

Some thoughts on  
Women's role in the church

Women's role in the church today is a very important subject, as every Bible subject should be. In our society the "equality of women" is an issue in most businesses and organizations and the church also has been influenced to reconsider this question. Fortunately we, in the church, have an infallible guide to help us in solving this apparent dilemma. The New Testament teaches plainly that women's role in the church and in all church activities is very important.

The Great Commission was given only to *the eleven*, Matthew 28:16. But all the new disciples (both men and women) were then taught to observe *everything* that Jesus had commanded the apostles, verse 20, implying that women also were to "go and teach."

Women's role in the ministry of Jesus is well documented throughout the Gospels. Their constant and consistent assistance and encouragement were very important to the work of the Lord. The women's participation in the spread of the Gospel was continued in the church, as exemplified by Paul's female coworkers.

The Apostle Paul had many women working with him throughout his ministry. Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28-32) of the Holy Spirit coming on both men and women was fulfilled in Acts 2:17, Philip's four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:8-9), Lydia (Acts 16), also note Priscilla *and* Aquila taught Apollos (Acts 18:24-27). These are just a few examples to illustrate the fact and importance of women's role in the church.

Probably the most important function of women in the church is to be Christian wives, the function for which they were created, Genesis 2:22-24. There may be some who try to marginalize or even denigrate this role of women in the church. God doesn't!! Many speak of the importance of elders and deacons, but never stop to realize there would be no elders nor deacons without wives! Wives are not just acceptable for the leaders, they are not *just* a helpmate, they are a necessity! No wives implies no elders and no deacons, therefore no Biblical leaders in any church!!

When two Christians marry they become one flesh, but that is not the only way in which they are joined. Because of their mutual love, honor and respect they influence each other in every area of life! This mutual edification, encouragement and influence is a constant force in their changing lives. I think I can safely say that no man after being married for many years to a Christian wife will ever be "the same man" after that wife dies. The constant presence of a Christian wife is also a constant encouragement, balance, influence and sometimes "muffler." She dulls the pain from insult and embarrassment experienced by her husband as he lives the life of a Christian. She is uplifting during times of depression caused by the many present day troubles of most churches. She provides a different perspective when weighing the options of many decisions required of every Christian. She is the source of laughter in times of gloom. She contributes hope when it seems to be lacking. She offers inspiration when the passion seems to be gone. She adds to his spiritual knowledge in daily Bible studies and discussions. She assists in growing closer to God during regular mutual prayers. ***Her regular private prayers for him are the source of his strength as a blessing from God.***

When that constant influence is removed the man is never "the same." Maybe that is why elders and deacons are required to be married, i.e. the constant and direct effect of a wife is beneficial, needed and necessary. Would any elder say that the influence of his wife was negligible or will not be missed? Would any man, after a long happy marriage to a Christian woman say after her death that her future contribution to the man's attitudes, efforts, initiatives and decisions would have been minimal or not needed nor missed? Would any Christian man say he will make the same decisions, act with the same way, show the same love, give the same consideration to all questions as he did before his wife died? Anyone who can answer "yes" to any of these questions has missed out

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on the greatest blessings of married life and is making a very critical statement about his departed wife and/or their marriage.

Does the teaching of Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 apply to marriage?

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work:

If one falls down, his friend can help him up.

But pity the man who falls and has no-one to help him up!

Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.

But how can one keep warm alone?

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.

A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Anyone who reduces the wife to the position of just cook, housekeeper and/or additional wage-earner are denigrating the function of wives to their own detriment, for which they will answer to God. Anyone who does so is missing out on one of God's greatest blessings on this earth! It is equally true that any woman who is unwilling to submit to her husband and usurps (or tries to) more authority than given her by God will like wise "reap the whirlwind" in this life and on that great day of judgment.

After all this information about women's role in the family and in the church, can we therefore conclude that inspiration made no distinction between the Christian Work of male and female members of the church? Before we decide we must take note of several other facts established in the scriptures.

The following passage is very pertinent to the question of the proper relationship to be maintained between married men and women. Since these guidelines are not limited nor restricted they would apply at all times, including the time of worship. Ephesians 5:22-25,

**"22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her"**

For our purposes we choose only four of the many principles of living we can learn from this passage, followed by four other pertinent facts:

- 1) wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord, verse 22
- 2) the husband is the head of the wife, verse 23
- 3) wives should be submissive to their husbands in everything, verse 24
- 4) Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the church, verse 25
- 5) Jesus chose only men to be apostles, Luke 6:12-16.
- 6) Only men can be elders, but each one must have a wife, 1 Timothy 3:2
- 7) Only men can be deacons, but each one must have a wife, 1 Timothy 3:12  
The woman Phoebe, Romans 16:1, is discussed in detail in Appendix A.
- 8) Only men were selected for feeding the widows in Acts 6:3.

It seems obvious that some distinction is made by the Holy Spirit between the Christian work of the male and female members of the church. The important thing to remember is that **only** the Holy Spirit, through his word, can make that distinction! Since He has already made some differences in the work of men and women, examples

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1 through 8 above, is there any other distinctions we must consider? Yes there is. At least one more scripture must be considered: 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.

