

A number of years ago this congregation chose to engage women more into active participation of all aspects of the body life of this church. The following article was written by one of the elders at that time and represents the outcome of his personal study and journey surrounding this subject.

Women's Silence in the Church

By Jim Warren, Elder of the Troy Church of Christ, Troy Michigan
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Churches of every denomination are facing new challenges involving the role of women within the church. Our society is forcing us to ask questions about our past practices and beliefs. Some would prefer to discount the question as some feminist grab for power; others now confronted with the challenge, are seriously evaluating their previous understandings of scripture.

Foundational Verses

In a male dominated society it is easy to read passages like 1 Corinthians 14:34 and quickly conclude that scripture is making a universal statement for all Christians for all time that women should keep silent within church worship services.

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

Some believe, and rightly so, that if they deliberately violate scripture they are displeasing to God. As a result any attempts by churches to alter the position on women's role shakes some individual's spiritual foundations to the core.

Another verse that describes the role of women is found in 1 Timothy 2:8-12 (NIV)

I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing. I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.

These two verse have been responsible for developing a theology among churches that basically forbids women to speak within worship services, forbids women to teach when baptized men are present, and a variety of similar doctrinal positions. One minister went so far as to state that he would never allow his wife or daughter to pray in his presence, even at home because scripture forbids them to do so. While the latter may be an extreme position in some people's mind, such individuals hold to these positions with a desire to please God in all they do, which is an admirable quality for anyone.

The purpose of this paper is not to criticize nor ridicule those who hold such beliefs, but rather to logically reevaluate some of the time honored beliefs and traditions.

Understanding Verses in Context

Everyone can easily agree that it is wrong to quote someone out of context. Today's news media seems to have brought the ability of quoting individuals out of context to an art form. The news media and politicians continue to support their own positions with sound bites and snippets of interviews in order to twist things to their advantage. But just as it is wrong to quote individuals out of context, it is equally wrong to quote scripture out of context in order to support one's own position.

When evaluating scripture there are three basic rules that we can follow that will help one to more thoroughly understand the meaning of scripture and its application to our lives today. They are to simply:

1. Understand the physical, historical, and cultural circumstances of the individual who is writing the scripture as well as those receiving it. Even though scripture describes itself as being inspired by God, it is still important to understand the circumstances concerning when it was written. While there are historical sources that can be consulted concerning a passage, scripture itself is often the most valuable source of additional information for understanding what is going on at a given time.
2. Once the situation or problem is understood, it is then much easier to understand the meaning of the verses, books, or letters that are addressed to specific situations. Given one understands the context or problem; it is much easier to understand what God is communicating to specific audiences. In general, scripture has one meaning for those to whom it was written. However it can have several applications for both the receivers of the information as well as for us today.
3. After carefully understanding the meaning of scripture for the day, it is then possible to logically determine if the principles are something that God is laying down as a rule or commandment for all generations for all time, or if it only applies to a specific situation of the day. If the latter is true it can still have potential application for all time.

To illustrate this point examine the Old Testament passage.

Deut. 25:4 (KJV)

Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.

1. The original context of this passage is to the children of Israel in regards to how they are to live after their departure from Egypt. It is one of the many laws that God gave to them through Moses.
2. The point of the instruction appears to be that they should care for their oxen by allowing them to eat some of the corn that they have contributed to growing by

virtue of their work in the field. Additional applications for the day could extend to not only how they treated their oxen, but also how they treated other livestock.

3. Paul illustrates the principle of understanding the original context and making a current day application when he takes this verse and uses it as basis for supporting the position that ministers should be supported by the church.

1 Tim. 5:18 (NIV)

For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages."

Understanding Other Passages

If we don't use such a three-step approach we can come up with different conclusions for different first century practices. When scripture gives us examples of foot washing at the last supper, was this a practice that God intended to be replicated throughout history? Probably not, but he did intend for us to draw the application that leadership involves serving, not lording one's authority over another.

When we read that Jesus blessed the cup and gave it to the disciples to drink at the last Passover was he establishing a rule for all time that communion could only be dispensed through a single cup to believers? Probably not, but there is the application of giving thanks for the bread and cup during communion.

When we read of wedding feasts where Jesus turned water to wine, was this a biblical example of how all weddings should be conducted for all time, with wine no less? Probably not, but there is an application that weddings are sacred events that should be celebrated.

