

"Women Speaking in Church"

By: James White, J. N. Andrews, Uriah Smith and Ellen White

SHALL WOMEN SPEAK IN THE CHURCH? From: Morning Star March 14, 1871

James White, president

Among some Christian sects it is considered disorderly for women to speak or pray in a public assembly. Of course they quote 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35, as deciding the case. Paul there says, "Let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak."

If this passage is to be taken as a general law, it is forbidden to a woman to speak, pray, or sing, in public, for silence is commanded. It is as much a violation of this scripture to exhort in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, as to exhort in prose and to pray. But no one thinks it wrong for women to sing in public; why should they forbid the other forms of speech, and allow this?

The fact is, Paul is here correcting abuses, disorders which caused confusion in the churches at Corinth, and he commanded those who possessed the gift of tongues to be silent, unless an interpreter was present, and that only one should speak at a time.

All of this concerned those who possessed, or pretended to possess, supernatural gifts, and were exercising them so as to cause confusion. Women were not to wrangle and to yield to pretended impulses, and become excited and immodest in such assemblies.

But nothing is proved by this in regard to what is proper in orderly, sober assemblies. Because it is very improper for women to take part in such meetings as they had at Corinth, it does not follow that they may not take part in orderly religious meetings.

In 1 Timothy 2:11, 12, women are commanded to learn in silence, and forbidden to teach, or usurp authority over the men. This cannot mean absolute silence, but the opposite of loquacity, impertinence, arrogance. In some of the churches they had fallen into the habit of disputing, and becoming much excited, and the result was great disorder. Where women indulged in this, the matter was made worse, on account of their being generally more excitable than men, and immodesty on their part caused offense and scandal. It was very necessary that this should be forbidden.

Women who usurp authority over men, and become dictatorial in public assemblies, are very much out of place; but that does not prove it improper to speak in a proper manner.

That these passages do not forbid a modest, orderly utterance of their views, hopes and joys, in religious meetings, is evident from the fact that the Scriptures indorse and commend such acts. In 1 Corinthians 11:5, directions are given that women who pray and prophesy in public should follow the custom of society, and have their heads covered. If it was wrong for them to speak or pray in public, why give these directions? The only difference made between men and women, is that men are to uncover their heads, and women are to cover theirs, when they speak or pray.

Joel prophesied that under the gospel dispensation the "sons and daughters" should both prophesy, or exhort, as the word means; and Peter, Acts 2:17, so applies it. It is not likely that Paul's words conflict with this.

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Philip, the evangelist, Acts 21:9, had four daughters that were exhorters, and so noted and useful were their services, that the inspired writer was moved to mention them, that all other sisters having the same gifts might be encouraged to exercise them in the same way. When women are forbidden to speak for Christ, the spirit of the gospel is violated. Morning Star.

"LET YOUR WOMEN KEEP SILENCE IN THE CHURCHES."

June 26, 1866

Editorial by Uriah Smith, editor

Whether or not a woman has a right to take part in the public worship of God, has been with many, a serious question on account of the one declaration of Paul, found in 1 Corinthians 14:34,33, of which the heading to this article forms a part, and which has been supposed to refer to this subject. The whole passage reads as follows: "Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything let them ask their husbands at home; for it is a shame for women to speak in the church."

Taken independently of its connection, and in a general sense, it is not strange perhaps that this passage should suggest itself to some minds as a prohibition of any public participation in the worship of God on the part of females. Taken however in connection with the other instruction of the apostle with which it stands, and in view of the part assigned to females in other portions of the word of God, the evidence is to our mind conclusive that it is not designed so to teach.

1. In spiritual matters, women have, in almost every age of the world, had an important part to act. Go back about thirteen hundred years before Christ, and we find Deborah a judge of Israel. She was a prophetess; and Israel sought to her for judgment, and received counsel and instruction at her hand. Judges 4:4-9.

2. About seven hundred years after this, another prophetess appears in the record, 2 Kings 22:14-20. When Hilkiah, the high priest, found the book of the law which had lain for long years concealed in the house of the Lord, and had caused it to be read before Josiah, the king; the king rent his clothes, and sent the high priest with others to Huldah, the prophetess, to inquire of the Lord concerning this matter. And the Lord gave to the king and people through her, a fearful threatening of the overthrow of Jerusalem on account of the sins which had been committed.

3. We come down to the birth of Christ, and there we find another prophetess acting a conspicuous part in the public worship of God. When the infant Saviour was brought into the temple, Anna, a prophetess, "coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." Luke 2:36-38. Here we have an instance of a woman's publicly teaching in the temple, and giving instruction to all them who were looking for redemption in the city of Jerusalem.