Sometimes it is beneficial to state the obvious. The verses mentioned so far were penned by Matthew, Luke and Paul at the direction of the Holy Spirit. They are therefore true, exactly correct (in the original language) and understandable, 2 Corinthians 1:13.

We must also note one more characteristic of the writings of the Holy Spirit: Every word chosen by the Holy Spirit is the very best choice to convey His idea to all people in every generation! Yes, 1 Corinthians was written to the church at Corinth, but its meaning was intended for all people for all time. Surely there is no doubt about every word of the New Testament being intended for all people for all time, unless the Bible itself gives us a limitation, for example 1 Corinthians 13 limits the spiritual gifts to Christians in the first century.

Before looking at 1 Corinthians 14:34 in detail we must take a diversion to establish a very important point of interpretation: The completeness of the scriptures.

This necessary diversion must precede the detail analysis of 1 Corinthians 14:34 because most of the confusion about these verses stems from the misuse of non inspired historical information to determine the meaning of the text.

### **The diversion**

Do we need any information outside the scriptures in order to understand the scriptures? I will be using seven scriptures and sufficient logic to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the answer to that question is a resounding: "No."

The first scripture to consider in this regard is 2 Timothy 3:16-17,

(NIV)

**16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

(ASV, v. 17) That the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work

(KJV, v. 17) That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

(KJV, v. 17) that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. ...

It seems that sometimes a passage can be quoted so much that the very familiarity of the words clouds their meaning. Could this be one of those passages? Is verse 16 sometimes quoted without regard to verse 17? All believers know that the Bible is inspired by God and the Word is good for teaching God's will. Is there more to it than that? The other words of this passage are also from God and therefore are equally important and correct.

The Word can/should be used to teach, rebuke, correct, and train, according to verse 16. This is true "*so that* the man of God," i.e. any Christian striving to please God, may be thoroughly equipped (NIV), complete, furnished completely (ASV), perfect, thoroughly furnished (KJV,) complete, thoroughly equipped (NKJV), for any and every single good work. Although "every good work" applies to all Christian activities in general, surely all would agree that worshipping God is a "good work" and therefore we are completely equipped by the scriptures

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to worship God is keeping with His wishes. If the scriptures will completely furnish us as to how to worship Him, then we need no information from outside the scriptures to know or understand how to worship correctly.

Think about the implications of that last paragraph. If the reasoning is correct then we need no information outside the scriptures to accomplish ANY good work because the scriptures give us all we need to accomplish any and every good work! If understanding The Word is a good work, then we need no information from outside the scriptures in order to understand the scriptures.

If the Old Testament was written for our learning (Romans 15:4, please read the entire verse carefully), surely we can learn, at least, this one truth from the last sentence of Leviticus 10:1-3, i.e. in worship we must do everything the Word tells us *and* nothing more!

Consider this syllogism:

Major Premise: No data from outside the scriptures is needed to do any good work, 2 Timothy 3:17,

Minor Premise: Understanding any scripture is a good work,

Conclusion: Therefore no data from outside the scriptures is necessary to understand any scripture,  
2 Corinthians 1:13

Although History, Archeology, Psychology and local culture may be interesting and beneficial subjects to study, none of that information is necessary to understand any of God's Word. If we allow this outside information to be the determining factor in deciding the meaning of any passage then that process can easily, and frequently, lead to a false conclusion.

2 Peter 1:3-4. (NIV)

**3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.**

(ASV) seeing that his divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness,

(KJV) According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness,

(NKJV) as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness,

The Holy Spirit says, through Peter, that "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness." This (everything we need) comes to us through our knowledge of Him. We get our knowledge of Him only through The Word, therefore this Word supplies us with everything we need for life and godliness. But understanding His Word is also a necessary part of having spiritual life and godliness. Therefore His Word gives us all we need, completely equips us, for understanding His Word.

Looking again at verse 4 with comments after certain phrases/clauses, we have:

**"through these** -- [his own glory and goodness, v. 3]

**he has given us his very great and precious promises** -- [which are only given to us through The Word]

**so that through them** -- [ i.e. his great promises]

**you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world..."**

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I am sure that I do not understand everything involved in "participating in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world." However I am sure that it is a great blessing to be desired and we are told here how to receive this blessing. Through His great and precious promises. By knowing them, believing them and accepting them, we may participate in the divine nature and escape the world's evil. But we only know His great promises through reading The Word. Therefore The Word, reading it and following it, is all we need to participate in the divine nature. But we also need to understand The Word in order to participate in the divine nature, for who would say we can have this blessing without understanding The Word. But if The Word is all we need to participate in the divine nature, and understanding The Word is also necessary to participate in the divine nature then The Word is all we need to understand The Word.

A recap of verses 3 and 4 of 2 Peter 1 is repeated here for convenience.