When we read about communion being taken as part of a love feast, was God telling us that we should be having large pot luck dinners for all time and that communion was to be part of this practice? Probably not, but the application that communion is intended as a special time for the saints when they examine themselves, their relationship to one another, and with the Lord is something that is applicable for all time.

When we read about Paul baptizing believers in every city, both Jews and Gentiles, was this a practice for all time or was this a cultural baptismal practice of the day? While churches may believe it was just a custom of the day, there are a lot of supporting scriptures to lead us to believe that baptism has far more significance. For example, the inclusion of baptism in every conversion instance recorded in the New Testament and Paul's detailed descriptions in Romans 6 provides a deeper understanding of this subject. Because of the evidence and Jesus commands we conclude that this is a practice that God did intend for all time.

The Corinthian Church

There is a long-standing television game show called “Jeopardy”, where the answers are given by the host and the contestant must provide the question. Sometimes when we read scripture we are sort of playing the same type of game in the sense that we read several answers and it is up to us to determine the questions or more specifically the types of problems that are being addressed. This is particularly true in the book of 1 Corinthians. Throughout the book of 1 Corinthians we find the Apostle Paul giving instructions in response to specific problems in the church at Corinth. A quick overview of the problems is noted below:

- Division in the church (1 Corinthians 1-4).
- Discipline (1 Corinthians 5-6).
- Marriage and divorce (1 Corinthians 7).
- Doctrinal disputes (1 Corinthians 8-10).
- Misunderstanding of spiritual (charismatic) gifts (1 Corinthians 12-14).

Based on the answers Paul provides we can begin to recognize the problems of the day, and based on the problems gain an insight into the culture and why Paul needed to write the letter to Corinth.

We can surmise from Chapters 1-4 that there was a lot of envy and jealousy between the members of this early church. Some were arguing in favor of their favorite evangelist or apostle. In Chapters 5-6 we recognize that immorality existed in the church along with lawsuits between members. In Chapter 7 there were women asking questions about staying married and in Chapters 8-10 there were several doctrinal disputes about marriage, the role of men and women, questions about the right to marry, abuses of the Lord’s Supper, and so forth. In Chapters 12-14, where the instructions about women remaining silent are found, we find instructions about the proper use of spiritual gifts.

The Women in Corinth

Since we are primarily concerned about women’s role in the church let us analyze the circumstances that are applicable to women’s role and set the other issues of the book aside. Let us start by examining the historical setting and circumstances in Corinth.

Historical Setting

Corinth was an important city and had been so from ancient days. It was situated on the isthmus bearing its name, and controlled land and sea trade routes. In New Testament times, it was not only an important commercial city but also the administrative center of the Province of Achaia.

Robert H. Gundry’s description of the city (*A Survey of the New Testament*, Zondervan) gives us an idea of the cosmopolitan character of Corinth.

- The athletic games at Corinth were second only to the Olympics. The outdoor theater accommodated twenty thousand people, the roofed theater three thousand. Temples, shrines, and altars dotted the city. A thousand sacred prostitutes made themselves available at the temple of the Greek goddess Aphrodite. The south side of the marketplace was lined with taverns equipped with underground cisterns for cooling the drinks.
- Noted for its lax morals and scandalous lifestyle, Corinth was a completely pagan society—a society that created many difficulties for the believers who lived there. The city was so wicked that people in other parts of Asia would use the word “Corinthianized” to describe someone of depravity.

Paul’s Teaching About Women in Other Places

In Jewish traditions women were second-class citizens. Men and women were separated during worship in the temple according to Jewish rules. Pharisees would pray daily giving thanks that they were not a women, and women were not even allowed to give testimony in a court of law according to Jewish laws of the day.

When Jesus began his ministry he surprised the religious people of the day because of his relationship with women and the fact that some of his closest friends and supporters were women. We read of the Mary and Martha incident where Mary wants to sit and listen to the Rabbi instead of preparing the meal with Martha, and after Jesus resurrection the first person he appears to is a woman, Mary.

In Paul’s letter to the Galatians Paul makes a radical statement for the day, namely that there are no differences between men and women in God’s eyes.

