

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. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, two-or at the most three-should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. 28 If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.

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.

That doesn't mean each person has each one of those. Various different people have different things to offer.

Paul's point is that whatever your gift, it must be offered in such a way as to edify the church.

If you are not using your gift to build up the church you are defrauding the church.

Isn't this an interesting picture Paul paints? People are standing in line, champing at the bit to offer what they have to offer. And that was as it should be (as long as they did it in an orderly way, and for the edification of the body).

Today we have the opposite problem as the Corinthians. It's like pulling teeth to get people to participate many times. Our culture has drilled its consumer, entertainment mentality into our brains, so we come to church with that attitude.

"I don't want to have to think of a prayer or go out of my way to exhort someone. I'm here to be amused."

27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, two-or at the most three-should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret.

In the worship service there should never be more than three people who speak in tongues, and zero if there is no interpreter.

The fact that there are hundreds of churches where, at this very moment people are speaking in tongues without an interpreter, more than three do it, and people do it at the same time is just in-your-face disobedience to God.

Sometime prior to the service in question, there were a group of people who had been identified by the church as interpreters. By some means God had made it clear to the church that these people had the gift.

So if one of those people was not present, no tongues were allowed.

Again, we need to highlight the fact that it's not enough that someone claims to be an interpreter. There must be some verification.

My great uncle is a missionary in Africa. He was at a Charismatic meeting once in which someone was speaking in tongues, and there was an interpreter. The interpreter was saying wonderful things, and everyone was saying "Amen."

The guy speaking in tongues had no idea what he was saying. But my uncle did, because he happened to be speaking in an African dialect that my uncle knows.

He said the man was uttering blasphemies in this dialect, and what the translator was saying had nothing to do with what was actually being said.

Discernment in this area is vital. Don't just assume something is the gift of tongues because it takes place in a certain context or the person seems spiritual. Faith is always based on evidence.

And a mere inner, intuitive feeling, by itself, is never enough evidence to discern that something is from God.

I wish I could convince everyone of this one thing: we should all vow to never accept subjective feelings alone as the authoritative voice of God.

28 If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.

Keep quiet does not mean “whisper” or “mumble.” It means not to make any sound at all.

Some people think they are following this verse by mumbling in tongues so that 4 or 5 people sitting around them can hear. That is clear disobedience to this verse.

29 Two or three prophets should speak,

The prophets were people who spoke direct revelation from God. During the time the NT was being written by the Apostles, obviously no churches had New Testaments. So in place of a copy of the NT, God gave them prophets.

From this passage it sounds like the prophets played a major role as leaders of the early church, and they did – no question about it. But some people have wondered, when we get to the Pastoral Epistles, which gives detailed instruction about how the churches are to function, and especially extensive detail regarding the leadership, why do we read nothing there about the prophets? There are long lists of qualifications given for elders, for deacons, for deaconesses... but prophets and prophecy are not discussed at all (except for a passing mention of the prophets’ involvement in Timothy’s ordination in the past). And at the beginning of the book of Philippians, where the leadership is being addressed, all it says is “To the overseers and deacons.” What about the prophets? I think the answer lies in Eph.2:20

19 you are...members of God's household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

The Apostles and prophets were not ongoing offices in the church. They were there at the very beginning to help lay the foundation, but the more the NT message began to become solidified and distributed, the less there was a need for the Apostles and prophets.

So you see them with a prominent role in the early books like 1 Cor. and 1 Thes., but not in the later books such as the Pastorals.

Not everyone who claimed to be a true prophet actually was, however. So what they said needed to be evaluated in light of the OT and the knowledge of the Gospel they did possess.

and the others should weigh carefully what is said.

The others refers to the rest of the church – not to the remaining prophets (had Paul wanted to indicate that he could have just said οἱ λοιποὶ.) It’s not that the whole church waited until the end of the evaluation process to see if they should believe any part of what was said. The church was the group doing the evaluating. (Carson)

Some say this is proof that true prophets were giving false prophecies, and were unlike the OT prophets in that way. Or the NT prophecy was not as authoritative as OT prophecy.

I don’t see any reason why we need to come to those conclusions. Just because a message is to be evaluated doesn’t mean the messenger is not a spiritual authority, or uninspired. In Acts 17 the Bereans were praised even as they evaluated Paul’s message.

30 And if a revelation comes to someone (lit. – if it is revealed to another) who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop.

Evidently, in Corinth they figured that whoever felt like he had a revelation from God should just begin speaking at that very moment. So people would be speaking all at once.

That also came out of their background. In the mystery religions, those who spoke in tongues or prophesied were not always in control – they believed the gods were controlling them at that moment.