**3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.**

Logical analysis of verse 3:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness.  
Everything we need for life and godliness comes through our knowledge of Him.  
Our knowledge of Him only comes through His Word.  
Therefore His Word provides everything we need for life and godliness.  
Everything we need for life and godliness includes understanding His Word.  
Conclusion: Therefore His Word provides all we need for understanding His Word.

Logical analysis of verse 4:

God has given us His very great and precious promises.  
Through His great promises we may participate in the divine nature and escape the world's corruption.  
We only get His great and precious promises through The Word.  
Therefore His Word is necessary and sufficient for us to participate in the divine Nature,  
But we also need to understand His Word in order to participate in the Divine Nature.  
Conclusion: Therefore His word is necessary and sufficient for us to understand His Word.

To deny either of the above conclusions you must deny at least one of the preceding statements. Because we all love the truth please send me any criticisms of the above logic: c2baird@charter.net

Romans 16:25-26 (NIV)

**25 ¶ Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, 26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him—**

**(ASV, v.26) but now is manifested, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, is made known unto all the nations unto obedience of faith:**

**(KJV, v. 26) 26 But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:**

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(NKJV, v. 26) **26 but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith—**

The mystery of the Gospel was hidden for long ages. Paul says that now, by the command of God, the mystery is revealed and written down so that all nations might believe and obey Him. This Gospel was/is sufficient for all nations to believe and obey. Was the Gospel written in such a fashion that it could be understood? Or was it insufficient and needed an outside source of information in order to be understood? Verse 26 says it was written at the direction of God. The purpose was stated: that all nations might believe and obey. To be believed and obeyed by all nations implies that all must understand it. If it was written for that purpose, did the Holy Spirit write it so that it could be understood in and of itself? If not then God, through the Holy Spirit either:

- 1) was **unable** to write it in such a fashion to be understood by everyone in and of itself, or
- 2) He **chose to** write it in such a fashion as not to be understood by everyone in and of itself.

If you conclude that any outside information is needed to understand any verse of the Bible, then you must believe 1 or 2, above, is correct!

Please consider the implications from believing either number 1 or 2, because either option is at odds with so many scriptures about the power of God and/or the love of God and His desire for all to be saved. The only rational solution is that both 1 and 2 are false, implying that the Holy Spirit wrote the Bible in such a way that anyone seeking the truth about God and His Will, with prayer and perseverance, can read and understand it apart from any other information outside the Bible.

1 Corinthians 4:6

**Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not take pride in one man over against another.**

Paul says "I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit." What things? In all of chapter 3 Paul says several times: do not follow men! Then in chapter 4 verse 6 he tells the Corinthians why he said this, so that you can learn the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written" and do "... not take pride in one man over against another." I sincerely pray that no man will face The Judge on that Day saying "I thought it meant that I could go beyond what was written by the Holy Spirit to get the necessary information to understand what was written by the Holy Spirit."

Paul here has used as particular example to illustrate the point that all should follow the "...saying 'do not go beyond what is written!'" Once we concede that going outside the scriptures is necessary, or even acceptable, in order to properly understand the scriptures, the flood gates are open. We can quote any person who has, what we deem to be, the *right* education and training to justify any position on any verse, thereby rendering the scriptures just another ambiguous, contradictory and unreliable story book. The use of commentaries is a perfect example of how this can happen. If you read any 10 commentaries on any one verse you will more than likely get 11 interpretations of that one verse. There are two axioms that should be followed concerning all commentaries: 1) When all else fails, read a commentary and 2) Never read a commentator to learn what he teaches, only read it to analyze his reasons for teaching it. (Yes, that includes this work also!)

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Galatians 1:6-9

**6 ¶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!**

There are many lessons that can be learned from this passage. All lessons taught by this scripture are very important because he who violates this teaching will be eternally condemned. Paul says it twice for emphasis. Therefore we must be sure of our understanding so that we do not suffer this horrendous consequence. It is usually conceded by all that these verses teach the Christian Gospel was completely taught in the first century, leaving no possibility of additional revelation from God "other than the one we preached to you" or "other than what you accepted." Please notice that any other gospel not preached, (past tense) or accepted by the Galatians in the first century will lead to condemnation, a very serious result! This, of course, applies to books like the Koran, the book of Mormon or any other writings which claim divine authority over our lives. But how does this apply to our question about requiring information outside the Bible to properly understand the message from the Bible?

The Mormons claim that their book doesn't add to or change the Gospel it only explains the Gospel. My standard response is "If it is different than the Bible, it is wrong. If it is the same as the Bible then we don't need it." (So far I have not received any response from them to that observation.)

To review: Some say that we must know the local cultural conditions from the city of Corinth, in order to understand 1 Corinthians 14:34. This position necessitates knowing something outside the Bible in order to understand the Bible. But this is exactly why the Mormons say we should read their book, i.e. in order to understand the Bible. It is true the Mormons claim divine authority for the Book of Mormon and our brethren do not make such a claim for the historical and cultural information they say we must know. But the information in both cases is: 1) from outside the Bible and 2) The Bible cannot be understood correctly without this particular information. If the divinely inspired word cannot be understood correctly without the cultural information written by *un*inspired men, does that not put the importance of non scriptural information on a par with inspired writings, i.e. both are needed to understand and practice God's will for us today? It would also be true that we would have to respect this new outside information as infallible with no possibility of change, because if in 3 years, or 5 years or 10 years we discovered new and more accurate historical information we would have to change our beliefs and practices again, proving either the previous change was a perversion of the gospel and/or the new change is that perversion as warned against in Galatians 1:6-9, bringing with it the promised condemnation.