Galatians 3:28

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

One of the obvious problems faced by the early church was their understanding of the new role for women and specifically what Paul meant by “there is neither male nor female.” It may be hard to grasp, but in some people’s opinion Paul’s teaching stimulated one of the first “Women’s Lib” movements in society! Christ’s example and his teaching through Paul was that men and women could possess the same spiritual gifts. As a result woman could now view themselves as individuals of great worth and no longer exist in the shadow of their male counterparts. We read in various passages that women even prayed and prophesied in the public assembly

1 Corinthians 11:5 (NIV)

And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head--it is just as though her head were shaved.

We also read that Philip the evangelist had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

Acts 21:8-9 (NIV)

Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

Given the significant deviation that this teaching implies from Jewish and Pagan customs, it is safe to conclude that several men and women in Corinth and other cities were struggling to understand the implications of lifting women up to stand beside men. As we read more of Paul's answers to questions and problems we recognize that some of the women, most likely reveling in their new position in society, were at times becoming too assertive to the point of disrupting the entire church.

Questions in Corinth

One of the questions that Paul has to answer deals with is the issue of husbands and wives who are raising questions about divorcing their spouses. Notice in this context that he is addressing both men and women who are raising this question, while in Jesus Sermon on the Mount Jesus deals with men who are divorcing their wives for trivial matters. In this culture Paul is specifically telling women that they should not divorce their husbands if their husbands are content to live with them. He also goes on to tell them that they have the opportunity to win them over.

In this culture we find women who are in such a liberated state such that they can consider the idea of initiating a divorce with their husbands. While we can only speculate, perhaps some of these same women who are raising questions about divorcing their husbands are also seeking emancipation by questioning their traditional role as wives altogether.

1 Corinthians 7:10-11 To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

1 Corinthians 7:13-14 (NIV)

And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

Based on the Paul's answers found later in his letter we can speculate that some of these same women are also aggressively behaving in ways that support their newly found equality and flaunting male authority all together. For example, women are now wanting to prophesy in the public worship without a head covering.

1 Corinthians 11:5-6 (NIV)

And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head--it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head.

Note that is not a question about whether women can pray or prophesy in a public worship service, but an issue of them doing so without a head covering. Veils were a sign of submission in their culture; however it seems that some women that now viewed themselves as equal with men wanted to throw off their veils. Paul instructs these women by telling them that the woman came from man, and that men still have authority over women.

1 Corinthians 11:3 (NIV)

Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

While Paul taught that men and women were equal, he also wanted them to understand that being equal does not mean that they have the same roles. Men and women were created to compliment one another. However to throw off their head covering is a sign of rejecting God's natural order.

1 Corinthians 11:11-15 (NIV)

In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering.

There is also speculation about the appearance of women versus known practices in the city of Corinth. As previously stated Corinth was a city filled with idolatry and immorality where the priestesses from the temple of Aphrodite would go into the city and commit immoral sex acts with male patrons. Could the lack of a veil be associated with the immoral priestesses of Aphrodite? If so, Paul would definitely want to advise them to maintain a head covering in order to preserve the reputation of the church. While there is no way to know for sure, we do know that Paul believed that it was commonly understood that women should pray with a head covering and asks a rhetorical question in support of women wearing head coverings.

1 Corinthians 11:13 (NIV)

Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?

Additional Cultural Insights

According to the Teachers Commentary comments for 1 Corinthians 12-14, perspective was especially important in a place like Corinth. It was universally accepted in the Hellenistic world that some were especially close to the gods. Usually this closeness was supposed to be manifested by trances, ecstatic speech, and other unusual or bizarre forms of behavior. All this was taken as evidence of special spiritual endowment. A person with epilepsy, for instance, was said to have the “divine disease.” The oracles at religious centers were often given drugs to provoke their utterances. The oracle at Delphi, so prominent in the early days of Greece, where priestesses breathed volcanic fumes from a cleft in the rock of the temple floor, and her unconscious mutterings were then interpreted by the priests.

Given this historical account it is not a surprise that the Christians in Corinth that came from these pagan religions would be attracted to the spiritual gift of tongues. Nor would it be a surprise that they thought of such people as being especially spiritual.

Abuse of Spiritual Gifts

In Chapters 12-14, leading up to the verse where women are told to keep silent, we find Paul offering instructions on spiritual or charismatic gifts. He explains what they are and then goes on to offer specific instructions for how they are to be used in the context of worship assemblies.

