

THINGS JESUS NEVER SAID

DID JESUS OR PAUL FORBID WOMEN FROM BEING PASTORS/MINISTERS

According to Research: The modern debate **really began in earnest during the nineteenth century.**

By the Late 1900s --- This became one of the most discussed passages in New Testament studies.

From which Two major interpretive frameworks emerged:

Complementarian and **Egalitarian:**

COMPLEMENTARIAN-ISM teaches that men and women are **equal in worth, dignity, and spiritual status before God**, but have different governing roles.

- especially in areas of church leadership and marriage.
- The word comes from the idea that men and women **complement each other.**

But In the church leadership, the primary governing teaching office of elder or pastor is reserved for **qualified men only.**

EGALITARIANISM teaches that **men and women are equal in value and equally eligible for all areas of ministry and leadership, based on gifting, calling, character, and God's empowerment rather than gender.** The word comes from the **idea of equality.**

WHY THE DEBATE INTENSIFIED IN THE 19TH CENTURY:

Several discoveries encouraged closer study:

- Thousands of additional Greek manuscripts became available.
- Greek lexicons became far more available and sophisticated.
- Archaeological work in Ephesus expanded understanding of the city's religious and social context.

- Researchers examined how rare words such as the Greek word *"authentein"* were used in Greek literature.

As a result, many scholars concluded that the passage deserved renewed examination rather than simply repeating traditional assumptions.

Faithful, Bible-believing scholars can be found on both sides:

- **Complementarians** generally see 1 Timothy 2 as establishing a timeless pattern for church leadership.
- **Egalitarians** generally see it as addressing a specific crisis in Ephesus while affirming women's teaching and leadership elsewhere in the New Testament

There are "40 authors who authored the books of the Bible. 39 of them empower women.

- *But only ONE of them seems to restrict women.*

Collectively these 40 authors, present women as leaders, prophets, judges, teachers, evangelists, patrons, and faithful partners in God's redemptive mission.

Yet when the conversation turns to **women being leaders in ministry**, almost all the attention centers on two passages in the New Testament—**both written by the Apostle Paul**.

These two texts have generated hundreds of years of misunderstanding, debate, and even division over what women may or may not do in the life of the church.

The question is **not whether these passages matter—they do**. Paul wrote to nine people or cities, and in only **three geographic locations** did he write what seemingly is restrictive verses towards women: they were to **Corinth, Ephesus, & the Island of Crete**.

Interestingly, **In all three of these cities, the people worshiped female deities or goddesses.**

INTERESTINGLY, THERE ARE ONLY TWO SUCH PASSAGES IN ALL THE NEW TESTAMENT.

But they have caused a LOT OF MISUNDERSTANDING regarding what is ok and not ok for women to do in the church.

The question is whether we are interpreting them in harmony with the whole witness of Scripture or **allowing two difficult texts to overshadow the Bible's broader testimony about God's use of women.**

1) ONE OF THOSE PASSAGES IS WRITTEN TO THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS

1 Timothy 2:11-14 NRSV- *Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man...*

2) ONE WRITTEN TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

1 Corinthians 14:34-35 NASB

Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says. And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in the church.

SO HOW ARE WE TO INTERPRET THESE - SO CALLED - "LIMITING PASSAGES?"

BY GOING DEEP INTO THE CONTEXT, ITSELF.

IF YOU PICK UP ANY **DECENT COMMENTARY.**

- **And Look up these "limiting passages," and you'll discover the **various ways** these texts **can be interpreted due to the ambiguity of the language.****

The fact that **competent Greek scholars have disagreed for hundreds of years** on the meaning of Paul's words in these passages is **proof of their obscurity**.

- (Don't let any NON-SCHOLAR tell you otherwise)

Secondly Follow the Laws of Hermeneutics

Hermeneutical Principle: in Biblical interpretation

"Clear passages should always illuminate difficult passages."

When a text is difficult, disputed, or capable of more than one interpretation, **it should be understood in harmony with the Bible's broader and clearer witness."**

We should never allow one or two difficult verses to redefine what Scripture consistently teaches elsewhere.

This rule also states

"THEREFORE, WHEN AN OBSCURE PASSAGE SEEMS TO BE AT ODDS WITH THE CLEAR THRUST OF SCRIPTURE, WE MUST ALSO LOOK CAREFULLY AT CONTEXT."

Attention to context—**HISTORICAL, SOCIAL, LOCAL, AND SPIRITUAL**—IS CRUCIAL WHEN IT COMES TO RIGHTLY INTERPRETING A PASSAGE OF SCRIPTURE.

THE LOCAL CONTEXT OF THE 1ST "LIMITING PASSAGE"

The debate centers on whether **Paul the Apostle** was giving **a universal command** to **all churches** or was **simply addressing a specific problem in the church at Ephesus**.

The first key passage is **1 Timothy 2:11-15 NKJV**

¹¹ Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. ¹² And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve.

¹⁴ And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. ¹⁵ But she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with *self-restraint*.

TWO VIEWS: Probation vs local correction

View 1: A universal prohibition (Complementarian)

This view holds that Paul established a permanent pattern for church leadership.

Their arguments include:

- Paul appeals to the order of creation not about **local customs** ("Adam was formed first")

Secondly The quote - the qualifications for overseers in 1 Timothy 3 are understood to **assume male elders** only.