The only reason we have confidence and complete comfort in believing and practicing the instructions in the Bible is that we know it is from God, who loves us and will never change His will for us. If we allow non scriptural information to determine how we understand God's Word then we are giving that outside information equal respect and allegiance and we are staking our eternal destiny on the mere hope that the non-inspired data will never change.

To clarify: If there is anything in The Word we can't understand without some non scriptural information, then the non scriptural information needed has equal value with the inspired writings, if not why not? Is it possible to find one verse or sentence that proves the Book of Mormon is not needed to serve God, and not use the same evidence with equal force against the necessity of non scriptural information to understand inspiration? If we

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need non scriptural information to understand 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, are there other cultural or historical facts we need to know in order to know other truths in the Bible?

**If no**, why then do we need this non scriptural information to understand only these two particular verses? What very unusual evidence can we imagine to support this unique principle of interpretation?

**If yes**, which Bible verses do we need outside information on in order to truly understand, and how do we decide which scriptures need that outside information to understand? What evidence can be provided to separate those scriptures which can be understood with only scriptural support and those scriptures which need non scriptural information to explain? And how do we infallibly get that non scriptural information and how do we know when we have it?

Without this outside information the most natural way to understand 1 Corinthians 14:34 is that women are not to speak in the worship service. With these cultural *facts(?)* about Corinth we now understand this passage to mean because of a particular problem at Corinth women at that time were not to speak in the worship service, but since we do not have that problem now, women can speak in the worship service, as long as the elders approve. Could this be an example of perverting the Gospel?

Maybe some very basic truths we hold now are really incorrect because we have not yet learned the pertinent cultural or historical *facts(?)* that will enlighten us to the actual truth. Surely we can see that requiring non scriptural information in order to understand the Bible is contrary to scripture, logic and common sense.

Revelation 22:18-19

**18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. 19 And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.**

If we can't understand any particular scripture without some evidence from a non scriptural source, then that non scriptural source is given equal respect as inspired writings, which means we are adding this new information to other inspired writings of the first century, thus adding to The Word of God. Someone might say "But we don't say these new writings are inspired, so we are not adding to God's Word."

Is that an improvement? Are we willing to put our soul in jeopardy by allowing first century cultural practices to explain inspired writings? Would God write anything so vague or ambiguous that we would then have to rely on mere men using non scriptural information to correctly explain what God couldn't or wouldn't clearly explain in His own writings? Please don't face the Judgment with that very illogical position.

Never read non-inspired writings to learn what they teach, only read them to analyze why they teach it! (And, yes, that advice also pertains to this writing!) And if that non-inspired writing depends on non scriptural information for his conclusions, discard them.

Any one of these six scriptures proves beyond a reasonable doubt that no outside information is needed to understand the scriptures. All six taken together are overwhelming evidence to support this conclusion. In case some are indifferent to the reasoning processes used above, please consider this last scripture. With the previously presented evidence surely this last verse will be conclusive.

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2 Corinthians 1:13

(NIV) 13 For we do not write to you anything you cannot read or understand.

(ASV) 13 For we write no other things unto you, than what ye read or even acknowledge,

(KJV) 13 For we write none other things unto you, than what ye read or acknowledge;

(NKJV) 13 For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand.

Does this inspired assertion by Paul apply only to this second letter to Corinth? Or does it apply to his first letter to the this same church as well? Maybe some would say that only the Christians at Corinth could understand. We today cannot understand without the help of uninspired historians who now are sufficiently correct to tell us how to worship God! Some of us think this is a general statement from the Holy Spirit that everything written by the Holy Spirit is understandable, in and of itself.

We do not need to know the societal peculiarities of Corinth in order to understand 1 Corinthians 14:34.

If this last sentence is not true then we have two very unacceptable implications:

**1) The first unacceptable implication is:** Most people in most countries and most past generations didn't/can't understand this passage because they don't have this particular historical or local cultural knowledge. For all the years that all those *uneducated* (at least on the one subject of the local cultural practices of Corinth) people read this passage, they could not understand it because they did not know this particular *fact(?)* of history. They practiced only male speakers in the worship only because they did not understand the real reason for Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 14:34. Now that we *know(?)* why Paul wrote it and that his reason does not apply today, we can now teach the real truth that anyone can speak in the worship as long as the elders condone it.

If needing outside information to understand 1 Corinthians 14:34 is true for this subject, is it true for any or all other subjects in the Bible? **EXAMPLE 1.** Was immersion practiced for baptism only because of the cultural practices of the time? Now that we are wiser, from our study of history and psychology, we know the real point of baptism is a symbolic washing, therefore any application of water is acceptable to God. This implies we don't need to practice immersion today! The actual meaning of the word baptism will not save the practice of *immersion* if the actual meaning of the words "it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church" will not keep women from speaking in the worship service! We must always follow the literal meaning of the words unless there is sufficient contextual evidence to understand it figuratively.