At the end of this discourse he is discussing worship assemblies and the specific use of tongues and prophecy. His argument is that tongues are not discernable by others unless someone is present that can interpret the tongue and therefore should not be practiced in the worship assembly. However, he specifically advocates the gift of prophecy in the assembly.

1 Corinthians 14:22-25 (NIV)

So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But 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, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"

Paul then continues with specific instructions about the assembly and sandwiched within these verses are the specific instructions about women keeping silent in the churches.

1 Corinthians 14:26-40 (NIV)

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. If anyone speaks in a

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

Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.

As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. 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.

Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored.

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

Given the context of the verse on keeping silent it would seem logical that Paul is addressing a specific problem at Corinth as opposed to making a statement that applies to all churches for all times.

Going back to our three rules for interpreting scripture it is important to understand first the historical setting.

1. Paul is writing to a young church in Corinth whose members have come out of the pagan religions and fertility cults of the day (I Cor 6:11). We know that they have an attraction for spiritual gifts, particularly tongues, which can be explained by the historical information known about the culture. We know that Jesus and Paul taught that men and women both possessed spiritual gifts. This gave women a new equality that they perhaps over played within the church, which caused many problems. We know that some of the women were asking questions about divorcing their husbands. We know that some women wanted to prophesy without head coverings. When we get to Chapter 14 we conclude there were several additional issues needing correction concerning spiritual gifts. They include:
 - Members were speaking in tongues without an interpreter, and while they may have been edifying themselves, or perhaps just drawing attention to themselves as being spiritual, it had no benefit to the worship assembly. (Verses 1-5)

- Members needed specific instructions about the purpose of tongues and their value to the individual. (Verse 6-21)
- Members needed to understand the value of prophecy versus tongues and how prophecy could be used to edify the body as well as convict non-believers. (Verse 22-25)
- Members needed specific instructions about what should happen within a worship assembly, e.g. practice tongues only if an interpreter was present and then only two or three people should speak while taking turns. When it came to prophecy two or three prophets should speak in turn and others should weigh carefully what was said. At times while someone was prophesying another would receive a revelation. If this happened the first should stop while the other spoke. Prophecy should take place in turn and with order.
- Given all of the instruction on taking turns, the last verse of *everything being done in a fitting and orderly way*, and the instruction that *the spirit of the prophets is in the control of the prophets*, one has to conclude that chaos was taking place during the worship assembly. Remember also that this is the same church where individuals were actually getting drunk at the Lord's Supper, *1 Cor. 11:21 (NIV) for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk.*

Based on Paul's instructions it would appear that he was addressing several issues. For one, several were trying to speak at the same time and we would conclude from earlier passages that this would include both men and women. Others were interrupting one another and justifying their actions by saying that a controlling spirit of prophecy was forcing them to interrupt. Paul says no, one who is prophesying has control over themselves. One would conclude this also included both men and women since earlier verses referred to women who were praying and prophesying with their heads uncovered. Given that Paul specifically indicates a number of two or three, it would suggest that many more wanted to participate and things were getting out of hand.

1 Corinthians 14:29-32 (NIV)

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

- In the midst of the specific instructions about spiritual gifts we find the verses about women keeping silent and asking questions at home.

1 Corinthians 14:33-35 (NIV)

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

As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. 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.

2. Given the historical and scriptural context of the verses about keeping silent in the churches it makes logical sense to conclude that these verses are addressing yet another specific problem at Corinth, namely certain women were misbehaving and causing disorder. Given that certain emancipated women have already been behaving in aggressive ways, e.g. wanting to divorce their husbands, pray and prophesy in the assembly without veils, wanting to draw attention to themselves by speaking in tongues, interrupting one another during prophecies, claiming that they cannot control themselves because they were controlled by the Spirit, one can easily conclude that some women were behaving in such a shameful manner that Paul had to give them specific instructions to stay quiet all together. Put in modern day vernacular, certain women should just keep their mouths shut while at the assembly because they were causing a major disturbance. But what were these women actually doing?

We know that Paul states that, *two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said*. It is logical to conclude that a lot of discussion was taking place during the assembly about what had been prophesied and its application to the local church. Given Paul's previous instructions about men and women's roles, coupled with other NT instructions about male responsibilities as Elders, it makes logical sense to conclude that Paul was most likely addressing certain women who were confronting men during the assembly and challenging their authority to lead and determine what was appropriate prophesy for the church. While it is only speculation, perhaps certain prophecies given by women were not receiving the consideration by the male leadership that certain women thought they should receive. As a result these women wanted to take charge and usurp the male role of leading the church. If this were true, then Paul's instruction to such women to remain totally silent makes logical sense and all of the verses remain in context and still support the overall message of the letter.

