

# **Women in Ministry**

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### Introduction

... our beloved brother **Paul**, according to the wisdom given to him, **has written to you**, as also **in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.** (2 Peter 3:15-16, NKJV)

Now **these people were more noble-minded** than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, **examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.** (Acts 17:11)

**Study to show yourself approved by God**, a workman who need not be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth.** (2 Timothy 2:15, MEV)

The ministry of women is a reality backed by the will of the Father, the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit. It is of major importance to God, men, women, and the church at large. Tragically, incorrect teaching about women still binds parts of the body of Christ. Some congregations restrict the ministry of women. Others go as far as forbidding women to speak in the assembly altogether. It can be difficult and painful to examine what we have been taught, but it must be done. The Lord calls us to examine the Scriptures for ourselves (Acts 17:11), rightly divide the word of God (2 Timothy 2:15), and forsake the futile ways of our forefathers (1 Peter 1:18).

Three passages are mainly used as proof texts for restricting the ministry of women. These are 1 Corinthians 14:34-38, 1 Corinthians 11:3-6, and 1 Timothy 2:8-15. However, it is evident that these passages not only contradict each other but also the essence of the New Covenant. How could Paul forbid women from ever speaking in church and then discuss whether they should wear head coverings when they pray and prophesy? Prophecy is by definition of the Scriptures a vocal utterance to edify the church (1 Corinthians 14:3-4). And why would Paul command that women should not teach men if they are not allowed to speak in church anyway?

More importantly, God solemnly decreed that women prophesy under the New Covenant (Joel 2:28). The Bible specifies that to prophesy is to speak for the edification of the church (1 Corinthians 14:3-4). The Bible also establishes that prophecy is a form of teaching (1 Corinthians 14:31). The very essence of the New Covenant is the outpouring, indwelling, and ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is the outpouring on, indwelling of, and

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ministry through men and women. God went to great lengths to establish that he would pour out his spirit on all flesh, on our sons and daughters, and even on the male and female servants (Joel 2:28-29). This principle is reiterated in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." The Holy Spirit does not discriminate based on gender, race, or social status.

The first outpouring of the Holy Spirit happened at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21). God cannot and does not at the same time commission women to prophesy and then restrict or even silence them. I Corinthians 14:34-38, I Corinthians 11:3-6, and I Timothy 2:8-15 are not universal laws for the church. These passages can only be understood in their context. They belong to the parts in the epistles of Paul that are hard to understand (2 Peter 3:16). The knowledge of their cultural and religious background is indispensable.

The question of women in ministry is not a question of female rights. It reaches far beyond that. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is at stake. The question is whether we allow the Holy Spirit to minister through men and women as he chooses. If we don't, we grieve, quench, and resist him (Ephesians 4:30, I Thessalonians 5:19-22, Acts 7:51).

### The New Testament Church

How do we find out what God's order (prescribed functioning) for the church is? We look at God's order (his command) which is found in his Word, the Bible. God had announced that he would pour out his Spirit on all flesh under the New Covenant. The consequence of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit would be that men and women alike prophesy.

And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy<sup>1</sup>. Your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit. (Joel 2:28-29) To prophesy means to speak or sing by inspiration in prediction or simple discourse (STRONG'S H5012). It can also mean to become a prophet. With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all flesh, God's desire first expressed through the prophet Moses was finally fulfilled, "I wish that all the Lord's people were

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1) prophesy = nâbâ (STRONG'S H5012): to prophesy, i.e. speak (or sing) by inspiration (in prediction or simple discourse), make self a prophet

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prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!" (Numbers 11:29) The New Covenant is the covenant of the outpouring, indwelling, and ministry of the Holy Spirit. Born again men and women are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people, **destined to proclaim the praises of Jesus** who called them out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

Joel's prophecy was first fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came down as tongues of fire on the 120 men and women in the upper room: **But this is what has been spoken through the prophet Joel ...** (Acts 2:16). It is being fulfilled every time since the church was born when a believer receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Men and women were praying together while they were waiting for the promised Holy Spirit to come: **These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.** (Acts 1:14)

1 Corinthians 12:1-11 explains the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 14 gives more details about the gifts of the Holy Spirit and explains the functioning of the church. 1 Corinthians 14:26 states that each member of the body serves in the gifts of the Holy Spirit: **Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation.** (1 Corinthians 14:26) "Each of you" here mirrors "all flesh" in Joel 2:28. God confirms that everybody, men and women alike, takes part in the ministry of the Holy Spirit through his body.

Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 14:3 shows that "to prophesy" means the same under both covenants because the essence of prophecy does not change. **The one who prophesies<sup>2</sup> speaks<sup>3</sup> to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation** (1 Corinthians 14:3). To prophesy in the Greek means to speak under divine inspiration, to exercise the prophetic office, and to foretell events (STRONG'S G4395). According to STRONG'S G2980, the word "speak" used here means: say, speak, talk, discourse, preach, declare, announce, reveal, make a vocal utterance, exercise the faculty of speech, make an address, make an announcement, make a declaration. **Prophecy according to Scripture, both the Old and the New Covenant, is spoken, not silent. According to Joel 2:28-29 and 1 Corinthians 14:3-4, God decrees that (men and) women prophesy, i.e. talk, speak,**

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2) prophesy = prōphētēuō (STRONG'S G4395): prophesy, speak under inspiration, exercise the prophetic office, to foretell events, divine

3) speak = laleō (STRONG'S G2980): to talk, i.e. to utter words, preach, say, speak, talk, tell, utter

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preach, and declare to and in the church. This is God's order.

Paul moves on to explain the purpose of prophecy. As stated in 1 Corinthians 14:3-4, the objective of prophecy is to build up the church: **He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.** (1 Corinthians 14:4, NKJV) The man or woman who prophesies builds other people up, encourages them, and consoles them. Prophecy is also a form of teaching: **"For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted."** (1 Corinthians 14:31) Hence, the command to prophesy is by definition the mandate for women to speak, teach, and build up the church. This is in line with Paul's admonishment to Timothy to train men and women who in turn will teach others: **"The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful people<sup>4</sup> who will be able to teach others also."** (2 Timothy 2:2, NASB) The gospel is to be entrusted to faithful male and female believers who will then take the baton and teach others in the body of Christ.

God already established his speaking order under the Old Covenant: **And he who has my word, let him speak my word faithfully** (Jeremiah 23:28). The person who has the word of the Lord must prophesy. That means to speak out the word he or she has received from God. The Lord God makes it abundantly clear that men and women are spiritually equal. In the church, they must function solely in response to the unction of the Holy Spirit and never according to gender:

- ✓ **There is neither male nor female.** (Galatians 3:28)
- ✓ Therefore, from now on, **we regard no one according to the flesh.** (2 Corinthians 5:16)
- ✓ It is the Spirit who gives life; **the flesh profits nothing.** (John 6:63)
- ✓ **To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit** for the common good. (1 Corinthians 12:7)
- ✓ As **each one has received a gift<sup>5</sup> (charisma), minister it to one another** as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. (1 Peter 4:10)
- ✓ Whenever you come together, **each of you** has a psalm, **has a teaching**, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. (1 Corinthians 14:26)
- ✓ ... **speaking to one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs ... (Ephesians 5:19)

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4) people = anthropos (STRONGS G444): human being, i.e. male or female

5) gift = charisma (STRONGS G5486): spiritual endowment, miraculous faculty, religious qualification

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- ✓ ... **submitting to one another** in the fear of God. (Ephesians 5:21)
- ✓ But **every woman who prays or prophesies** ... (1 Corinthians 11:5)

Women are not just permitted to speak in church. They are commanded to speak, i.e. talk, discourse, preach, announce, reveal, make a vocal utterance, exercise the faculty of speech, make an address, make an announcement, declare under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, teach, and edify the church.

The crucial issue is not whether a man, a woman, or a child speaks in church. The crucial issue is (the discernment) whether a person is speaking under the anointing of the Holy Spirit and is bringing the word of the Lord for edification (1 Corinthians 14:5 and 26).

1 Corinthians 14 is the main chapter on the participation of all saints - men and women - in the assembly. Paul concludes it with these words: **If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized** (1 Corinthians 14:37-38).

### 1 Timothy 2:8-15

**I desire therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel with propriety and moderation - not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.**

Have you ever wondered since when women get saved by childbirth? Isn't salvation by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9)? Isn't it by repentance of sin and faith in Jesus (Mark 1:15)?

Paul's letter to Timothy is not a universal command for the church. Rather, Paul addresses a specific situation in Ephesus (Greece at the time) where Timothy was staying. The religion in Ephesus was the worship of the false goddess Artemis. Artemis was the Greek goddess of hunting, wilderness, and fertility. The Romans knew her as the goddess Diana (Acts 19:23-28). Ephesus housed the colossal Artemis temple. It measured 63,000 square

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feet according to the Encyclopedia Britannica and was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Artemis worship pervaded the city. The cult of Artemis was a female only cult. The Artemis priestesses in the temple had to take a vow not to get married as Artemis herself was not married. However, they were involved in prostitution. Men and women in Ephesus came to Jesus out of the Artemis cult. Of course, they were drenched in false doctrine and idolatrous practices, especially the dominance of women over men.