**EXAMPLE 2.** Should we also consider that the necessity of taking bread and fruit of the vine for the Lord's Supper is possibly because of the local cultural effect of this horrendous crucifixion of their leader. So they reacted so extremely as to remember that death by symbolically taking part of His flesh and blood through this weekly ritual. Now that we have a greater knowledge, through our advanced study of history and psychology, of why they did this we can now be relieved from this emotional and physical burden of symbolically taking part of His flesh and blood. We can now just remember His sacrifice only through prayer and/or a moment of silent meditation with no need to actually take the Lord's Supper.

It can be spiritually very dangerous to flippantly discard both examples 1 and 2 as nonsense without showing very clearly how these two examples are different from the necessity of knowing the local culture of Corinth before we can understand 1 Corinthians 14:34.

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**2) The second unacceptable implication is:** No one will every be confident of the meaning of this passage (and many others) because, to this day, the societal peculiarities of Corinth (and many other historical and cultural trends of the first century) are still being debated. Is there anything more uncertain than the accuracy of the history and culture of the first century (with the obvious exception of what is written in The Word)? Would anyone look forward to facing our eternal Judge explaining that we practiced and taught a particular thing in our worship because we *thought* we knew *why* Paul (or any other writer) had written it? We then based our decision, our teaching, our practices, in worship for example, on that assumption. Is there anything in life that could have greater or more catastrophic consequences than taking that position to the judgment and having The Judge say "you were wrong, you should have just followed what was perfectly written through the Holy Spirit?"

**Summary of this diversion**

The scriptures plainly teach that the scriptures are all we need in order to understand the scriptures. The necessary implications from denying this axiom are totally unacceptable.

Would God write His Word in such a way as to require a particular fact of history to be known in order to understand His message? If so, what other scriptures do we think we know, while in fact we don't, because there is some fact of history we have not yet learned that would explain them differently??

Let us all agree to these two principles of interpretation:

- 1) **WE DO NOT KNOW WHY ANY WORD OR SENTENCE OF THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN, UNLESS THE SCRIPTURES TELL US!**
- 2) **IF WE ARE NOT TOLD WHY, WE DON'T NEED TO KNOW WHY IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THE MESSAGE!**

Please consider these implications very seriously. They will have a great influence on understanding the following message from our God, to whom we will all, one day, give an account for our beliefs and practices.

**Return to The Text of 1 Corinthians 14**

It may be difficult for some to accept the teachings of 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 but it is certainly not difficult to understand them.

**... As in all the congregations of the saints, 34 ¶ women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. 35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.**

The first question to ask is: What is the context of these verses?

The whole of chapters 12 -14 deal with various aspects of the gifts of Holy Spirit. Chapter 12 lists and defines the Gifts and specifies their importance. Chapter 13 compares the Gifts with Love showing the greater importance of Love and the temporary nature of the Gifts. Chapter 14 deals with all the mishandling of the Gifts by the Corinthian church. Chapter 15 starts the new subject of the resurrection and the detail events at the end of time. We therefore need to concentrate on chapter 14 for our context.

The following phrases or clauses, from the NIV, are important to establish that the whole of chapter 14 is dealing with the worship service at Corinth:

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- v 4. "...he who prophesies edifies the church."
- v 5. ""...so that the church may be edified"
- v 6. "Now, brothers , if I come to you and speak in tongues..."
- v 12. "...try to excel in Gifts that builds up the church"
- v 19. "But in the church ..."
- v 23. "so if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in a tongue..."
- v 24. If someone "comes in while everybody is prophesying..."
- v 25. "God is really among you!"
- v 26a. "What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together ... "
- v 26b. "... be done for the strengthening of the church"
- v 31. "For you can all prophesy in turn..."
- v 33b. "As in all the congregations of the saints ..."
- v 34. "...in the churches."
- v 35.b. "...in the church."

All of these phrases/clauses plus several others plainly show that the discussion is concerning events or actions of the Christians in Corinth during the cooperate worship service.

The text of 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 is repeated here for convenience:

**... As in all the congregations of the saints, 34 ¶ women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. 35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.**

We must now focus on the immediate context of verses 34 and 35. In the context of a worship service what do these words mean? The most basic rule of Bible understanding is that the meaning of all words and phrases must be determined by the context in which they are found. No word or clause in verse 34 or 35 can be understood without considering the other words and clauses of these two verses. This "context rule" is true for every word and clause in the Bible. All Bible students and scholars actually do agree on this one principle.

Whatever the words in verses 34 and 35 mean, the application is in "all the congregations of the saints," verse 33b. That is, these instructions are general instructions for every church in all countries for all time.

**"women should remain silent in the churches."** We cannot take this clause out of context and conclude that women cannot make any noise at all. If this clause was alone, with no reference to any context then it would be true that all women when they are "in the churches" must make no sound at all. Not even coughing, sneezing, crying, correcting their children or singing!! This is an example of why we *cannot* ignore the context of any word, phrase, clause or sentence while, at the same time, claiming to love the truth.