In 14:35 Paul described the activity as, "it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church." The Greek word for 'speak' in this verse is *laleo*; a prolonged form of an otherwise obsolete verb; to *talk*, i.e. *utter* words : to preach, to say, to speak after, talk, tell, utter. (Strong's Greek and Hebrew Dictionary)

What was shameful? It was not speaking in the worship because Paul has already condoned this activity earlier in the book.

1 Cor. 11:5 (NIV)

And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head--it is just as though her head were shaved.

If a woman had her head covered, then it would be proper for a woman to pray or prophesy. But what was disgraceful was certain women who wanted to “preach” or “speak after” concerning what was being carefully weighed. By entering into the role of determining what was appropriate they were usurping the male role of leadership according to God’s design. Perhaps they were debating or arguing issues in front of the entire assembly and not only causing a disturbance, but probably offending many other people in the assembly by their overt behavior. Given this is the case; Paul was telling these women to just be quiet. If they wanted to discuss or debate these items, then they should do so at home with their husbands and not in the assembly. These women were violating God’s designed roles for men and women as Paul had previously stated in 11:3 and detailed in Ephesians 5.

Note also that Paul’s states in verses 33-34, *as in all congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches, they are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says.* When he refers to all congregations of the saints Paul must be referring to both Jew and Gentile churches. In the Jewish context, women remaining silent could be more easily understood given the Jewish traditions regarding women, their separation in the synagogue, etc. Paul also adds the phrase, *as the Law says.* While Jewish Christians would obviously have respect for the Law, Gentile Christians coming from a pagan background would not have such respect because they had never been under the Jewish Law. What was the point Paul was making when he mentions, *as in all congregations of the saints?* Also, what significance would mentioning the Law have for the Gentiles in this church? The answer would appear to be in the common issue concerning women being in submission. Whether one was a Jew or a Gentile, being in submission is a higher order objective applicable to all churches. Being in submission to authority is a character quality for all women for all time. When under authority, both men and women are free to exercise their spiritual gifts in the assembly.

3. The conclusion relative to the 1 Corinthians 14 passage about women keeping silent appears to be addressing a specific situation in Corinth as opposed to being a command for all churches for all times. There are however several modern day applications relative to this teaching. They would include:
 - Men and Women are equal in Christ and they have the same spiritual gifts however they have different roles and responsibilities within the body.
 - When women are submitted to authority, they can participate in a variety of worship assembly activities and express their gifts along side men.

- Men and women should both focus on development of inward character qualities, particularly submission to authority, which is in line with God's assigned roles and responsibilities.

Additional Supporting Evidence

If one accepts the terms of biblical interpretation offered and the conclusions thus far, then the results should be consistent with other forms of hermeneutics, e.g. a study of the Greek words used in the instruction.

The Greek verb translated "remain silent" is an imperative form of the word sigao. Sigao means "a. say nothing, keep silent ... b. stop speaking, become silent ... c. hold one's tongue, keep something. (a) secret" (Bauer, Gingrich, and Danker, Greek-English Lexicon, 2nd ed., p. 749). Its corresponding noun (sige) means "silence, quiet in the sense of the absence of all noise, whether made by speaking or by anything else" (Bauer, Lexicon, pp. 749-750). This word means that in whatever situation was in view by Paul in this text, females were not allowed to open their mouths. They couldn't make a sound. They had to wait until the service was over even to ask a question about what had happened.

By virtue of the strong words used, it appears much more logical to conclude that Paul was addressing a specific problem in Corinth. If this passage were interpreted as a mandate for female behavior for all assemblies for all time then churches throughout the ages and today would be in violent disobedience of the command. If taken literally then women could not sing in the assembly, women could not confess the Lord in baptism, women could not talk in Sunday school, they could not speak a word while in church. Such an interpretation would be entirely inconsistent with the message of the whole letter and the rest of the NT. If this is the language used by Paul in this verse, then we must conclude that he was dealing with a specific problem in Corinth as opposed to establishing a command for women for all time.