- Therefore, women cannot serve in the governing teaching office of elder/pastor over men.
 - **This is the historic position of many evangelical churches.**

However 1 Timothy 3 According to Greek Lexicon the Greek literally says; **"faithful spouse," not necessarily "male only."**

Literal GK says, "A leader must be faithful in marriage" This is not a MALE requirement!

View 2: This is A local correction (Egalitarian view)

This view argues Paul was correcting a particular crisis in the church at Ephesus and Corinth.

Their arguments include:

1) The context is false teaching

They point out several **contextual** clues:

*They say Paul is addressing **a church dealing with disorder and false doctrine prevalent in Ephesus***

Consensus: In this view, Paul is NOT ESTABLISHING A UNIVERSAL RULE about ALL WOMEN TEACHING, but he was addressing a unique local problem.

The letter is written to Timothy in Ephesus, to correct this error

Let's look at the context

many scholars argue the passage is too disruptive to be about WOMAN IN GENERAL

They say that 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is about wives and husbands specifically - NOT ALL WOMEN!

Using a screenshot from Biblegateway.com look at this passage and notice the "Footnotes"

¹¹ A woman^[a] should learn in quietness and full submission. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man;^[b] she must be quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴ And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. ¹⁵ But women^[c] will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

[Read full chapter](#)

Footnotes

- a. [1 Timothy 2:11](#) Or *wife*; also in verse 12
- b. [1 Timothy 2:12](#) Or *over her husband*
- c. [1 Timothy 2:15](#) Greek *she*

The Greek word ***gynē*** for “woman” or wife” is the exact same Greek word and the Greek word ***anēr*** for “man” or “Husband” is also the same Greek word noting the GK here can be a word to wives or husbands - and not all women in general

Scholars say Woman and Wife are the same **exact Greek word** and only the context **decides which one.**

Let's read this translation in the whole context

1 Timothy 2:11-15,

¹¹ A wife should learn in quietness and full submission. ¹² I do not permit a wife to teach or to assume authority over her husband, she must be quiet.

Now the strange two verses that both views struggle with

¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴ Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.

Here is another strange comment that some scholars struggle with

¹⁵ But she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with *self-restraint*.

However, all of these verses match the Strange Doctrine being taught in Ephesus. One of the major themes of 1 Timothy is the stopping of false doctrine. This the theme of all six chapters 1 Timothy

Paul repeatedly warns about false teachers (1 Timothy 1:3-7; 4:1-7; 6:3-5).

1 Tim 1:3

³ When I left for Macedonia, I urged you to stay there in Ephesus and stop those whose teaching is contrary to the truth

KJ so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine...

Paul repeatedly mentions:

- false teachers
- myths
- endless genealogies
- deceptive spirits
- people upsetting households
- people desiring to be teachers but not understanding what they teach

He continues in vs 4

⁴ Don't let them waste their time in endless discussion of myths and spiritual pedigrees. These things only lead to meaningless speculations, ^[a] which don't help people live a life of faith in God.

[a]. Greek is *myths and endless genealogies, which cause speculation.*

Apparently Paul's prior warning in book of ACTS to the church in Ephesus was now finally coming to pass.

- Five years earlier he forewarned the Ephesian elders that *wolves would penetrate the church and draw disciples after themselves with perverse teachings* (Acts 20:28-30).

NOW THE WOLVES HAD APPEARED.

- So Paul exhorts a young Timothy to combat their perverse teachings (1 Tim. 1:3-7; 6:3-5).
 - Since Timothy was well aware of the heresy, Paul doesn't need to explain it in detail.

What were these myths and spiritual pedigrees?

History records that Gnosticism was a dominate heresy that was in full bloom into the second century.

- The Gnostics taught that full salvation comes through special knowledge (gnosis) that only the enlightened ones possessed.

What Timothy was battling in Ephesus appears to have been **SOME FORM OF THIS HERESY.**

- (Paul seems to **refer to the heresy** when he says to Timothy, **in chapter 6 VS 20 where Paul even names this false "gnosis"**)
- Along with some **MYTHS ABOUT THE LAW THAT WERE ALSO EMBRACED** (1 TIM. 1:4-7).
- WHICH INCLUDED the forbidding **eating meat and engaging in marriage** (1 Tim. 4:1-3).

WE ALSO KNOW FROM HISTORICAL RECORDS THAT THE Gnostics PERVERTED THE CREATION ACCOUNT.

Eve was regarded as both a **mediator and redeemer.**

- **She pre-existed Adam.**
- Man came into existence **because of woman**, and he was given **enlightenment through woman.**
- **Since Eve was the first to take a bite from the Tree of Knowledge, she was regarded as the bearer of special spiritual knowledge (gnosis).**

This gave way to The Artemis Philosophy, **Ephesus was famous for the Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.**

First, In the New Testament, Ephesus was a Greek city under Roman rule, but the inhabitants spoke **Greek and worshiped the Greek goddess Artemis** (**called Diana in many older English Bible translations, such as the KJV**).

Acts 19 refers to "Diana of the Ephesians"

The text clearly says Ephesus was worshipping this goddess - they were angry at Paul's teaching against the worship Artemis read Acts 19

Artemis Was the Supreme Deity of Ephesus

Acts 19 records the crowd shouting: "**Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!**"

She was considered:

- protector of the city
- giver of prosperity
- guardian of the people

The Temple of Artemis was one of **the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World** and **dominated the city's economy and identity.**

Scholars have suggested:

Women Held Important Religious Roles

The temple employed female religious officials, including priestesses.