The very next clause must be part of the context and says **"They are not allowed to speak ..."** This part of the context tells us what type of silence is being commanded. Women are be silent in so far as speaking is concerned. This second clause limits the degree or type of silence demanded, i.e. no speaking. This may seem so obvious to many. Why, therefore, spend so much time on this point. Many others are want to say, and some actually do say "If women are to keep silent then they can't sing either." Anyone who thinks or says this, is giving a perfect example of taking a passage, on a clause in this case, out of context. Paul knows this is so important that he, being directed by the Holy Spirit, repeats it in the very next verse with these words "it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church." Saying it twice in two consecutive verses is sufficient for any who love the truth. This

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also removes any doubt about the need of women, and all others, to sometimes make noises of coughing, sneezing, correcting children, etc.

I pray it is perfectly clear to all that the silence demanded of the women here does not include singing. The only silence demanded is clearly identified as speaking, twice in two verses. If women are to maintain silence in the worship service in other ways than speaking, that restriction must be specified in some scriptures. Until other scriptural evidence is presented, women's silence in the worship service is limited to speaking, as specified in these two verses. For any who may want to extend the command of silence to activities other than speaking with no scriptural evidence, they will be very sad trying to explain that to Christ on Judgment Day, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Romans 14:12.

In support of the position that the words of 1 Corinthians 14:34 do not really mean what they say, some have mentioned the particular subject of chapter 14 as being the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and then concluded that women are to be silent in the church only in so far as spiritual gifts are concerned, i.e. during the worship service the women were not to use their spiritual gifts to speak, i.e. pray or prophesy. And since we no longer have spiritual gifts today women are no longer bound by this limitation of not speaking.

**If** this last conclusion is true **then** the women who did not have the spiritual gift to speak in tongues or prophesy could speak anytime they wanted in the church. Is this really what Paul is saying? If you have the gift of prophesy or tongues whereby your statement would be from God and therefore correct in every detail you could not speak, but if you had no spiritual gift and your comment was just a human thought it would be acceptable for you to speak at your own discretion. Is this a reasonable situation for the Holy spirit to endorse? Could any rational person think this was what 1 Corinthians 14:34 was saying? Instead of being blessed by having this gift to prophesy or speak in tongues, you were hindered or limited in your speaking in the church while worshipping the very God who had given you the gift, but if you did not use a spiritual gift then you could speak. This conclusion is totally untenable.

In addition to that very unusual deduction it should be asked "If He meant to limit only the women who spoke in tongues or prophesied why didn't He say that?" In the 14th chapter alone some form of the word *speak* is used 24 times. Sixteen of those 24 times some form of the word *tongue* is used in the same verse telling us specifically the type of speaking under discussion was the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues. Two additional times some form of the word *prophesy* was used, again making it clear what type of speaking was being done. Three times the word *speak* is used with neither the word *tongue* nor the word *prophesy* appearing with it in the same verse, but the adjacent verse made it clear the *speaking* being done was through a special gift of the Holy Spirit, see Appendix B for a detail list of every scripture in chapter 14 that uses *speak*.

The point is that every time the word *speak* is used in the fourteenth chapter the immediate context makes it clear that the subject is speaking with the gift of tongues or prophesy. The only exceptions are verses 34 and 35 where no contextual evidence is present to limit the speaking to the type using the Holy Spirit to prophesy or speak in tongues. Paul could have written "women cannot speak in tongues in the church services" or "When the church is speaking in tongues or prophesying the woman are to be silent" or "Women are not to use their spiritual gifts in the church services" or many other word choices to say or imply the same thing. Since Paul did not specify any of these exceptions in his writings, neither can we.

These two verses simply say "they are not allowed to speak" and "it is a disgrace for a woman to speak in the church." Without the written words to imply a restriction to the type of speaking being done, we must understand the context to mean just what the words say, no more, no less. These two verses are general

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instructions, not limited to the use of a gift of the Holy Spirit, and applying to "all the congregations of the saints," verse 33b. Scriptural evidence is needed to conclude otherwise.

To give support to the idea for a general command in the mist of specific instructions about miraculous gifts, consider verse 33, "For God is not a God of disorder but of peace." Does this comment only apply to meetings where spiritual gifts are present, or it is a general guideline for all meeting of the church? Look also at verse 40, "But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way." This also must be considered as a general instruction for all meetings of the church not just those meetings were spiritual gifts are involved. So if there are general instructions immediately before and immediately after verses 34 and 35, it is not at all unreasonable to conclude that verse 34 and 35 are also general guidelines for all church meetings for all time. The absence of detail information to the contrary makes this possibility a very strong probability.