Do Not Permit a Women to Teach

The next logical question is how does the conclusion concerning the Corinthian passage compare with the instructions in I Timothy 2.

I Timothy 2:8-12 (NIV)

I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing. I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.

Following the same principles of biblical interpretation mentioned earlier, the first objective is to understand the circumstances regarding Paul's letter to Timothy.

1. The letter to Timothy is in the context of helping Timothy teach those within his care. Paul advises Timothy concerning several different topics to include: exposure of false doctrines, myths and genealogies; law; sound doctrine; the glorious Gospel; mercy; truth; dedication; prayer; harmony; women's dress and appearance; marriage and dietary practices; qualifications for leaders; conduct; sayings, truths of the faith; the practice of religion; relationships with fellow Christians; treatment of widows; ways to select elders; contentment; righteousness; faith; love; endurance; hope in God; and doing good. Paul's instructions go beyond the basic processing of true information. As we look at I Timothy we realize that biblical teaching includes urging, pointing out, commanding, setting an example, as well as giving instructions. Christian teaching calls for a personal involvement that touches every aspect of the learner's life. As Paul describes the qualifications for Elders and Deacons in Chapter 3 one of the prime qualifications is the ability of those leaders to lead by their example. After Paul describes the qualifications for Elders and Deacons he adds the verse concerning their wives.

1 Timothy 3:11 (NIV)

In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

It would appear that Paul's primary message for I Timothy is to not only learn how to teach or disciple individuals, but that those appointed as Elders and Deacons also lead by example.

The next objective is to understand how the passage relates to the problems of the time and how those receiving it would interpret it.

2. Given the charge to Timothy concerning the training of disciples it is appropriate to interpret the passage concerning women in this context. While Paul emphasizes the need to lead by example, the passage concerning women follows the same pattern. He is stating that women's influence should not be based on their appearance involving costly clothes, jewelry, or their appearance but rather based on their life style of good deeds. Just as the wives of Elders and Deacons are to be worthy of respect, Paul is urging that all women be known for their inward character qualities as opposed to their outward appearance. As part of their inward character qualities they should demonstrate the quality of submission and not be known as one who flaunts authority. In adding the phrase that they should remain silent he is stating that they should be in submission to those in authority and not "taking charge" so to speak.

The Greek word translated "quietness" (v. 11) or "silent" (v. 12) in this setting is not the same Greek word "sigao" used in 1 Corinthians, but "hesukia". It refers

less to a person's speech than to his or her spirit of inner peace and ability to live in peace and harmony with others (Bauer, Lexicon, p. 349). For example, Paul has already used the same word in verse 2 of the "peaceful and quiet lives" as Christians pray to live in the larger society. Believers should live in harmony with others and with proper regard for "all those in authority." The word does not imply keeping silent like "sigao" does in 1 Corinthians but rather is concerned that women are demonstrating a quiet and gentle spirit that is becoming one who teaches and represents Christ.

If Paul was instead communicating that women are to never teach and must remain totally silent he would be contradicting his own behavior with respect to Aquila and Priscilla noted in Acts 18. While in Corinth Paul met this couple and they all worked together as tent makers to support themselves. Knowing how Paul continually taught those in his presence, e.g. his instruction of the Roman guard while imprisoned in Rome, it would seem logical that Paul would have communicated the commandment for women to remain silent and not teach to Aquila and Priscilla while he worked along side them. However, it would appear that he never communicated such a command as evidenced by Aquila and Priscilla actions in verse 26 towards Apollos. Hence one has to conclude that, Paul was again addressing a character attitude in I Timothy 2 as opposed to establishing a commandment for all time for women to keep silent in churches and to never teach.

Acts 18:24-26 (NIV)

Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

3. The application of the I Timothy passage concerning women is very applicable to today once it is understood in its original context. Women today should also be known for their character qualities as opposed to their outward appearance

Paul's teachings versus Troy Church activities

The desire of the Troy Church is to be faithful to the word and allow all its members the same freedoms as those taught by the Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul. Hopefully this paper has provided insights and clarity to passages that have been misinterpreted in the past.

While Troy Church believes that men and women are equal and made in the image of God we agree with scripture in that God established different roles for men and women in society as well as the church. It goes without saying that men and women are designed to

be physically different. Men's bodies are physically stronger, they have different thinking patterns, and different physical drives. Women bodies are also uniquely designed with a special layer of skin that makes their bodies smoother, specific body proportions suitable for child bearing and rearing, and unique ways of thinking that gives them sensitivities greater than that of the male. God did not make the sexes the same because he has different roles for each of them to play. But he did design them to compliment one another within a family.

