the fact that the term, speak, is never used of this activity in this context, but is used of a number of very clearly defined activities dozens of times. In these chapters speaking clearly includes the following things:

-speaking in tongues. It is used 16 times in this way. Note especially verses 27 and 28 and note the parallel use of "keep silent." Speaking in tongues could be a form of prayer or even singing, vv. 15, 16.

-prophesying. Note vv. 3, 6, 29. Note the parallel use of "keep silent" in v. 30.

-other forms of proclaiming the word. Note vv. 6 and 19. These verses confirm the application of these directives to the exercise of ordinary speaking gifts in the church. It is not just inspired utterance which is forbidden, but ordinary teaching as well.

But even the proper application to us of the prohibition of the extraordinary gifts of tongues' speaking and prophecy would lead to the same conclusion. If even women with extraordinary gifts are told to keep silence, then there can be no possible exception for women today. Based on the fact that God has given them unusual gifts, some women are claiming the right today to speak in the church. Here in 1 Cor. 14 were

women who spoke under the direct inspiration of the Spirit, who prophesied, who spoke in tongues! If even such were forbidden to speak in the assemblies of the church, then surely it is arrogant impiety for those with only ordinary gifts to claim such a privilege.

-asking questions. Note v. 35. This is "speaking" according to the Apostle Paul. This further implies that Paul regards such asking of questions as a violation of the divine order and an act of insubordination. We may ask, How is asking questions in order to learn more about the Word of God insubordination? The answer seems to be that in the church, asking questions is itself an act of great boldness and prerogative. It is, thus, a violation of the meekness, quietness, and subordination appropriate to a woman. It manifests insensitivity to her identity for her to take such a "leading" role in the public worship of the church.

In conclusion we must assert that it seems obvious that Paul is thinking of an individual speaking before or addressing the church when he forbids speaking and commands silence in these verses. Each of the specific applications proven above have this character. Clearly, Paul is not thinking of congregational singing or even of the corporate responsibility to say the amen. Such things are simply participation in worship, not a leadership role in worship. Paul both here and in 1 Tim. 2:8- 15 does, however, clearly regard such things as the proclamation of the Word, leading in prayer, and even asking didactic, directive questions as acts of headship or leadership. It is, therefore, a violation of the divine order for a woman to engage in these or any other activities involving leadership in the assembly.

### **Closing Observation: Woman and Church Office**

The discussion of women and church office requires not only a proper doctrine of women in the divine order, but also a proper doctrine of church government. Thankfully, I may assume that we here share such a proper doctrine of church government. I must briefly state five key assumptions about the government of the church which will be assumed in these concluding remarks. First, there is a divinely ordained government for the local church. Second, this government includes specified and defined offices. Third, these offices are the offices of elder and deacon. Fourth, the office of elder involves the exercise of ruling and teaching functions in the church. Fifth, the office of deacon involves the exercise of administrative authority over the affairs of the church.

Now if these assumptions are correct, then it must be clear that women are forbidden to hold or exercise office in the church. This is so, primarily because the holding of such offices commits them to functions in the church which it would be a violation of the divine order for them to exercise. This is, of course, most pointed with reference to the office of elder. By definition this office is the exercise of ruling and teaching functions in the church. It is a manifest absurdity to have an elder who would be forbidden to proclaim the Word or taking a leading role in worship or even to ask questions. But it is

also clear enough that deacons exercise an administrative authority over the church's affairs. Note Acts 6:3; 1 Tim. 3:12, 13. Such authority is also forbidden to women by the principles we have been studying. It is headship, the exercise of authority over men, which is forbidden to women. It is such authority which deacons exercise. Yet a word of qualification is in order here. The nature of the office of deacon as peculiarly a serving office makes it frequently appropriate that women should be involved in assisting in its functions. The references to women in the New Testament in conjunction with the functions of the diaconate are to be explained on this basis. 1 Tim. 3:11 and possibly Rom. 16:1 are references to female diaconal assistants.

The primary means which the Holy Spirit takes in addressing the subject of women in the church is to address their proper role in the assemblies of the church. When the role of women in the church as an assembly is understood, it makes their role in the church as an institution become abundantly clear. Their proper role in the assemblies of the church is, however, dictated by their place in the divine order. It is the divine order itself which prohibits women in church office. If the divine order is that the head of the woman is the man, then that order must be most carefully observed in that church which is the temple of the living God.

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<sup>1</sup>George w. Knight III, *The Role Relationship of Men & Women*, (Chicago, Moody Press, 1985), pp. 49, 50.

<sup>2</sup>Knight, pp. 49-80.

<sup>3</sup>Patricia Gundry, *Woman Be Free*, p. 61. Cf. also Robert K. Johnston's essay in *Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation*, entitled "The Role of Women in the Church and Home," pp. 236ff.

<sup>4</sup>Knight, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup>Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female*, pp. 137, 138. Cf. also Lasor, p. 237

<sup>6</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, *I and II Corinthians*, pp. 436, 437; F. w. Grosheide, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 251, 252.

<sup>7</sup>Lenski, pp. 454, 455.