**1 Timothy 2:8-15 is a correction of false Artemis doctrine.  
Not a universal command for the New Testament Church.**

1 Timothy 2:8-15 is not and has never been a prohibition of female ministry in general. One woman (1 Tim. 2:1 is singular) who had come out of Artemis religion was causing trouble in the Ephesian church. She was teaching false doctrine (same verse). This woman needed to stop teaching in the church and quietly learn the truth (1 Tim. 2:11-12). Paul imposed the same request for silence on men who taught falsely (Titus 1:10-11; 1 Timothy 1:3). Artemis doctrine included the following false teachings and practices:

- \* Artemis was the only God, the creator of the world, and the savior. (Corrected in 1 Tim. 2:5)
- \* Women were more powerful than men. (Corrected in 1 Tim. 2:14)
- \* Women dominated men who connected to the goddess by sleeping with a female temple prostitute. (Corrected in 1 Tim. 2:12<sup>6</sup>)
- \* Women were created first. (Corrected in 1 Tim. 2:13)
- \* Women braided their hair with gold, pearls, and costly array to mark themselves as prostitutes. (Corrected in 1 Tim. 2:9-10)
- \* Artemis was the goddess of childbirth, and women trusted in her for a safe birth. (Corrected in 1 Tim. 2:15)
- \* Men had to pray with one hand lifted higher than the other. (Corrected in 1 Tim. 2:8)

**Restricting or even silencing women based on 1 Timothy 2:8-15 is wrong. First of all, it violates God's Word: Men and women are spiritually equal (Galatians 3:28). God's sons**

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6) to exercise authority over = authentein (STRONGS G831). Authentein, derived from the Greek word authenteo, is a word found only once in the Greek New Testament. According to STRONGS and other translators, it means: to govern, to exercise authority, to dominate, to have mastery over; to act self-appointed, to have full power or authority over; to commit a murder.

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and daughters prophesy (Joel 2:28-29). Men and women are both called to speak and build up the church (1 Corinthians 14:3-4). Men and women both teach (1 Corinthians 14:31, 2 Timothy 2:2). Secondly, restricting or even silencing women based on 1 Timothy 2:8-15 fails to acknowledge that 1 Timothy 2:8-15 is the line-by-line refutation of Artemis doctrine and by no means a universal law for the church.

The question whether women can speak in church has long been answered by God himself. The real issue is (the discernment) whether a person brings the word of the Lord or not.

**The Lord gives the command;  
The women who proclaim good news are a great army. (Psalm 68:11)**

### **1 Corinthians 14:34-38**

Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it to you only that it reached? If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant (1 Corinthians 14:34-38).

The key phrase and red flag in verse 34 is **as the law also says**. There is no Old Testament law or Scripture that women have to be submissive and thus silent in the assembly. The second key word is **shameful**. A woman's voice is never called **shameful** in Scripture. The Greek word **aiskron** that is translated as **shameful** in English actually means **lewd, vile, filthy, indecent, foul, dirty, and morally degraded**.

So where do this law and this idea that a woman's voice is shameful originate?

**It is the Jewish Talmud that silences women. The Bible does not.  
And the Jewish Talmud calls the voice of women shameful. The Bible does not.**

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, the Talmud is a collection of teachings by Jewish rabbis that were regarded as holy and normative by Jews. Some traditional Jews still regard the Talmud as normative today. In its broadest sense, it is a set of books consisting of the Mishna (repeated study), the Gemara (completion), and auxiliary materials. The

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Mishna is a collection of originally oral laws in addition to scriptural laws. In Jesus's day, the Mishna was still in oral form and known as the oral law. The Mishna and the Gemara were put into writing much later. In essence, the Talmud is a collection of Jewish teachings, laws, and traditions outside of God's Word. It is not the Bible.

Jesus sharply criticized and rejected the Jewish oral law when he confronted the Pharisees and scribes: "In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men ... thereby invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that." (Mark 7:7-8 and 13).

### The Talmud Silenced Women

The silencing of women was a Jewish law. Women were not allowed to speak in the synagogue. They were not even allowed to ask questions. The Jewish oral law stated further that women were in all things inferior to men and should thus be submissive:

- \* A woman's voice is prohibited because it is sexually provocative. (Talmud, Berachot 24a)
- \* Women are sexually seductive, mentally inferior, socially embarrassing, and spiritually separated from the law of Moses; therefore, let them be silent. (Summary of Talmudic sayings)

### The Talmud Called the Voice of Women Shameful

- \* It is a shame for a woman to let her voice be heard among men. (Talmud, Tractate Kiddushin)
- \* The voice of a woman is filthy nakedness. (Talmud, Berachot Kiddushin)

Paul had already confirmed that women pray and prophesy in church (1 Corinthians 11:5). According to 1 Corinthians 14:3-4, prophesying is speaking aloud to the church and in the church. Why then would Paul contradict himself, violate Joel's prophecy, and write the verses 34 and 35?