But when the true God works through someone, He doesn’t do it by overriding that person’s faculties and will. Instead He works through them.

He doesn't turn you into a robot. He just works to influence your thoughts and your will, so that you can decide to do what He desires.

Paul doesn't say how you would know that something is being revealed to another prophet. Maybe they raised their hands.

Paul is teaching them to defer to one another, instead of everyone trying to grab as much attention for himself as possible.

When I read v.30, the question that pops into my mind is "What if the first prophecy is better?" Regardless, the point is to be quick to yield to one another.

So you are a great musician, and someone else would like to serve the body in that way – be quick to yield.

You're making a great comment in a Bible study, and someone else looks like he would like to speak, be quick to wrap up what you are saying so he can speak.

If this applies to an inspired revelation from God, surely it applies to anything else. Even if Almighty God is literally speaking through you at the moment, it's still better to deprive the church of the rest of the revelation in order to yield to someone else.

31 For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.

Paul again relentlessly turns back to his main point. The reason we must have order in the service is because that's what edifies the church.

32 The Spirits of prophets are subject (lit.submissive) to the control of prophets.

That's a great insight into how inspiration works. God does not override the personality or will of the prophet. When the Bible writers penned the Scriptures, they were acting on their own free will, deciding what to write, but God, by means of providence, saw to it that every last letter was His inerrant Word.

33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.

Since God is not characterized by disorder, He is not the cause of disorder. So when there is disorder in a church, there is some other cause behind it other than God.

The *manner* of worship out to reflect the nature of the God being worshiped.

Notice what he offers as the opposite of disorder. It's no a structured regimen, but peace.

That goes beyond mere organization. It carries a nuance of right relationships, mutual harmony and respect for one another.

During our worship time we don't carry on conversations or get up and walk around unnecessarily out of respect for one another, so that others have a peaceful atmosphere for worship. (I think we could probably do a little better in Sunday School)

Our Sunday mornings are not to be times where we are vying against each other for attention. Rather our actions and words should fit in with each other hand in glove.

This is really a wonderful picture of how our worship times should be. God's desire is neither for a stiff, rigid formality nor an undisciplined frenzy or free-for-all.

There is a place for spontaneity and creativity, yet only within the confines of a well-ordered structure.

As in all the churches of the saints, 34 women should remain silent in the churches

The argument for this going with v.34 is that v.33 is too much of a far reaching principle than to just connect it to what is merely the custom in the churches (Morris).

The argument for the traditional verse division is the fact that "As in the churches women should remain silent in the churches" is an "intolerable redundancy" in Fee's words. (The NIV smoothes it out by translating the first "churches" as "congregations")

but it's the same word).

But perhaps it means something like "As in all the other churches, so it should be in your churches."

Either way Paul is using the practice of all the other churches as an argument for order and peace. What the rest of Christianity does is worth paying attention to. Whenever there is a consensus among the whole church about something, that's significant.

34 women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. 35 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.

Where on earth does this paragraph come from? I thought we were talking about prophecy!

And we are. In fact, if you read the next paragraph (vv.36-40) you see that's still the subject matter at hand.

More than one scholar has pointed out that if you just remove vv.34,35, the text flows very smoothly right from v.33 into v.36.

In fact, Gordon Fee, who is hands down my favorite charismatic scholar (one of my favorite scholars period), in his commentary on 1 Cor. simply decided vv.34,35 weren't in the original MSS even though they appear in every copy we have.

He doesn't do anything like that anywhere else in any of his other writings.

Thiselton points out the continuity of vocabulary with the rest of the chapter – "**to speak, remain silent, in the churches, in submission**"

So what are we to make of this? We are not at liberty to just remove things we don't like from the text. So let's see if we can make sense of it.

34 women should remain silent in the churches.

This is the third time someone is told to be silent in the church. Tongues-speakers without interpreters, prophets whose turn is up, and now women in the context of evaluation of prophecies.

This seems at first to come as a surprise in light of the larger context of the book, where just a few chapters earlier he gave a whole bunch of regulations for women praying and prophesying – implying that if it is done with a submissive attitude, it is permitted.

Some have suggested that ch.11 is only talking about women praying or prophesying in private, not in the gathering of saints.

But there is nothing in ch.11 that indicates that, and it seems to be to create more problems than it solves.

1. It seems to me to be too great an emphasis on external things in private prayer.

Are we going to say that if a woman wakes up in the middle of the night, or if she is taking a shower or something, and wants to pray, she has to first go get a veil?