Scholars say that **women in Ephesus** enjoyed higher religious status than anywhere else.

In Greek culture women were the most **unrestricted - even worshipped.**

This explains why the only 3 "LIMITING" PASSAGES in the NT **were written to Greek churches.**

Artemis Was also Associated with "SAFE Childbirth"

Ancient women often **prayed to Artemis for:**

- **safe pregnancies**
- **successful labor**
- protection of infants and the mothers life

Scholars say this background sheds light on **1 Timothy 2:15:**

"She will be saved through childbearing..."

So Paul is reassuring Christian women that they should trust God rather than Artemis for protection during childbirth.

This seems to fit the entire Ephesian context.

The wording of the verse strongly reflects this interpretation because **in the Greek, Paul is speaking in broad terms, of protection from the dangers of childbirth.**

Scholars say that according to later Gnostic writings from the second century and beyond,

Artemis worship taught:

- Eve existed before Adam,
- Women created men,
- Therefore, women are spiritually superior over men

This does explain why Paul in 1 Timothy 2 talks about the proper Order of Creation

Artemis worship gave women unusually prominent religious roles.

- It appears that new converts may have brought those false ideas into the church.

Certain women believed they possessed greater spiritual authority than men.

- This is where the **idea of women being superior to men comes from.**

However, there are important cautions:

- We have no **direct evidence** that all of this was the specific false teaching Paul was combating, he only alludes to it.

But: Many respected scholars consider the Artemis-superiority theory **a strong probability due to the flow of Paul's words**

"For Adam was formed first, then Eve." And his mention of false genealogies.

If someone **in the church of Ephesus** had been teaching this doctrine:

- **Eve was created first,**
- **women are spiritually superior,**
- **women should dominate men,**

Then Paul's appeal to Genesis would directly refute that error!

Since Timothy is considered primarily a **corrective** letter and 1 Timothy is written to **address specific problems in the Ephesian church.**

The Artemis/female-superiority teaching, that elevated women over men makes even more sense.

This heresy taught that **ONLY** women could **lead people to the illuminating gnosis** that was represented by the **Tree of Knowledge.**

Therefore, she was allowed to usurp authority over a man.

- They also taught that redemption completely reversed the effects of the fall so that **men were no longer subject to earthly authorities** and **women were no longer subject to their husbands.**

While male teachers were also spreading this doctrine (**1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17**), it found fertile ground among the women in the church (**2 Tim. 3:6-9**). Some scholars believe **untrained women** were especially vulnerable to these false teachings.

Now - in light of these problems - do you see now see why Paul's comments on the order of creation now fit?

My Assessment

The strongest evidence supports these conclusions:

- **Yes, false teaching was a major problem in Ephesus.**

- Yes, some women appear to have been influenced by that false teaching.
- Paul explicitly mentions women believing erroneous doctrines regarding genealogy.

So is this theory factual?

NO, Its a **scholarly hypothesis**, not a clear **established biblical fact**.

One can only infer all of this from the HISTORICAL context.

2. "Let a woman learn". Vs11

The verb (*manthanetō*) is an **imperative**.

Paul is commanding that women should be taught.

In a first-century Jewish and Greco-Roman setting, that was remarkably affirming. Paul's instructions in 1 Timothy begin with a positive command:

"Let a woman learn."

In the first century, it was actually radical for Paul to begin with:

"Let a woman learn..." - Vs 11

"Let a woman learn quietly" - Vs 12

These phrases are actually significant because in the **ancient world women were denied formal religious education**. Women were often excluded from formal theological education.

Paul's command begins by affirming that women should learn. Jewish and Greco-Roman culture **denied women formal theological education**.

In the cultural setting of the first century, that itself elevated women as disciples **capable of receiving theological instruction**.

Paul's first command is **not "be silent forever"** but **"become a learner."** It is not the Greek word for **absolute silence (sigao)**.

The same word appears earlier: "that we may live peaceful (hēsychios) and quiet lives..." (1 Timothy 2:2)

It means:

- calmness
- peacefulness
- receptivity
- orderly conduct

This next verse contains the greatest debate.

I Timothy 2:12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.

"I do not permit"

Greek: "I am not permitting..."

Many scholars argue the **present tense reflects Paul's current directive for the specific situation in Ephesus.**

"Exercise authority over"

Here is the BIG KAHUNNA - The Main key word: Gk **authentein**

3. The Greek verb **authentein. ow-then-teh'-o**

1 Tim 2: 12 "I do not permit a woman (wife) to teach or to assume authority (authentein) over a man;^[b] (her husband); she must be quiet."

PAUL DOESN'T USE THE normal Greek Word for authority *exousia* the general GK word in the N.T. for AUTHORITY

- ***exousia* = USED 103 times in 93 verses**

Instead, Paul uses **a rare Greek word *authentein* translated "exercise authority over."**

It appears only once in the New Testament.

- one who **with his own hands kills another** or himself

- one who **acts on his own authority**, **autocratic**
- an **absolute master** - you are the author of...
- to govern, **exercise dominion over one**
- **to usurp authority**
- **to assume authority improperly**

THE GRK LEXICONS SAY "THIS WORD DOES NOT MEAN TO "SIMPLY HOLD AUTHORITY."

Greek Lexicons; "There is no evidence in the surviving Greek literature that *authenteō* means "to operate properly under authority" or "to function appropriately under authority."

In fact, the word consistently has **an active sense**, not a submissive one.

