

## Further Instructions About Spiritual Gifts in the Church

### 1 Corinthians 14: 26-40

1 Corinthians 14:26-40: *“How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. 28 But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. 30 But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. 32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. 33 For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. 34 Let women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. 35 And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. 36 Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? 37 If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. 38 But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant. 39 Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. 40 Let all things be done decently and in order.”*

### Background Notes

In the first half of this chapter, we saw that the Corinthian Christians were placing an undue amount of attention and emphasis on the gift of tongues. Because the gift of tongues was more dramatic than some of the other gifts, it easily led to pride and self-display and self-glory!

That problem was certainly present at Corinth. In fact, it's hard to miss the point that things were out of control in the Corinthian church, and it seems that the disorder was primarily due to the misuse of the gift of tongues. Not only was there pride and jealousy about the gift of tongues, and not only were the Corinthians wrongly elevating this gift above the more important gift of prophecy or teaching, but they were exercising this gift in a disorderly way in the local church. Too many Corinthian Christians were exercising this gift simultaneously, and many times they did not have interpreters.

So in no uncertain terms, the apostle Paul taught that there are limits to and regulations for the use of spiritual gifts in the church. In the first half of this chapter we mentioned that there were three limitations to the use of the gift of tongues in the church:

- a. The limit of interpretation: The gift should only be used in public if the message given in an unknown tongue is interpreted, so that the whole church can be edified.
- b. The limit of priorities: The gift of tongues is low on the priority list of gifts that build up the whole church.

c. The limit of order: The gift of tongues should be under control at all times so that there is no disorderly conduct in the church at any time.

This matter of order in the church was so important that further regulations were given for proper conduct in the church in the second half of chapter 14. As the last verse of the chapter says, *“everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way”* (v40).

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The “priesthood of all believers” should be practiced in the Church today.

Verse 26: *“How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.”* In the early Church, there was no clergy. There were no ordained preachers or teachers, as there are in most churches today. The 1<sup>st</sup> century churches didn’t have one minister or one pastor, and they didn’t have liturgies or highly structured services. In the early Church, the “priesthood of **all** believers” was practiced and emphasized. **All** church members were encouraged to use their spiritual gifts in various ministries and opportunities.

This practice should still be true today. Churches today have various forms of church government and structure and order of services, but every church should allow for the gifts of all believers to be developed and used under the biblical guidelines.

A Christian man once told me that he loved his church, and on several occasions he had wanted to share an encouraging word he had received from God’s Word with the congregation. But he wasn’t able to do so, because in their services there was no opportunity for such sharing. This is a sad commentary. This Christian brother is gifted to teach the Bible and share a word from the Lord, but his spiritual gift is stifled. The priesthood of all believers should be practiced in the church today.

The danger of the biblical principle that all believers are priests is that if there are no guidelines, and anyone just does or says whatever they want and whenever they want, then there will be disorder and chaos in the church’s worship. So the apostle Paul gave further regulations about the practice of the priesthood of all believers.

Three regulations were given for the gift of tongues:

- a. At most, only three individuals should speak in tongues at any given worship service.
- b. No more than one person should speak in a tongue at any given time in the service. In other words, take turns!
- c. There must be an interpreter.

Similarly, three regulations are given for the gift of prophecy:

- a. At most three prophets should speak at any one service.
- b. They should speak in turn, not simultaneously.
- c. One speaker should not monopolize the time, but should give way to the other teachers.

These biblical regulations show that spiritual gifts are under the control of the individual. There is no idea in the Bible of spiritual gifts being uncontrollable, such as, “The Holy Spirit made me do it! I couldn’t stop myself from speaking and disrupting and being unable to control myself.” No - that’s an unbiblical explanation and excuse!

*“The spirits of the prophets are subject to the control of the prophets”* - both in the control and the content of the prophecy (v32). The prophet is to rule and govern what he says. The teaching is to be in line with the Word of God, and the way it’s delivered should not lead to confusion in the church, but to peace and unity. *“For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace as in all the churches of the saints”*(v33). These guidelines control and regulate the priesthood of all believers and the use of spiritual gifts. And the priesthood of all believers should be practiced in the church today.

## **2. God’s structure of authority should be practiced in the church today.**

Verses 34-40: *“Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant. Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order.*

In the commentaries on this section of chapter 14, there are a number of interpretations for verse 34: *“Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says.”* Some commentaries say that this regulation was only meant for the church at Corinth. But the Greek word for “church” here is plural, and the last phrase of verse 33 (which some translations properly place at the beginning of verse 34), shows that it was a regulation for all churches.

Other commentaries say the Greek word used here for *speak* means “chattering,” and thus verse 34 means that the women at Corinth were to refrain from chattering, especially with their husbands, during the church services. But the Greek word used for *speak* in verse 34 is the same Greek word that is used for *speak* in the rest of the chapter, in regard to tongues and prophecy. So clearly the word *speak* is not limited to chattering.

Another possible view draws verses 34 and 35 together, and holds that the women were not to question men when the prophets were questioned about the revelations that they had received from the Lord. If the women had questions about the teachings or prophecies, they should discuss these questions at home, not during public worship (v35).

Then there is the position that holds that *“Let your women remain silent”* refers to all speaking, in all church services. However, this view must be harmonized with 1 Corinthians 11:4-16, which indicates that women were praying and prophesying at the church in Corinth, and the apostle regulated (but did not forbid) this practice.

So we see that the proper interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:34 is not as easy or straightforward as one might think. There is some room for discussion.

However, in 1 Timothy 2 & 3 the apostle Paul taught that women should not be the spiritual leaders in the church, nor should they be the primary “upfront” preachers or teachers in the church services. 1 Timothy 2:11-12, *“Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.”* The structure of authority, with male leadership in the church, should be maintained as God ordained it.

In 1 Timothy 2, the apostle Paul used a “Creation argument” to back up this teaching. This was not merely an illustration from Creation. He used a Creation *argument* as his basis for teaching that these directives were trans-cultural - not just for the 1st century churches, but for church services today as well.

So the regulation concerning the silence of women in churches in 1 Corinthians 14:34 certainly involves a recognition of the authority structure that God has ordained, and it includes the “upfront” preaching in church services (then and today). God’s structure of authority should be practiced in the church today.

## Practical Application

### Don’t pull Galatians 3:28 out of context!

Galatians 3:28 says, *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* Some Christians have pulled this verse out of its proper context, to use as their “proof text” for saying that there should be no role distinction between men and women in the Church, as there was in the Old Testament.

Nothing could be further from the truth! This is bad hermeneutics - improper interpretation! The context for Galatians 3:28 is **salvation**, **not** the **structure of authority in the Church**. In salvation, there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, or slaves and free, or men and women. But 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 11 & 14 all teach that there *is* a role distinction between men and women in the Church. The structure of authority that was laid down in the Old Testament, that was ordained from Creation, and was recognized in the Law, should continue in the Church today.

So don’t fall for bad hermeneutics! Don’t pull Galatians 3:28 out of context!