**In objection** to this conclusion it has been mentioned that if 1 Corinthians 14:34 actually means what the words imply, "women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak...", then it would seem to conflict with Paul's admonitions in 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 concerning men and women praying and prophesying. Once again a careful reading of the context will easily resolve this apparent conflict. Paul's discussion in 11:1-16 are general instructions about how to pray and prophesy at all times, making only a distinction between men and women, with no mention of where these instructions apply. Since no restrictions are mentioned in the context as to where these instructions apply they are general guidelines to be followed at all times, limited only by 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and the time limit of the spiritual gifts.

Many have made the mistake of thinking that Paul is applying these instructions (11:1-16) just to the church assembly. This assumption is unfounded in scripture and logic. As an experiment, start reading in 1 Corinthians 10:27 and pause after each verse and ask yourself "Are these comments applying to just the church assembly?" The answer after verse 27 is "Of course not. This sentence has nothing to do with the church assembly." Continue reading, mentally stopping after each verse and ask the same question. As you start through chapter 11 you might be surprised that the answer to your question has not changed. There is no word or group of words that say, imply or hint at a change in the location as to where the instructions apply. Chapter 11 verses 1-16 are general instructions applying to all places where is appropriate to pray or prophesy. However we do have 14:34-35 restricting the women from speaking in the church assembly. For a detail explanation of 11:1-16 see the article "Head Covering" on the website: [cliffbaird.wordpress.com](http://cliffbaird.wordpress.com)

These two verses (1 Corinthians 14:34-35) limiting a previously stated general guideline is not unusual. **EXAMPLE 1:** We have Jesus saying "...and to him who would borrow, turn him not away." A general statement implying that anytime anyone wanted to borrow from you, you must lend him anything he wants. Thankfully we also have 1 Timothy 5:8, Ephesians 4:28 telling us we must care for our family and work with our hands to earn money in order to help others, thus implying that we must keep back enough money for those purposes. **EXAMPLE 2:** the whole of chapter 14 makes no distinction between men and women, until we get to verses 34 and 35 which then restricts all the previous verses, to apply only to men, as the women are to be silent.. **EXAMPLE 3:** The Great Commission, Mark 16:15, i.e. "go unto all the world." This would imply all must be missionaries. Again we have other verses that limit this general statement, such as the existence of a local church implying some stayed home to form a church to serve the local community, plus many other verses saying or implying that not every single soul must be a foreign missionary. I'm sure you can think of many other examples.

**In Summary:** It is clear that 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 is not limited to the church assembly but are general instructions applicable anywhere praying and prophesying are appropriate, which can be limited or restricted by

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any verse(s) so designated by the Holy Spirit, i.e. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. Much more evidence on this subject is given by the article "Head covering" on the website ([cliffbaird.wordpress.com](http://cliffbaird.wordpress.com)).

**In Summary of "Women's role in the Church,"** it has been proven beyond a reasonable doubt that women can function in the church in any capacity except:

- 1) Women can not be an elders,
- 2) Women can not be a deacons,
- 3) Women cannot speak in the Worship service,
- 4) Women must be in subjection to their husbands.

With all this information in mind, with humility and a strong love for the truth in our hearts, let us review these 3 short verses again with a fresh outlook and ask ourselves "Which word in these 3 verses is ambiguous or difficult to understand?"

**... As in all the congregations of the saints, 34 ¶ women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. 35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.**

Must consider v. 36 also. It adds evidence to the conclusion and explains the verse in context better than the "traditional" method, with no conflicting implications for any other scriptures.

If we pray for wisdom, as we must, James 1:5-8, if we love the truth, as we must, 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12 (especially verse 11) then we will, ... repeat WILL, be able to understand these verses without any necessary help from uninspired writers.

When we and our congregation practice the teachings of these plain and simple words we will be happier because we will be more pleasing to God.

## Appendix A

### Romans 16:1, was Phoebe a deaconess?

The answer to this question is based solely on the translation of the Greek word *διακονον*, therefore we must pursue the details of the Greek meaning. This particular Greek word is used only one other place in the New Testament, i.e. Romans 15:8. The first place to look for our answer is the various translations. A few examples follow:

	Romans 15:8	Romans 16:1
John Wycliffe (1382)	"a minister"	"in the service of the church"
John Purvey (1395)	"a minister"	"in the service of the church"
William Tyndale (1526 & 1534)	"a minister"	"a minister of the congregation"
Geneva Bible (1599)	"a minister"	"a servant"
KJV,	"a minister"	"a servant"
NKJV,	"a servant"	"a servant"
ASV,	"a minister"	"a servant"
NASB,	"a servant"	"a servant"
NIV,	"a servant"	"a servant"
ESV,	"a servant"	"a servant"
YLT (Young's Literal Translation)	"a ministrant"	"a ministrant"

Next we must check the interlinears:

Berry's Interlinear (1897) --	"a servant,"	"a servant,"
Marshall's Interlinear (1958) --	"a minister"	"a minister"
Brown & Comfort (1990) --	"a servant"	"a deacon"
William Mounce (2008) --	"a servant"	"a servant"

Please note that from the first English translation by John Wycliffe in 1382 until sometime after the ASV of 1901 this Greek word was never translated by the English *deaconess*. The ESV, NASB, NIV, and ASV give the possibility of "deaconess" in the footnote. Many of the more modern translations use *deaconess* in the text of Romans 16:1, but I could find no translation which gave *deaconess* in the text or even as a footnote in Romans 15:8. This just proves the obvious: only the context can choose the correct word from a list of valid options.