It refers to exercising, assuming, or asserting authority over rather than being under someone else's authority.

Could it imply "self-assumed authority"?

Many scholars—**on both sides of the broader debate**—acknowledge that *authenteō* carries the nuance of **acting on one's own authority** or **assuming authority for oneself over another**, RATHER THAN SIMPLY HOLDING A LEGITIMATE OFFICE.

That right there should settle the argument

This is why the Greek translates it as

"But I am not allowing a wife to teach and usurp authority over her husband"

THEREFORE, MANY SCOLARS SAY

"Paul IS forbidding abusive or unauthorized teaching rather than banning all teaching by ALL women."

Here is A Balanced Assessment

The **strongest evidence** points to Paul addressing **real problems in the Ephesian church**, especially **false teaching and disorder**.

What remains debated is whether his solution **was temporary and situation-specific** or a **timeless rule against women in church leadership**.

That is why **faithful evangelical scholars** who affirm the authority of Scripture **ARRIVE AT DIFFERENT CONCLUSIONS**.

The discussion centers on **how best to understand Paul's words in their historical, literary, and theological context**.

Secondly: The New Testament presents women as **active participants** in the ministry of the early Church. **While there remains legitimate debate over the office of elder or overseer**, the biblical evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that **women served as coworkers, teachers, prophets, evangelistic laborers, patrons, and leaders within the Christian community**.

Whichever interpretation one adopts, **it is DIFFICULT to argue that Paul believed women could never speak, teach, or minister publicly**.

His own letters acknowledge women praying, prophesying, teaching in certain contexts, serving as deacons, laboring alongside him in the gospel, and being entrusted with significant leadership in ministry.

The central question is much narrower:

- Did Paul prohibit women from holding the **authoritative teaching office** over the gathered church **for all time**?
- Or **was he addressing a temporary situation involving false teaching and disorder in Ephesus**?

Faithful Christians have answered that question **differently for HUNDREDS OF YEARS** - and I probably won't end that debate today - because some people will **fight for their tradition no matter what the bible says**. Tradition!!!

Whatever one's position on church leadership, **Paul's concern in the letter is clearly that sound doctrine be taught faithfully and that the church remains orderly.**

Let's look at more Evidence from Paul's Ministry

If Paul believed women **could never minister publicly**, several passages become difficult to explain.

THE BROADER NT PICTURE IS Women minister elsewhere in Scripture

Elsewhere Paul acknowledges women are serving in prominent positions:

- **Priscilla** helped instruct **Apollos** more accurately (Acts 18:26).
- **Phoebe** is called a servant (or deacon) of the church (Romans 16:1).
- **Junia** is described as **outstanding among the apostles** (Romans 16:7), **though the meaning of that phrase is debated.** (more on them later)

Then In **1 Corinthians 11**, Paul himself assumes women pray and prophesy publicly, provided they do so appropriately. These passages suggest Paul did not prohibit every form of public ministry by women.

While sincere Christians continue to debate the precise boundaries of pastoral authority, **the biblical record leaves little doubt that God used women in profound and indispensable ways throughout the ministry of the early Church.**

Women Prophesying

In **1 Corinthians 11**, Paul gives instructions for women praying and prophesying in the gathered church. He regulates the manner in which they do so but **does not forbid the activity itself.**

My Assessment

When all the evidence is considered, I think several conclusions are well supported:

1. Paul clearly valued women as disciples and coworkers in the gospel.
2. He affirmed **significant ministry** by women, including prayer, prophecy, evangelism, and service.
3. The prohibition in 1 Timothy 2 is tied to teaching and usurping authority in the gathered church, **and whether it is universal or situation-specific remains a matter of sincere disagreement among orthodox Christians.**
4. The immediate context of false teaching in Ephesus strongly suggests Paul was addressing a real local pastoral problem, **not merely offering an abstract theological statement.**

I find it significant that on the day of Pentecost, Peter quoted Joel:
“Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy... Even on My male servants and female servants I will pour out My Spirit, and they shall prophesy.” (Acts 2:17-18)

That declaration frames the new covenant as one in which the Holy Spirit empowers both men and women for prophetic ministry. Any interpretation of 1 Timothy 2 should therefore be considered alongside the **broader witness of Scripture**, which **consistently shows God calling, gifting, and using women in His redemptive mission.**

My opinion based upon many scholarly studies:

We know from the historical setting, Acts 19, and the pastoral concerns addressed throughout 1 Timothy that false teaching was a major problem in Ephesus.

The religious environment surrounding the worship of Artemis was also highly influential.

The contextual evidence indicates that Paul was addressing a unique local situation rather than establishing a universal, church-wide prohibition against women serving in leadership.

Lastly, "Think about Deborah in the Old Testament—God explicitly raised her up to lead, judge, and govern over men.

Why would the New Testament, which brings greater freedom to men and women and explicitly states that gender distinctions don't determine our status in Christ, suddenly give women fewer leadership opportunities than they had centuries prior?"

Part two:

THE SECOND DIFFICULT PASSAGE: 1 CORINTHIANS 14

1 Corinthians 14:34-35 NASB

Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says. And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in the church.

Notice what Paul **does not** say.

- "Women cannot be ministers."
- "Women cannot teach."
- "Women cannot prophesy."
- "Women cannot exercise spiritual gifts."
- "Women cannot speak in a church gathering under any circumstances."