4. In the great prophecy concerning the spiritual features of the present dispensation, Joel 2: 28, 29, daughters as well as sons, handmaids as well as servants, were mentioned as those upon whom the Spirit should be poured, and through whom its operations should be manifested. Now can we suppose that Paul would give directions concerning the same subject, to apply at the same time, and lay down a rule which would completely cut off the prophecy of Joel from fulfillment on the part of the daughters and handmaids? Certainly not.

5. We read in Acts 21: 8, 9, of Philip, the evangelist, one of the seven, who had four daughters who did prophesy. Paul and his company came into his house in the year A.D. 60, one year after he had written to the Corinthians to have their women keep silence in the churches; but we do not read that he uttered

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any rebuke, or urged any protest, against their following their calling, and speaking to the disciples, to their edification and comfort.

6. Paul, in Romans 16, A.D. 60, mentions Phebe as a servant of the church, Priscilla as one of his helpers in Christ Jesus, Tryphena and Tryphosa, as those who labored in the Lord, and Persis as one who labored much in the Lord, all women and fellow-helpers of the apostle. In Acts 18, 26, we read further of Priscilla, that in connection with her husband Aquila, she took Apollos and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly—a woman expounding the way of the Lord, and that too to a no less renowned personage than the eloquent Apollos. In Philippians 4: 3, Paul speaks of other of his sisters in the church as follows: "And I entreat thee, also, true yokefellow, help those women which labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellow laborers, whose names are in the book of life." Here are women mentioned as laboring with Paul in the gospel, and whom he ranks with Clement, as his fellow-laborers. Can we suppose that these women were altogether silent in the churches?

7. In chapter 11: 5, in this same epistle to the Corinthians, Paul gives directions how the women should be attired while praying or prophesying in the public congregation, or "when they were come together in the church." Verse 18. In verse 4 he says, "Every man praying or prophesying with his head covered, dishonoreth his head." Then he proceeds to give directions in regard to the women, "But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered, dishonoreth her head." Here praying and prophesying are allotted to the woman no less than to the man. In chapter 14, 3, he tells us what it is to prophesy: "He that prophesieth. speaketh unto men to edification and exhortation and comfort." In this way then it was designed by the apostle that women should speak in the church. There is no evading this conclusion: and the way some attempt to avoid it, is a little singular. Commentators of high standing, to save their position on chapter 14:34, that women should take no part in the public worship of God, explain Paul's language in chapter 11:5, in reference to women's praying or prophesying, by saying that Paul here "gave directions how it should be done, provided any such thing were allowable: but he did not mean to intimate that women ever would pray or prophesy; and in chapter 14, 34, he expressly forbids it." We may be sure that the apostle indulges in no such trifling.

8. No one certainly will contend that Paul excludes females from being members of the church. Yet in chapter 14:23, 24, he speaks about the whole church being come together, and all speaking with tongues, and all prophesying. This would include the sisters equally with the brethren.

We are thus brought to the question. What does Paul then mean by the language, "Let your women keep silence in the churches?" From the evidence thus far presented, we can take our stand positively on what he does not mean. He does not mean taking such public part in the service of God, as that of which we have such prominent examples in both the Old and New Testaments. He does not mean to cut off the prophecy of Joel from a great part of its fulfillment. He does not mean to contradict his own directions expressed in chapter 6: 5. Hence he does not mean to forbid any kind of public exercise by which "edification, exhortation or comfort" is given to the church. If he does mean any of these things, then there is a positive contradiction between Paul, and other sacred writers, and between Paul and Paul; which Bible believers will not be ready to admit; and if he does not mean any of these things, then his language is far removed from furnishing any objection to women's taking part in the public worship of God, as conducted at the present day.

The question still remains, What does the language mean? On this point we may not be able to arrive at so definite conclusions, as on the inquiry, what it does not mean; but there are grounds for certain inferences, which are both fair and necessary.

1. Paul is correcting wrongs and irregularities that existed in the Corinthian church. There were occasions when it was improper even for the men to speak. See verses 27-30. We may justly infer therefore

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that what he says in reference to the women, is of the same nature, and that the speaking he refers to is that which would be out of order, and cause confusion in the church.

2. The antithesis of the command, "Let your women keep silence in the churches," is expressed in these words: "But they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law." This shows that the speaking which is prohibited, is of that kind which would show that they were not under obedience. But what is meant by being under obedience? The Scriptures represent, that a subordinate position, in a certain sense, is assigned to the woman, for the reasons that she was formed from the man, and at a subsequent time, and was first in transgression. 1 Corinthians 11, 8; 1 Timothy 2: 13, 14. The leadership and authority is vested in the man. "Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." Genesis 3: 16. This order is not to be reversed, and the woman take the position which has been assigned to the man; and every action on her part which shows that she is usurping this authority, is disorderly, and not to be allowed. Hence Paul says plainly to Timothy, 1 Timothy 2:12, "But I suffer not a woman to teach nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." There is no doubt but it was the very same point, the usurping of authority over the man, that the same apostle had in view in 1 Corinthians 14: 34.

