

“Ready to Give a Defense”

Answering Our Friends’ Religious Questions

Lesson Ten - Women’s Role in the Church

Introduction. The Bible assigns specific roles to men and women in the home and in the church. These roles limit the responsibilities and behavior of both men and women. In our generation, many in the religious world have rejected these Biblically assigned roles and presumed to give to men and women the same roles in both the home and the church. In this lesson we will consider what the Bible teaches about a woman’s role in the local church.

I. Scriptural instructions regarding women.

- A. “Let your women keep silent in the churches” (I Corinthians 14:34,35).
 1. The word here “Silent” is the Greek word *Sigao* (σιγάω) meaning - “To keep silence, hold one’s peace; passively to be kept in silence, be concealed.” (*Thayer’s Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*, pg. 574) Further “1. Be silent, keep still. a. say nothing keep silent. b. stop speaking, become silent...” (*A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by Walter Bauer, pg. 749).
 2. This is a word for absolute silence. (The only exception to this would be when it comes to singing – (Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16)
 3. *In which sense is the word “church” used here?*
 - a. Not the universal sense (a woman would have to be silent from the moment she became a Christian).
 - b. Nor purely in the local sense (all Christian should be identified with a local congregation – she would have to be silent from the moment she identified with a local church).
 - c. This is when a congregation comes together as a church to engage in authorized works of the church. Then a woman must be absolutely silent.
- B. “Let a woman learn in silence with all submission” (I Timothy 2:8-14). Two points to note here:
 1. “Learn in SILENCE” (NASB “quietness”). “Silence” here is Greek word *Hesuchia* (ἡσυχία) meaning – “1. Quietness. 2. Silence” (*Thayer’s Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*, pg. 281) “1. Quietness, rest. “Silence...quiet down” (*A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by Walter Bauer, pg. 349). This is not absolute silence but a disposition of quietness. The text indicates that a woman is to always maintain a disposition of quietness
 2. Women are not to teach or have authority over men (presumably in a religious context).
- C. I Corinthians 14:34,35 & I Timothy 2:11,12 compared. We note that these texts address different contexts and offer different instructions and prohibitions.
 1. I Corinthians 14:34,35
 - a. Context: Spiritual gifts & Conduct in the assembly
 - b. Instruction: “Keep silent”
 - c. Prohibition: Not permitted to speak
 2. I Timothy 2:11,12
 - a. Context: General conduct
 - b. Instruction: Learn in “quietness” (ASV) “quietly” (NASB)
 - c. Prohibition: Not permitted to teach or have authority over a man.

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- D. "Teachers of good things" (Titus 2:1-5).
1. Some contend that I Timothy prohibits a woman from teaching in any context. However, this passage commands women to be "teachers of good things" (vs. 3) and older women to "admonish the younger women..."
 2. This makes it clear that outside of the assembly a woman may teach other women and children.
 3. *Is there any context in which a woman may speak with a man about spiritual matters?* We have already seen that a wife may talk with her husband at home about spiritual things (I Corinthians 14:35). In addition to this...
- E. "They took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:24-26).
1. This is not in the assembly; it is not a woman over a man but with another man "explaining" the way of God. (In Greek "they" indicates it wasn't "THEY took him aside and HE explained" but rather - "THEY took him aside and THEY explained").
 2. This shows that in a setting outside of the assembly, where a woman is not over a man she may talk with men (other than her husband) about spiritual matters maintaining a quiet disposition.

II. Applications.

- A. In the church assembly a woman should not preach.
1. This would be teaching & exercising authority over a man (I Timothy 2:12).
 2. This would be speaking in the church (I Corinthians 14:34).
- B. In the assembly a woman should not lead singing, prayer, preside at the Lord's table or read scripture.
1. This would be speaking in the church (I Corinthians 14:34).
- C. In a Bible class which is not the church assembled a woman may speak but not teach over a man.
1. A smaller portion of a congregation meeting in a home, part of a meeting house or anywhere does not constitute the church assembled (Acts 18:26).
 2. This follows the example of Priscilla and Aquilla in Acts 18:24-26
- D. A woman may teach other women or children in settings outside of the assembly.
1. This is not speaking in the church (I Corinthians 14:34).
 2. It is not exercising authority over a man (I Timothy 2:13).
 3. This follows the instructions of Titus 2:1-5
- E. In instances where the church is assembled to carry out authorized works of the church a woman must not speak whether it is a period of worship or not.
1. Members of a local congregation are always a part of the church but they are not always "in the church." (Example: every member engaged in a business doesn't mean the church is engaged in business).
 2. Worship is not the only authorized work of the church. (Matthew 18:15-20). This would not be a matter of worship but what we might call church business.

Conclusion. We must follow the pattern of the Bible in all things, no matter how much our culture and the religious world rejects them. God has set roles for men and women in accordance with His wisdom. We must accept this and never presume to act on our own wishes and imagination.