In the same letter, **1 Corinthians 11:5** Paul mentions the **proper ways that women pray and prophesy publicly**:

And that becomes **extremely important** when we examine the immediate context.

THE CONTEXT IS CHURCH ORDER

First Corinthians 14 is primarily dealing **with the orderly use of spiritual gifts in a public church gathering**.

Paul repeatedly emphasizes that everything should be done “**decently and in order**” (1 Corinthians 14:40).

It is primarily about **orderly use of spiritual gifts**, in a public church gathering

Paul repeatedly says that things must be done “**decently and in order**” (14:40).

IE **Notice** what Paul says to the **other groups** in the same chapter. He tells those **speaking in tongues** to keep silent under certain circumstances (v. 28). He tells **prophets** to keep silent under certain circumstances (v. 30).

So when Paul says someone **must “keep silent,”** that does **not necessarily mean:**

“You are permanently forbidden from speaking.”

It mean’s to be *silent **in this particular situation.***

LOOK AT THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT

1 Corinthians 14:29-35: *Let **two or three prophets speak**, and let the **others pass judgment**. But if **a revelation** is made to another who is seated, **let the first one keep silent**. For **you can all prophesy one by one**, so that **all may learn** and **all may be exhorted**; and the **spirits of prophets** are **subject to prophets**; for God is **not a God of confusion** but of peace, **as in all the churches**.*

Right here Paul is even restricting prophets speaking, only 2 or 3

BUT WHAT DOES “WOMEN” MEAN?

Here we encounter another important issue.

The same Greek word, can mean **either women or wives**, depending **on context**.

Verse 35 is especially interesting: Notice how specifically Paul addresses the issue:

“Let them ask their own husbands at home.”

This raises several questions

Why would Paul specifically tell them to ask their husbands at home if the issue were simply that all women were forbidden from speaking? The marital language is difficult to ignore.

"And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home..."

That sounds particularly like wives interrupting or questioning proceedings in a way that was disruptive, rather than a blanket statement that females cannot minister. That has led many interpreters to understand VS 34-35 as addressing wives speaking inappropriately during the evaluation of prophecies, RATHER THAN BANNING WOMEN FROM MINISTRY GENERALLY.

We also have to remember the Corinthian letter was a response to Timothy's letter.

Paul begins 1 Corinthians 7:1 by saying: "Now concerning the things about which you wrote..." here Paul was responding to questions and issues that had come from the Corinthian church.

That means we are, in a sense, eavesdropping on one side of a conversation. We have Paul's response, but we do not possess the original letter the Corinthians sent to him.

Therefore, there are places where we have to determine from the context whether Paul is:

- 1. Giving his own instruction,**
- 2. Responding to a question,**
- 3. Correcting a practice,**
- 4. Or possibly quoting a statement from the Corinthians before correcting it.**

That is why context is absolutely essential. Therefore, what many scholars have deduced is that in this passage, he is probably quoting a question, which they sent to him.

PAUL HAD ALREADY ACKNOWLEDGED WOMEN SPEAKING PUBLICLY:

There is **another problem** with interpreting 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 as an absolute prohibition against women ever speaking in a church gathering.

1 Corinthians 11:5 Paul discusses women praying and prophesying.

That means women were participating vocally in some form of public worship.

So if 1 Corinthians 14:34 meant: "Women are never permitted to speak publicly in a church gathering under any circumstances,"

Then Paul would appear to contradict what he had already said only a few chapters earlier. That is why the context matters so much.

Paul also says "all" In 1 Corinthians 14:31, Paul says:

"for you ALL CAN prophesy one by one" (v. 31) and "when you assemble, every one of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation . . ." (v. 26).

- Note: **"ALL"** in the Greek...means all; **NO EXCLUSIONS!**

Therefore, for Paul to suddenly say that **women must never say a word in the church meeting** is to completely contradict himself in the space of a few sentences.

CONTEXT CHANGES EVERYTHING

And here is where the importance of context becomes obvious. If **"keep silent in the churches"** meant that **women could never speak** whenever they **were physically inside a church building**, then the command would **extend far beyond the worship service**.

- **Women could not talk in the lobby.**
- **They could not talk in the bathroom.**
- **They could not talk before or after the service.**
- **They could not talk to one another anywhere inside the church building.**

Obviously, that is not what Paul meant.

So we all agree that some context is required. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS POURED OUT ON MEN AND WOMEN

Finally, we cannot overlook what happened at Pentecost.

Peter quoted the prophet Joel in Acts 2:

**“Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy... Even on My male servants and female servants I will pour out My Spirit, and they shall prophesy.”
–Acts 2:17-18**

Notice the language: Sons and daughters. Male servants and female servants. They shall prophesy.

The Holy Spirit was not poured out exclusively upon men. God empowered both men and women to participate in the ministry of the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 11:5 – women are explicitly described praying and prophesying.

Romans 16:1-2 – Phoebe is called a diakonos (deacon) of the church in Cenchrea.

So when we come to 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, we must interpret those difficult verses in light of the whole New Testament witness, the immediate context, the Greek language, the historical setting, and Paul's own instructions concerning women praying and prophesying.

The question is not simply:

“Does the Bible say women should be silent?”

The better question is: “What kind of speaking was Paul restricting, to whom was he speaking, and what problem was he correcting?”

NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLARS HAVE PUT FORTH TWO SCENARIOS THAT EASILY RESOLVE THE APPARENT DISCREPANCY.