Why? One major emphasis of the NT is that now our personal interaction with God is not a function of external rituals and trappings. It's an issue of the heart. So to require some external, symbolic ritual like that for personal, private prayer would seem to go against a major thrust of the NT message.

In the church, however, it makes sense that your external posture and mannerisms and dress becomes significant, because those things have an impact and send a message to the rest of the people.

2. Prophecy is supposed to be public.

The whole reason Paul has been praising prophecy over tongues in this chapter is because prophecy edifies the body.

Just listen to what Paul has said just in this chapter about the purpose of prophecy and see if it sounds like something that is to be done in private:

3 everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. 4 He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.

24 if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, 25 and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare.

26 ... All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.

29 Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. 30 And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. 31 For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.

3. The context of ch.11 seems to be talking about practice in the church.

At the end of that section in ch.11 Paul doesn't say, "Women should do this because there is no other practice among the *saints*." He says their women should do it because there is no other practice among the *churches* (v.16)

So if Paul has women praying and prophesying out loud in the church in ch.11, how is it that now he requires total silence? The word **silent** means complete silence – it's the same word used in v.28 to describe the silence required of the tongues speaker when there is no interpretation.

And it's used again in v.30 to describe the silence required of the prophet when the next prophet starts speaking.

And there are some other problems. V.35 says **If they want to inquire about (lit.learn) something, they should ask their own husbands at home**

So not only are women required to be silent in the church, they are forbidden to learn in the church. That is in tension with 1 Tim.2. In that chapter Paul is giving instructions about "in every place" (v.8 – NIV "everywhere") which is a way he refers to the various local churches, and he says **11 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.**

In the Jewish culture no premium was placed on teaching women. Many rabbis said it was a waste of your breath. In fact, some rabbis taught that it actually dishonored God's Word to teach it to a woman.

So in the face of that cultural backdrop Paul says, "No, let them learn!!!" The teaching in the church should be directed toward women right alongside men. It is crucially important for the women to learn from God's Word, because in His Kingdom women play a vital role.

So how is it that Paul makes a point to command that women learn in the churches in Timothy, but here says if they want to learn anything they must learn it from their husbands at home, and not in the church?

Also – one other problem. If the standard is that women are not to speak at all in church, why is it that later on they receive restrictions specifically in the area of teaching men in 1 Tim.2:12?

If the standard is for her not to make a peep of any kind, why would Paul say, "She's not allowed to make a sound, AND she's also not allowed to teach men in the church"?

That would be like if we made a rule "No children are allowed to go downstairs ever." Then later, in another context, you are explaining the rules to someone and you say, "Children are not allowed inside the furnace room downstairs on Sunday evenings."

What would be the point of giving such a specific prohibition if they are not allowed anywhere downstairs period?

On top of all that, Paul just got done talking about the fact that when they **come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation** (v.26). Those are all verbal gifts used in the assembly for the edification of the church, and the picture is of the entire church being involved (not just the men).

So you can see why this passage has caused so much consternation among interpreters.

The most common interpretation of this passage is one that assumes these women in Corinth were being disruptive. So it only applies to this church with this disruptive women, who now have to keep their mouths shut.

That has some problems. On what basis do we assume there were disruptive women? When there were disruptive women in Philippi Paul just mentioned them by name right in the text (Php.4:2).

Also, we know that there were disruptions in Corinthian worship – the tongues speakers and the prophets who were all speaking at once. And Paul solved that not by telling them to be completely silent. He just told them to go one at a time.

Why wouldn't he do that with the women too? Why not just say, "Hey, those ladies who are being disruptive should instead speak calmly one at a time"?

It doesn't seem to fit in context, and it seems to conflict with so much of the rest of the NT, including an earlier part of this very letter.

Any time you have a passage that doesn't seem to fit in context, that's a signal that perhaps your understanding of that passage is incorrect. Because it's the Holy Spirit who places each text where it is placed.

What if we consider that perhaps it does fit in the context?

They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says.

That comment about the law is another difficulty, since it's tough to find any explicit statement in the OT along the lines of female submission.

But it's not an insurmountable difficulty. Jesus insisted that Genesis 1&2 taught against divorce.

The creation account never even comes close to mentioning divorce explicitly, but the principle of marriage being permanent is there by God's example.

In the same way, the authority of a man over his wife is also implied in the creation account, as we see elsewhere in Paul (1 Tim 2:12-13).

He doesn't mention the specific passage here, probably because he already has a few pages earlier (11:8-9, where he brings up the order and purpose of the creation of the woman).

If this were prohibiting women from praying or saying anything in church, what would that have to do with submission. Is there something about prayer or asking an honest question that is inherently rebellious for women?