3. The following remarks from Dr. Clarke, doubtless convey the true idea: "It is evident from the context that the apostle refers here to asking questions, and what we call dictating in the assemblies. It was permitted to any man to ask questions, to object, altercate, attempt to refute, &c., in the synagogue; but this liberty was not allowed to any woman. St. Paul confirms this in reference also to the Christian church; he orders them to keep silence; and if they wished to learn anything, let them inquire of their husbands at home; because it was perfectly indecorous for women to be contending with men, in public assemblies on points of doctrine, cases of conscience, &c. But this by no means intimated that when a woman received any particular influence from God to enable her to teach, she was not to obey that influence; on the contrary she was to obey it; and the apostle lays down directions in chap. xi, for regulating her personal appearance when thus employed. All that the apostle opposes here is their questioning, finding fault, disputing, &c., in the Christian church, as the Jewish men were permitted to do in

their synagogues; together with the attempts to usurp any authority over the man, by setting up their judgment in opposition to them; for the apostle has in view, especially, acts of disobedience, arrogance, &c., of which no woman would be guilty who was under the influence of the Spirit of God." On the words, "It is a shame for women to speak in the church," he says, "The apostle refers to irregular conduct, such conduct as proved that they were not under obedience."

That it was some such irregularity which the apostle was combating in the Corinthian church, appears further from the challenge he gives them in verse 36: "What? Came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?" That is, did Christianity originate with you? or are you the only church that has received the true light, that things should be tolerated in your midst which are not allowed in other churches?

Such being the nature of the things prohibited by the apostle, who can say that he has any reference to such testimony as faithful Christian women bear when they rise to speak a word for the Lord and his truth, to the strengthening of themselves, and the comfort, edification, and encouragement of all the church?

MAY WOMEN SPEAK IN MEETING?

January 2, 1879 by J. N. Andrews;

James White, president

There are two principal passages cited to prove that women should not take any part in speaking in religious meetings. These are 1 Corinthians 14:34, 3E and 1 Timothy 2:12. But a careful study of the books of Corinthians shows that the passage first referred to can have no such application.

The Corinthian church was in a state of great disorder. The first chapter shows that they were divided into parties in reference to the apostles themselves. The fifth chapter shows that one had taken his father's wife, and the other did not mourn over this act. The sixth chapter shows that they went to law with the world, and implies that they were guilty of violating the seventh commandment. The eleventh chapter shows that when they celebrated the Lord's supper, the rich ate and drank until they were intoxicated, and the poor were waiting and suffering hunger.

Now it appears from the fourteenth chapter that when they were assembled in meeting, the women threw everything into confusion by talking among themselves, and acting with such indecorum as to be a matter of shame to them. So that what the apostle says to women in such a church as this, and in such a state of things, is not to be taken as directions to all Christian women in other churches and in other times when and where such disorders do not exist.

As positive proof that he was not speaking against a woman's participating in religious worship, we refer to 1 Corinthians 11:5, where he says that every woman who prophesieth or prayeth with her head uncovered dishonoreth her head. And in chapter fourteen, verse three, he says that he that prophesieth speaketh unto men, to edification, exhortation, and comfort. These two passages show that they (women) did speak to edification, exhortation, and comfort. It was not a shame for women to do this work. Therefore Paul did not refer to such acts when he said, "It is a shame for women to speak in the church." 1 Timothy 2:12. We understand this text to give Paul's general rule with regard to women as public teachers. But there are some exceptions to this general rule to be drawn even from Paul's writings, and from other scriptures. It appears from Phil. 4:3 that women labored with him in the gospel. Romans 16:1 shows that Phebe was a deaconess of the church at Cenchrea. See original.

Verse 3 shows that Priscilla, the wife of Aquila, was one of Paul's helpers; and Acts 18:26 shows that she was capable of instructing Apollos. Tryphena and Tryphosa, Romans 16:12, labored in the Lord; and Persis labored much in the Lord. Acts 21:8, 9. Philip's four daughters prophesied. In Luke 2, Anna the prophetess is mentioned. Verses 36-38. In the time of Jeremiah, Huldah was a prophetess consulted instead of Jeremiah himself. See 2 Chronicles 34. In the fifth of Judges, Deborah is spoken of, and in the fifteenth of Exodus, Miriam.

Paul, in Romans 10:10, says, "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation:" and this must apply to women equally with men.

WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

May 29 1879 by James White

(James White, J.N. Andrews, Uriah Smith editors)

"Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home; for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." 1 Cor. 14:34, 35.

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The only safe and proper rule of Biblical interpretation is to take every passage of the Book of God as meaning what it says, word for word, excepting those cases where the text and context clearly show that a figure or parable is introduced for a more clear elucidation of the subject. In the foregoing text the apostle does not use a figure or a parable, therefore his words should be taken as meaning just what they say.

But there are many other passages from the epistles of Paul which speak as plainly of the position of woman in the house and work of God as this one does. And in order to arrive at the truth of God on this subject, a position must be found that will harmonize all the texts. The word of God is not "yea and nay," but yea and amen, to the glory of its divine Author.

Paul, in the fourteenth chapter of his epistle to the church at Corinth, is correcting existing errors and establishing order in the church of Christ. He goes even so far as to give rules for those who, under the power of the Holy Spirit, are endowed with the gift of prophecy and of tongues. There were those women, doubtless, in the apostle's day as well as in ours, who could prate about "Women's Rights" as glibly, if not a filthily, as the notorious Victoria Woodhull. Hear the noble Paul on the subject in the same epistle where the foregoing text is found: "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God." 1 Corinthians 11:3. Paul continues in verses 4 and 5, and the reader will see that he places men and women side by side in the position and work of teaching and praying in the church of Christ, "Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoreth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoreth her head; for that is even all one as if she were shaven."

But what does Paul mean by saying, "Let your women keep silence in the churches"? Certainly he does not mean that women should take no part in those religious services where he would have both men and women take part in prayer and in prophesying, or teaching the word of God to the people. The only view that will harmonize all that the apostle has said of the position and work of Christian women, is that he is giving directions relative to meetings of the church to consider the secular matters, which can be managed quite as well by the brethren as the sisters. We here give the following reasons:

1. Both men and women attend the religious services of the church. Both hear all that is said. The woman understands quite as well as her husband, sometimes better, all that is said. They return home from church. Now apply Paul's statement to this case, "If they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home." On the supposition that the husband has been out to a business meeting, may be to consult with his brethren in reference to building a meeting-house, or hiring the minister, matters in which she has deep interest, how consistent that the wife should inquire in reference to the decisions of that meeting which she did not attend.

2. But on the supposition that they had both been out to a religious meeting, where the wife had heard all, understood all, the great apostle is charged with the ridiculous farce of both sitting down and asking and answering questions relative to matters with which they were both perfectly familiar. Consistency, thou art a jewel!

In the Sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, holy women held positions of responsibility and honor. The first case we will here notice is that of Miriam, mentioned in Exodus 15:20, 21: "And Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea."

Compare with Micah 6:3, 4, where the great God appeals to rebellious Israel in these words: "O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me. For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before

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thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam." Here we find a woman occupying a position equal to that of Moses and Aaron, God's chosen servants to lead the millions of Israel from the house of bondage.

The next case is that of Deborah, mentioned in Judges 4:4-10: "And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time. And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel in Mount Ephraim; and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh-naphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward Mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun.

"And I will draw unto thee, to the river Kishon, Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand. And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go; but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go. And she said, I will surely go with thee, notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honor; for the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh. And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kadesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet; and Deborah went up with him." Notice the following particulars in the foregoing statements:

1. Deborah was a prophetess. She received divine instruction from Heaven, and taught the people.
2. She was a judge in Israel. The people went up to her for judgment. A higher position no man has ever occupied.

The next cases of honorable mention are Ruth and Esther. The books of these two women hold places in the book of God with his holy prophets. Their position in the work of God was such as to give their history a place with the sacred writings translated into hundreds of languages and dialects, to be read by millions down to the close of probationary time.

The prophet Joel, as quoted by Peter, Acts 2:17, 18, describes the last days thus: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. And on my servants, and on my handmaidens, I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy." Here, too, women receive the same inspiration from God as men.

And Paul speaks of the labors of Christian women in the highest terms of commendation and regard as follows: "I commend unto you Phoebe, our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you; for she hath been a succorer of many, and of myself also. Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus, who have for my life laid down their own necks; unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles." "Greet Mary who bestowed much labor on us." "Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labor in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis which labored much in the Lord." Romans 16:1-4, 6, 12.

The prophet Simeon, and Anna the prophetess waited for the consolation of Israel at the close of the Jewish age, and with joy embraced the infant Saviour.

The Christian age was ushered in with glory. Both men and women enjoyed the inspiration of the hallowed hour, and were teachers of the people. "Philip," the evangelist, "had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy." Acts 21:8, 9. And the dispensation which was ushered in with glory, honored with the labors of holy women, will close with the same honors. Thus says God by his holy prophet: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." Acts 2:17.