New Testament scholars have proposed **two major scenarios** that help explain the apparent discrepancy between Paul's command for women to "keep silent" in 1 Corinthians 14 and his earlier acknowledgment of women praying and prophesying in 1 Corinthians 11.

Let's examine each one.

SCENARIO 1: WHAT 1 CORINTHIANS 14 CLEARLY DESCRIBES

The church meetings in Corinth had become **highly disorderly**. Paul was not correcting the existence of spiritual gifts. **He was correcting the way those gifts were being exercised.**

1. Multiple people were speaking in tongues without proper interpretation

Paul says:

"If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church."

–1 Corinthians 14:27-28

The problem was not simply that tongues were being spoken. The problem was **how they were being used.**

Paul establishes three requirements:

- Only **two or three** should speak.
- They should speak **one at a time.**
- There must be someone to interpret.

If there was no interpreter, the person speaking in tongues was to **keep silent**. That is important because it demonstrates that Paul's command to "**keep silent**" does not necessarily mean a permanent prohibition against speaking. It means **remaining silent in a particular situation because the circumstances require it.**

Earlier Paul says:

"What then, brothers and sisters? Whenever you come together, each one has a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation."

–1 Corinthians 14:26

This appears to describe a **highly participatory gathering**, where many members were prepared to contribute something.

However, this is a rebuke, we need to read verse 26 in light of the larger context.

Paul has spent **chapters 12-14 correcting the Corinthians' misuse of spiritual gifts**.

Immediately before this, he has discussed:

- **Tongues without interpretation**
- **Prophecy**
- **Intelligibility**
- **Confusion**
- **Disorder in worship**

So when Paul says, **"What then, brothers and sisters?"**, he is essentially asking: **"What is going on among you when you gather together?"**

He then describes a gathering in which **multiple people are bringing different contributions**—psalms, teachings, revelations, tongues, and interpretations—and proceeds to establish **order for those contributions**.

And notice the important distinction:

Paul does not rebuke them simply for having these gifts or wanting to contribute.

He corrects **the way they were exercising them**. That is consistent with the two governing principles he gives:

"Let all things be done for edification."

–1 Corinthians 14:26

And:

"Let all things be done decently and in order."

—1 Corinthians 14:40

2. THEY WERE SPEAKING IN AN UNCONTROLLED MANNER

Paul's command that those speaking in tongues do so **"each in turn"** (14:27) indicates that the Corinthians **were not properly regulating the timing of their contributions.**

Paul does not permit a free-for-all.

Even when the gift was legitimate, its exercise had to be **ordered, intelligible, and edifying.**

3. PROPHECY ALSO HAD TO BE LIMITED AND EVALUATED

Paul gives similar instructions concerning prophecy:

"Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge."

—1 Corinthians 14:29

The Greek verb used for **"judge"** carries the idea of evaluating, discerning, or distinguishing.

In other words, prophecy was not automatically accepted simply because someone claimed to be prophesying.

It was **permitted and encouraged—but also subject to communal discernment.**

Then Paul says:

"If a revelation is made to another who is seated, let the first one keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one..."

—1 Corinthians 14:30–31

Again, notice the phrase:

"one by one."

Paul is not describing everyone prophesying simultaneously.

Several prophets could participate in the same gathering, but they were to do so sequentially and in an **orderly manner, with only two or three speaking.**

So even prophecy—something Paul clearly valued—was subject to regulation.

The principle is clear:

Paul was not prohibiting spiritual gifts.

He was regulating their disorderly use.

The meetings in Corinth had **become disorderly**, and Paul was establishing principles of:

Order.

Discernment.

Intelligibility.

Peace.

Edification.

That is why I believe it is helpful to think of 1 Corinthians 14 not primarily as a **"prohibition chapter,"** but as a **"regulation chapter."**

Paul repeatedly says, in effect:

Let them speak—but let them speak appropriately.

That distinction becomes extremely important when we reach Paul's instructions concerning women.

SCENARIO 2: WOMEN WERE INTERRUPTING THE PROPHETIC EVALUATION WITH QUESTIONS

One proposed explanation is that some wives in the Corinthian congregation were **interrupting the proceedings with questions.**

Their motivation may have been legitimate:

They wanted to learn.

But in an already disorderly meeting, their questions could **create another source of disruption.**

Paul therefore says:

“And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in the church.”

—1 Corinthians 14:35

Notice the immediate connection between:

“desire to learn”

and

“ask their husbands at home.”

The issue appears to involve **questions and interruptions**, not necessarily the exercise of ministry or spiritual gifts.

THE CULTURAL BACKGROUND IS ALSO IMPORTANT

As previously stated women in the first century generally **had far fewer educational opportunities than men.**

Most women were not formally educated in the way men were.

Therefore, some scholars believe that **women asking questions during a public discussion**—particularly questions directed toward men who were speaking or **evaluating prophecy**—could have created a socially disruptive situation.

What might have been a legitimate desire to learn could nevertheless have interrupted the proceedings.

Paul's solution was practical:

If you have questions, ask your husband at home.

The church gathering was not intended to become an ongoing question-and-answer session.

NOTICE WHERE THIS INSTRUCTION APPEARS

The placement of Paul's instruction is significant.

Beginning in verse 29, Paul is specifically discussing prophecy and the evaluation of prophetic words.

He says:

"Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge."

Then:

"If a revelation is made to another who is seated, let the first be silent."