Paul did not write 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. The Corinthian Christians had written a letter to Paul (1 Corinthians 7:1). He commented on the different subjects they brought up one by one (1 Corinthians 7:25, 8:1, 12:1). Paul was an expert in the law. He knew what

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the Word of God taught as opposed to what Jewish oral law claimed. In verses 34 and 35, he repeated the words of the letter he had received and refuted them sharply right after in verse 36:

**What?**  
**Came the word of God out from you (men)?**  
**Or (What?)**  
**Came it unto you (men) only?**  
**(I Corinthians 14:36, KJV, explanations added)**

Pay close attention to the word **what** at the beginning and the word **or** in the middle of verse 36 in the KJV. It is the same Greek letter **η** in both cases (STRONGS G2228). Grammatically speaking, this **η** is an expletive of disassociation. Its meaning is **what**, **nonsense**, or **no way**. The KJV correctly translates it as **what** at the beginning of verse 36. Other Bible translations render it as **or**, such as the KJV in the middle of verse 36. Some translations leave the **η** out altogether. Paul was not establishing the silencing of women in the New Testament Church. On the contrary. In I Corinthians 14:36, he strongly refutes verses 34 and 35 twice.

Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, **as the law also says**. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for **it is shameful for women to speak in church**. **Or (What?) - did the word of God come originally from you? Or (What?) - was it to you only that it reached?** If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant (I Corinthians 14:34-38).

Silencing women in the church based on I Corinthians 14:34-35 is wrong. First and foremost, it contradicts the Lord's command that women and men alike would be filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesy, i.e. speak to teach and build up the church (Joel 2:28-29; I Corinthians 14:3-4; I Corinthians 14:31). The infilling of the Holy Spirit which leads to prophesying is the core of the New Covenant. It is made possible only by the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is the main difference to the Old Covenant where the Holy Spirit could and would temporarily come upon men and women, but could not indwell them permanently. Only a new spiritual creation through the new birth qualifies to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, silencing women in the church based on I Corinthians 14:34-35 falsely

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teaches that the very Talmudic traditions that Jesus rejected are the speaking order for the New Testament church. It is nullifying the Word of God for degrading Jewish traditions: "In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men ... thereby invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that." (Mark 7:7-8 and 13).

If anyone thinks himself to be spiritual, let him or her acknowledge that the things which Paul wrote are the commandments of the Lord (1 Corinthians 14:37).

### Conclusion

Don't let anyone fool you by using senseless arguments.  
These arguments may sound wise, but they are only human teachings.  
They come from the powers of this world and not from Christ.  
(Colossians 2:8, Contemporary English Version)

There is no Scripture in the New Testament that restricts or even silences women in the church. 1 Corinthians 14:34-38 is Paul's sharp rebuke of the rabbinic oral law that silenced women and called their voices shameful. 1 Timothy 2:8-15 is a line-by-line refutation of the false Artemis cult that pervaded Ephesus. In 1 Corinthians 11:3-16, Paul affirms the ministry of women and discusses the cultural implications of head covering customs for both men and women at the time.

The great reality of the New Covenant is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:28). God's order is that men and women prophesy, i.e. teach, preach, proclaim, and declare the word of God (Joel 2:28; 1 Corinthians 14:3-4; 1 Corinthians 14:31; 1 Corinthians 14:26; 2 Timothy 2:2). Men and women have received spiritual gifts and are supposed to minister to each other (1 Peter 4:10). Men and women edify the church (1 Corinthians 14:4). The very testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (Revelation 19:10).

The Scriptures and the Holy Spirit do not silence women. They are one, and their testimony is congruent (1 John 5:7). It is the religious spirit that seeks to tame, limit, and even forbid the ministry of women in the church, having a form of godliness but denying its power (2 Timothy 3:5). False teaching in this area denies the spiritual identity and calling of women. It stifles or even completely prevents the ministry of half of the Body of Christ. Such teachers are mistaken, not knowing (understanding) the Scriptures nor the

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power of God (Matthew 22:29) that manifests through men and women alike. They do great harm to women, men, and the Body of Christ at large.

**The Lord gives the command;  
the women who proclaim good news are a great army.  
(Psalm 68:11)**

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