

Bible Study Question# 2

What did the Apostle Paul really mean when he said in **1 Corinthians 14:34 (KJV)**:

³⁴ 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.

Taking a closer look at this issue of silencing women in the church, one can clearly see that Paul was dealing with the issues of confusion and disruption in the church. He was not seeking to take away the rights of Christian women to participate. To get a better understanding of how this whole issue came about, we need to get the full context by going back to Chapter 12.

1 Corinthians 12:1-3 (ESV)

¹ Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.

² You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led.

³ Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.

We realize that there were some attending the Corinthian church who were still involved with pagan idols. He points out that the members were once led astray themselves. It is obvious that anyone who says “**Jesus is accursed**” cannot be speaking from the unction of the Holy Ghost and was certainly uninformed about spiritual gifts. Why would Paul mention this in the first place? Apparently, there was an outburst from someone who said “**Jesus is accursed**” and someone else responded with a correction and said, “**Jesus is Lord.**” At this point, we are not told that these opposing statements or outbursts, if you will, involved women. But we do know that by the time he is finished dealing with this issue, he is telling women to be silent in the church (**1 Corinthians 14:34**). Paul took advantage of this opportunity to teach about spiritual gifts, love, and reconciliation toward those that were still unsaved and uninformed.

Fast forwarding to 1 Corinthians 14, look closely at what Paul is saying.

1 Corinthians 14:30-34 (ESV)

³⁰ If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent.

³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged,

³² and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.

³³ For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints,

³⁴ the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says.

We must also consider that the Greeks had only one word for both woman and wife (i.e. “gyne,” G1135). The same word that Paul uses in **1 Corinthians 14:34** is translated “wives” in many other scriptures such as **Matthew 19:8**; **Ephesians 5:25**, and **1 Peter 3:1**. So when Paul writes, “Let the women keep silent” he uses a word with two meanings. He may well be referring to “wives” who are unconverted and untaught” (i.e. the very one that prophesied that “Jesus is accursed.”

Notice in verse 31 that Paul said, “you can **all** prophesy one by one.” He did not say all men can prophesy, but that **all** can prophesy (i.e. men and women). Those who were not prophesying from the unction of the Holy Ghost need to be quiet! And those who are prophesying from the unction of the Holy Ghost need to do it one at a time. I can only imagine that Paul was anticipating that someone might say, “I just can’t control myself” but as verse 32 states, “the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets” which means that true prophets are not out of control; they have control over their spirits and their speaking.

Therefore, Paul did not discourage Christian women from prophesying or participating in church. However, he did discourage false prophesy, confusion and disorder (**1 Corinthians 14:33**).