Then:

"For you can all prophesy one by one..."

And within this same discussion, Paul addresses the women (wives):

"And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home."

That sequence has led some interpreters to conclude that Paul is addressing questions or interruptions occurring during the prophetic evaluation process.

In other words: The women were not being prohibited from ministry; they were being instructed not to interrupt the proceedings with questions.

They could **learn from their husbands** at home rather than disrupting the public gathering.

"KEEP SILENT" DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN "NEVER SPEAK"

This is one of the most important points in interpreting the passage.

Paul says:

"Let the women keep silent in the churches..."

The Greek word translated "keep silent" is *sigao* = **means to** hold one's peace temporarily.

It carries the sense of **being quiet, keeping silent, or refraining from speaking in a particular circumstance.**

The word itself does not necessarily establish a permanent, universal prohibition against speaking.

We have already seen Paul use the same concept several times earlier in the chapter.

Someone speaking in tongues must keep silent when there is no interpreter.

A prophet must keep silent when another receives a revelation.

Therefore, the question is not simply: "Does Paul tell them to be silent?"

He clearly does.

The question is:

"Silent when—and for what purpose?"

DOES THIS MEAN WOMEN COULD NEVER SPEAK IN THE CHURCH? Of course not—if we interpret the passage within the broader context of 1 Corinthians.

Paul has already acknowledged women praying and prophesying in 1 Corinthians 11:5.

He also says in chapter 14 **"You can all prophesy one by one..."**
—14:31

Therefore, interpreting 14:34-35 as an absolute prohibition against women ever speaking audibly in a church gathering creates a significant tension with Paul's own instructions earlier in the letter.

Whatever Paul means by **"keep silent,"** it must be interpreted in light of the fact that women are already assumed to be participating in worship and prophecy.

SO WHAT KIND OF SPEAKING IS BEING RESTRICTED?

Under this interpretation, Paul's instruction has a **very specific and limited application.**

He is addressing women who were speaking **at the wrong time or in a disruptive manner,** particularly when they had questions about what was being said.

Paul's solution was:

Listen.

Remain quiet while the speaker is speaking.

Ask your husband at home.

Do not interrupt the gathering.

The goal was not to silence women from ministry.

The goal was to **bring order and peace to a congregation** that had become confused and chaotic.

Paul's overarching principle remains:

"For God is not a God of confusion but of peace."

—1 Corinthians 14:33

And:

"Let all things be done decently and in order."

—1 Corinthians 14:40

So, under this interpretation, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is addressing a particular **kind of disruptive speech**—possibly questioning during the evaluation of prophecy—rather than establishing a universal prohibition against women ever speaking or ministering in the church.

And there is an especially important piece of evidence:

Paul had already discussed women praying and prophesying in the gathered church in 1 Corinthians 11:5.

Therefore, we cannot simply take the phrase **"keep silent"** out of its immediate and **broader context** and turn it into an absolute prohibition. The issue is not whether women could ever speak.

The issue is when, how, and under what circumstances they were to speak.

Eugene Peterson's *The Message bible* captures this interpretation particularly well:

"Wives must not disrupt worship, talking when they should be listening, asking questions that could more appropriately be asked of their husbands at home..."

Whether or not one accepts every aspect of this interpretation, **it demonstrates why context, Greek vocabulary, cultural background, and Paul's teaching throughout the letter must all be considered before concluding that Paul was universally prohibiting women from speaking or ministering in the church.**

Overwhelming Evidence from Paul's Ministry

If Paul believed women could never minister publicly, several passages become difficult to explain.

THE BROADER NT PICTURE IS Women ministers are ministering elsewhere in Scripture. These passages suggest Paul did not prohibit every form of public ministry by women.

The biblical record leaves little doubt that God used women in profound and indispensable ways throughout the ministry of the early Church.

Women Prophesying:

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul gives instructions for women praying and prophesying in the gathered church. He regulates the manner in which they do so but does not forbid the activity itself.

Then Peter quoted Joel:

"Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy... Even on My male servants and female servants I will pour out My Spirit, and they shall prophesy." (Acts 2:17-18)

That declaration frames the new covenant as one in which the **HOLY SPIRIT EMPOWERS BOTH MEN AND WOMEN FOR PROPHETIC MINISTRY**.

The New Testament clearly presents women as **active participants** in the ministry of the early Church. **His own letters acknowledge women praying, prophesying, teaching in certain contexts, serving as deacons, laboring alongside him in the gospel, and being entrusted with significant leadership in ministry.**

Elsewhere Paul acknowledges women are serving in **PROMINENT POSITIONS**:

LET'S LOOK CLOSER

Phoebe

Romans 16

Paul calls her a **diakonos** ("deacon" or "servant") of the church and commends her highly.

The word diakonos is the **same Greek term Paul regularly uses of himself, Timothy, Tychicus, Epaphras, and other ministers of Christ (1 Cor. 3:5; Eph. 3:7; Col. 1:7, 23, 25).**

(Geoffrey)

The Greek unquestionably identifies her as a recognized minister or servant of the church. Paul also calls her a προστάτις (prostatis), a term describing a patron, benefactor, in (Rom. 16:2).

Such language portrays Phoebe as a woman entrusted with significant responsibility and respected leadership within the Christian community (Rom. 16:1-2).