Spiritual Family

In a spiritual sense God gives men and women different spiritual roles as well. While God made them equal, he designed the sexes to be submitted to one another but gave them different responsibilities. God gives men the spiritual leadership responsibility in both the home and the church. Along with the leadership responsibility men are also told to love their wives as Christ loves the church. Elders are told to care for the flock as a shepherd cares for its sheep. Women on the other hand are not told to love their husbands, but to honor them. In the church, women are not told to lead but to be in submission to the male leaders. (This is not to imply that men are responsible for everything even though some churches may have acted this way in the past)

Scripture describes wives as being helpmeets. While husbands have leadership responsibilities before the Lord, wives are usually responsible for most of the child rearing responsibilities. In doing so wives are completely within God's authority and plan for the home. While God has designed both institutions, the home and the church, a lot of time could be devoted to how neither have properly adhered to God's design and as such have reaped many consequences. An in depth discussion of this topic is outside the scope of this paper.

But given that God has given male Elders the spiritual headship responsibility for the church, few have problems with women teaching Sunday School. It considered well within the overall authority structure. The fact that women speak and contribute within Sunday school classes is considered by most to be within scriptural authority principles. But given Paul's teaching one could easily conclude that whatever a woman does in a worship service is within scriptural principles as long as the woman is in submission to the authority of the male Elders. This is God's design, not man's. If spiritual gifts have been equally distributed between men and women then there is no reason that they should not be equally exercised.

While this new freedom for women's role in public assemblies is exciting for many, we have to cautious that it is not carried beyond the confines of scripture such that we end up with the same problems as the church in Corinth, e.g. women becoming too aggressive and wanting to usurp male roles of leadership.

The Role of Deference

It is interesting to note how Paul keeps truth in balance in his own life. On one hand Paul aggressively attacks the Judaizing teachers in Galatians for stealing Christian freedoms and enslaving people to legalistic practices. Paul even confronts the Apostle Peter when he does not eat with the Gentile brothers because of his concern about what the Jews will think. At the other extreme Paul after arguing against circumcision chooses to circumcise Timothy so he can better reach his Jewish audience.

In Romans 14 when Paul argues about the freedom of eating meat and drinking wine his closing argument in verse 21 says, *“It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.”*

So here you have a balance, in one instance Paul is ready to go to the mat so to speak over an issue and on the other extreme he is willing to give up his personal freedom to win those who he wants to influence for Christ. As you study the life of Paul you begin to see that his overriding value is to please the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus had the same balance in his life as well. While he aggressively attacked the Pharisees for their legalism he had compassion on those who misunderstood or who did not know better. The overriding character quality for both individuals appears to be love for the brethren. It is like the description of love in 1 Corinthians 13, such that we could be 100% doctrinally right on the woman’s issue, but if we fail to implement it in a spirit of love we would have nothing.

For many who have not had opportunity to think through the passages discussed in this paper, being forced to participate in services where women are actively displaying their gifts can be traumatic. In some instances they may even be capable of intellectually understanding the principles, but still have an emotional reaction to seeing women acting in a particular way. Here is where the principle of love must be exercised.

Just as some can hide behind the idea of “violating their consciences” and refuse to ever consider change, advocates of women’s role can be so driven to implement their freedoms that they run over those with legitimately tender consciences. Implementation of any new ideas should be slow and considerate to allow for individuals to become accustomed to new ways of worshipping and involving women.

At the same time, Troy Church has set a course and the ship is sailing. In the beginning perhaps only a few sails are hoisted to move the ship along. As the ship gains speed and the crew becomes accustomed to the sea, more sails can be hoisted until the entire ship is moving with the wind of the Holy Spirit. We believe God has wanted us to set sail, but we also believe that he is concerned about how we sail the ship.

Reviewing the issue of women’s role and being challenged by our society has been a healthy thing. It makes us go back and reestablish our scriptural mooring. This has not been done to pacify those who advocate women’s rights but rather in the Spirit of the Apostle Paul who stated so well,

1 Corinthians 9:22-23 (NIV)

To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

In our culture we must accurately portray God's message about women so that we can win men and women for Christ.