Checking the two most prominent Lexicons for the meaning of *διακονος*; the root word from which *διακονον* is derived:

BDAG: generally, one who is busy with something in a manner that is of assistance to someone.

1. one who serves as an intermediary in transaction, i.e. *agent, intermediary, courier*.
2. one who gets something done, at the behest of a superior, i.e. *assistant* to someone. ...  
... (the English derivatives 'deacon' and 'deaconess' are technical terms, whose meanings varies in ecclesiastical history and are therefore inadequate for rendering NT usage of *διακονος*)

Thayer: one who executes the commands of another, especially of a master, i.e. a servant, attendant, minister.

1. universally: of the servant of a king, Matt. 22:13. If "the church" is in the context: of one who does what promotes the welfare prosperity of the church, Col. 1:25

2. a deacon, one who, by virtue of the office assigned to him by the church, cares for the poor and has charge of and distributes the money collected for their use.
3. a waiter, one who serves food and drink, John 2:5, 9.

From all the above evidence it is clear that many English words could possibly be used to translate our Greek word, διακονον. This word is from the root word διακονος. Some form of this root word is used 29 times in the New Testament. Of these 29 uses only Philippians 1:1, and four times in the passage from 1 Timothy 3:8-13 use the English word *deacon*. This is true for the KJV, NKJV, ASV, NIV. This simply illustrates the more common translation is to use some word other than deacon, such as *servant*.

The most important thing to remember is only the context can determine the correct English word to use to translate any Greek word!! The Context is:

*Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church that is at Cenchreae: 2 that ye receive her in the Lord, worthily of the saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever matter she may have need of you: for she herself also hath been a helper of many, and of mine own self.*

High praise indeed from Paul and the Holy Spirit. But the degree of praise and/or her importance to the work is not the question (compare this to verses 3-5a, regarding Prisca and Aquila ).

Her value to Paul and his work is beyond question. Her sincerity, Christian spirit, generous Labor and great example are not doubted but should be admired, remembered and followed. The only question is "was she a deaconess?" Given all the above evidence supporting an alternative translation, such as *servant, minister, helper*, etc. we can conclude that Phoebe was not a deaconess for four reasons:

- 1) there is insufficient supporting the translation as *deaconesses*.
- 2) if *deaconess* is the correct translation then all the English speaking people for almost 600 years (John Wycliffe in 1382 until after the ASV of 1901) could not have known the truth that women could be deacons. -- Would God have allowed that ignorance to prevail for almost 600 years? and
- 3) There is no such thing as a deaconess. If a deaconess is defined as a female deacon then that is a contradiction in terms, i.e. a deacon must be a husband, there can be no such thing as a female husband, therefore there is no such thing as a deaconess.
- 4) We have no information to identify which active females Christians should/can have this office of deaconess, if indeed it does exist. Would God allow an office in the church for female Christian then give us no way to decide who or how to attain this office??

With all this evidence it seems reasonable to conclude that Phoebe was not a deaconess.

## Appendix B

Every occurrence of the word **speak** in 1 Corinthians 14

- 1 Corinthians 14:2 For anyone who **speaks** in a tongue does not **speak** to men but to God. Indeed, no-one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit.
- 1 Corinthians 14:3 But everyone who prophesies **speaks** to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.
- 1 Corinthians 14:4 He who **speaks** in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.
- 1 Corinthians 14:5 I would like every one of you to **speak** in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who **speaks** in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.
- 1 Corinthians 14:6 Now, brothers, if I come to you and **speak** in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction?
- 1 Corinthians 14:9 So it is with you. Unless you **speak** intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be **speaking** into the air.
- 1 Corinthians 14:11 If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the **speaker**, and he is a foreigner to me.
- 1 Corinthians 14:13 For this reason anyone who **speaks** in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says.
- 1 Corinthians 14:18 I thank God that I **speak** in tongues more than all of you.
- 1 Corinthians 14:19 But in the church I would rather **speak** five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.
- 1 Corinthians 14:21 In the Law it is written: "Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will **speak** to this people, but even then they will not listen to me," says the Lord.
- 1 Corinthians 14:23 So if the whole church comes together and everyone **speaks** in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?
- 1 Corinthians 14:27 If anyone **speaks** in a tongue, two—or at the most three— should **speak**, one at a time, and someone must interpret.
- 1 Corinthians 14:28 If there is no interpreter, the **speaker** should keep quiet in the church and **speak** to himself and God.
- 1 Corinthians 14:29 Two or three prophets should **speak**, and the others should weigh carefully what is said.
- 1 Corinthians 14:30 And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first **speaker** should stop.
- 1 Corinthians 14:34 women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to **speaking**, but must be in submission, as the Law says.
- 1 Corinthians 14:35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to **speaking** in the church.
- 1 Corinthians 14:39 Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid **speaking** in tongues.