Priscilla

Paul next greets (Priscilla) and Aquila, calling them his **"fellow workers in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 16:3)**. Throughout the New Testament, Priscilla's name frequently appears before her husband's, something unusual in first-century literature and often understood as **reflecting her prominence in ministry** (Acts 18:18, 26; Rom. 16:3; 2 Tim. 4:19).

Acts 18 She and her husband instructed Apollos in sound doctrine, explaining **"the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:24-26)**.

Luke presents Priscilla **name first several times**, which **indicates her prominence and Leadership** as fully participating in **theological instruction** without expressing the slightest concern **that such ministry violated God's design**.

Mary

Paul then greets Mary, **"who has worked very hard for you" (Rom. 16:6)**.

The verb κοπιᾶω (kopiaō), meaning **"to labor" or "to toil,"** is a word **Paul repeatedly uses for apostolic ministry** and **strenuous labor** in the gospel (**1 Cor. 15:10; Gal. 4:11; Phil. 2:16**).

He later uses the same language for **Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis**, who **"worked hard in the Lord"** (Rom. 16:12).

These women were **not passive observers** but **active participants** Paul uses a **Greek word to describe his own Apostolic labor, whose ministry Paul publicly honored.**

Junia:

The most discussed woman in **Romans 16** is **Junia**.

Paul writes, **"Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives and my fellow prisoners. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before me"** (Rom. 16:7).

Thanks to Geoffrey we have more evidence

Nearly every question surrounding this verse centers on two issues: **Whether Junia was a woman and whether Paul counted her among the apostles.**

The manuscript evidence overwhelmingly supports the feminine reading. **The earliest scribal tradition consistently understood the name as feminine. Junia is a well-attested female Roman name.**

The female name Junia appears extensively in Latin inscriptions, including many from Rome.

The **masculine Junias is extraordinarily rare**; the evidence for it as a contemporary male name **is extremely weak**. This According to (Bruce M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, 2nd ed.

Virtually **every modern critical edition of the Greek New Testament** therefore points to her name **as feminine 'Iouviav**. She is clearly honored as a respected worker in the gospel **"as outstanding among the apostles,"**

Traditionally this was understood to mean **"outstanding among the apostles."** This interpretation has dominated Christian history for well over **a thousand years.**

John Chrysostom, perhaps the **greatest Greek preacher** of the **fourth century** and a native speaker of Greek, commented on this passage: **"How great the wisdom of this woman must have been that she was even deemed worthy of the title of apostle."** (John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, Homily 31, on Rom. 16:7; Patrologia Graeca 60:669)

Chrysostom not only identifies Junia as a woman but **explicitly understands Paul to include her among the apostles.**

This is huge! His testimony is particularly significant because he lived centuries before modern debates concerning women in ministry and interpreted the passage as an ordinary Greek reader.

subsequent research and grammatical evidence has affirmed this translation

Even if Junia is called an apostle, **this does not necessarily place her among the Twelve.** The New Testament uses the same GK word ἀπόστολος more broadly than the Twelve Foundational Apostles of Jesus.

- **Barnabas is called an apostle (Acts 14:14).**
- **James, the Lord's brother, is called an apostle (Gal. 1:19).**
- **Silas and Timothy appear to be included among the apostles (1 Thess. 2:6).**
- **Epaphroditus is called an apostle or messenger of the Philippian church (Phil. 2:25).**

The **New Testament** uses the word "apostle" (meaning **"one sent out"**) to **describe more than 20 specific individuals**, and some broader **historical counts list upwards of 80 people** who fulfilled or were recognized in that role. There

is no **biblical evidence or historical record** indicating that **later figures met Jesus or saw Him in a vision and were witnesses of His resurrection** .

These individuals were considered apostles by function rather than by the eyewitness standard:

The office could therefore describe commissioned messengers and church planters beyond the original Twelve. **Only the Foundational Apostles the church was built on had that strict requirement.**

People get this confused most of the time on YouTube.

There are several others with prominent positions in ministry....like Philip who had four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9).

Euodia and Syntyche are described as women who **"labored side by side"** with Paul in the gospel (Phil. 4:2-3). **Older women are commanded to teach younger women sound doctrine (Titus 2:3-5).**

Together these passages demonstrate that women were active participants in the mission and ministry of the early Church.

Regardless of where one lands in that debate, these passages must be interpreted **alongside the substantial evidence that women prayed, prophesied, taught, labored in gospel ministry, and were publicly commended by the apostles themselves.**

The testimony of Scripture therefore presents a picture that is much richer than many modern discussions allow.

Paul does not speak of women **merely as recipients** of ministry **but as participants in it.**

He calls them coworkers, laborers, ministers, benefactors, fellow prisoners, and even apostles.

Fun fact: Look up Photini on the internet she was the Samaritan woman that meet Jesus at the well. In Eastern Orthodox (and some Eastern Catholic) tradition, Saint Photini is formally titled **Equal-to-the-Apostles** (sometimes rendered as "**peer of the Apostles**" or simply called an apostle/evangelist).

This rank was given to early saints whose public preaching and missionary work are considered comparable in scope and impact to that of the original apostles.

Sources describe her as:

- One of the first people to proclaim Christ after meeting him at the well.
- A tireless evangelist who converted her family (five sisters and two sons) and many others in Samaria, Carthage, and beyond.
- Honored in Greek sermons from the 4th to 14th centuries as an "apostle" and "evangelist," sometimes compared favorably to the male disciples.

There is a bunch of history on her many miracles and Nero's three attempt to kill her, on his third attempt he succeeded in killing her.