

NOTES AND RESOURCES

- This topic can be upsetting and challenging, so be respectful of varied opinions, and don't assume everyone thinks and feels the same way about it.
- Try to avoid sweeping, generalized language. Instead use language like: "What I have found," "How I see it," or "What makes sense to me is . . ."
- Be cautious of saying, "The Bible is clear on . . ." We all bring cultural assumptions and biases to the text. We all benefit when we see our biases and assumptions more clearly.

PASSAGES WHERE JESUS IS EMPOWERING TO WOMEN IN HIS CULTURE.

- Jesus revealed himself as the long-awaited Messiah – to a woman first (John 4:25-26)
- In a culture where men didn't speak to women in public, Jesus consistently engaged women in conversation (John 4:27).
- Women were included in his expanded group of disciples (Mark 15:41).
- Mary of Bethany was permitted to sit next to men as she learned from Jesus teachings, something unheard of in that culture (Luke 10:39).
- Following his resurrection, Jesus first appeared to a woman even though a woman's testimony would carry no weight in a court of law at that time (John 20:1-16).

A NOTE ON THE COMMENTARIES BELOW

The two Scriptures below have led many in the church to the understanding that women can't hold leadership positions in the church. The commentary below offers a differing interpretation that is more empowering to women. The commentary set is from N.T. Wright's "For Everyone" series.

COMMENTARY ON 1 TIMOTHY 2:10-12

"The key to [1 Timothy 2:10-12], then, is to recognize that it is commanding that women, too, should be allowed to study and learn, and should not be restrained from doing so (verse 11). They are to be 'in full submission'; this is often taken to mean 'to the men', or 'to their husbands', but it is equally likely that it refers to their attitude, as learners, of submission to God—which of course would be true for men as well. Then the crucial verse 12 need not be read as 'I do not allow a woman to teach or hold authority over a man' (the translation which has caused so much difficulty in recent years). It can equally mean: 'I don't mean to imply that I'm now setting up women as the new authority over men in the same way that previously men held authority over women.'" (NT Wright, Paul for Everyone: The Pastoral Letters: 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, 21-22).

COMMENTARY ON 1 CORINTHIANS 14:34

He clearly doesn't mean that no women must speak during worship. As we saw, chapter 11 assumes that women will take leadership roles in praying and 'prophesying' just as much as men will. And I simply don't think Paul has any agenda about keeping women in a downtrodden condition, as has often been suggested. What we have to reckon with is a possible scenario, or a set of possible scenarios, that might explain the sudden need for a commandment of this type.

The whole passage, and indeed most of this long chapter, is about speaking and being silent in public worship, and about making sure that everything is done out of a concern to build up God's people, and out of a belief that the God we worship is the God of peace, not of confusion or chaos. This suggests that one or both of the following problems may have occurred.

It is likely that the men and women were segregated during worship, as in synagogues, and as in some churches to this day in the Middle East and elsewhere. But if public worship was conducted in the main formal language of the day—in Corinth, obviously, mainstream Greek—many of the women, who might only understand their local dialects, would not always be able to grasp what was being said. (Like some other things in this letter, this isn't to say that Paul approves of a situation where women would be less educated than men, but he has to deal with the real problems he faces, not with an ideal situation.) As still sometimes happens today in such cases, the women might become bored and begin to talk among themselves. Or they might start calling across the central division to their husbands to explain what had been said. Either way, Paul says, this can be disruptive and should not be allowed.

That is one possibility. Another is that with Paul's instructions in verse 29, according to which the congregation should reflect on what a prophet said and 'evaluate' it, some of the women in the congregation might have taken it upon themselves to 'evaluate' what their own husbands had said, and do so rather too personally and sharply. In that case, it would be far better, Paul believes, to have them take the matter up at home, rather than airing what could be, at least by extension, a domestic disagreement within the context of public worship.

*Either of these may describe the situation Paul faced, or there may have been another possibility. We don't know. What is clear is that this is a particular problem posed from within the cultural setting of the time and that Paul's overriding concern is for order, peace and mutual upbuilding when the congregation comes together for worship, rather than for chaos, interruption, and dissension. (NT Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians*, 199-200).*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<http://juniaproject.com/why-i-support-women-in-church-leadership-30-seconds/>