But if we understand it in the context of making judgments about the prophecies, we can easily see how that would be in conflict with a posture of submissiveness in the church.

Many have wondered why it is that women could prophesy but not preach (since the prophet is a higher office than the pastor)?

It may be because preaching involves interpretive discernment, whereas prophecy is just verbatim announcement of God's Word (like reading the Bible). This would explain Paul's reasoning that it's because of the fact that Eve was deceived.

It may be that because of the role emotion plays in feminine thought processes, or it may be symbolic – to hold up high the importance of not being deceived.

And that would explain why the women may be allowed to prophesy, but they wouldn't be part of the discerning process of evaluating the prophets.

35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home

This really does sound like Paul is addressing some specific problem they were having in Corinth.

Perhaps women were judging their own husbands. Jesus made it clear that only in his hometown is a prophet despised. And Jesus' own family concluded He was insane rather than admit He was even a prophet.

So you can imagine what it would be like for a wife to evaluate her husband in the church (especially in a church where the people were so spiritually immature).

"I have a word from the Lord!"

"Yeah right – this from a man who leaves his underwear on the bathroom counter..."

For a wife to come out from under the authority of her husband like that is a disgrace to that wife.

If you have a comment, save it for when you get home.

And even if it's about some other man's prophecy – still, talk to your husband about it at home.

That's not to say the women's input is not valuable. I can think of a couple possibilities why they are to talk to their husbands about it at home.

1. It may be that because of the influence of emotions, while her input is valuable and important, it's helpful for her to first talk it over with her husband who can help her separate the reasoning from emotional influences.
2. Another possibility is again that it is only symbolic.

Some women are less emotional and more discerning than their husbands. But there is still the fact that God wants the headship in the home to be exemplified in the church.

God is glorified by the order and structure that comes from authority and submission.

(and keep in mind, the whole purpose of the entire section from v.26 all the way to the end of the chapter is to create order in the church)

And when this discussion in the home does go on – even that is supposed to be an effort on her part to *learn*. Even at home she isn't to come to her husband as a critic, but with a teachable heart.

Now, as soon as this verse is read in a church there is always the same reaction inside the hearts of many, many women:

"I would give my right arm if my husband would teach me something from the Bible. But the fact is, he doesn't have anything to teach me. He only has a very elementary understanding of spiritual things."

That's a disgrace, men – if that's you. It's a disgrace. You are to be her spiritual leader.

"But she has so much of a head start on me. She's been studying the Bible for years, and I haven't."

That doesn't matter. I've been studying the Bible about as long as Tommy has been alive, and when he preached a few weeks ago I learned some things I didn't already know.

You don't have to be smarter than her. Just be learning something from God's Word, and pass it on to her.

for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

The word **disgraceful** is the same word used in 11:6 about it being a **disgrace** for a woman's head to be shaved.

Paul is very concerned that women not be disgraced in the public assembly. And any time a woman publicly comes out from under the authority of her husband, she disgraces her husband and herself.

36 Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?

The Corinthians prophets must have had a prideful attitude along these lines: “Since I’m speaking God’s Word, no rules or restrictions apply to me.”

So Paul says, “Look around at the rest of the universal Church. This is the way God’s people act.”

37 If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. 38 If anyone ignores this, he is ignored.

(εἰ δέ τις ἀγνοεῖ, ἀγνοεῖται)

The point is not just that he’s ignored in the church. The point is he’s ignored by God – not recognized by God as one of His. It’s a very strong statement.

A person who simply disregards Scripture is not a believer.

Sometimes people get involved with sin, and they are confronted and say, “I don’t care that the Bible says that. I’m not going to listen to that.”

...and everyone says, “How can he be a Christian and have that attitude?” The answer is simple – he can’t.

As long as we are testing prophets, a great place to start is to see if they are willing to obey the Apostle Paul.

We had a self-proclaimed prophetess visit our church last week, and she claimed to have a message for me from God. I rejected her message and warned her of severe judgment.

She said, “If some dramatic miracles happen in the next few days, then will you at least consider my message.”

My answer was an emphatic “No!” If you are in disagreement with God’s Word, and your life is out of line with biblical practice, and you are not submissive to God, I don’t need to know what your message is, and I have no interest in any supposed miracles of corroboration.

I can rule such a person a false prophet a priori without any additional discussion or investigation.

39 Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

We do forbid speaking in tongues out loud without verification that they are authentic, but if such verification existed for both the speaker and the interpreter, we would permit them.

Because of our understanding of the role of miracles, we require the verification first.