

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

"...Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body." - Ephesians 5:23

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THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE LORD'S CHURCH

First Corinthians 14:34-35

by Ted J. Clarke

INTRODUCTION

Our last article on this topic dealt with First Corinthians 11:2-16 (March 1997). Please consult that article for introductory material regarding First Corinthians.

There are some people in the denominational religious world who have long believed that women should have leading public roles in the church (specifically in worship) equal to that of men. Numerous books have been published over the past ten years promoting these views, and a number of authors have responded in opposition to these ideas. There have been many women who have preached for some Pentecostal churches and independent churches in the past, but recently some of the mainline denominations have appointed women as preachers and priests. Several other religious groups are struggling with this idea or changing in their views on the roles of women in the church.

In churches of Christ there are those who believe it is time for us to reconsider our past views and they are pushing hard for changes to incorporate women into leadership roles. We are delighted to re-study any doctrine at any time with anyone, publicly or privately. However, the "change agents" among us do not really want a dialog. They want to present their false doctrines without having to meet the arguments of those of us who oppose their teaching. While some of us are ready to "contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3, ASV) and "set for the defense of the gospel" (Philippians 1:17), those opting for change want to promote their man-made doctrines unopposed. Jesus said that there will always be men like that, men who love "darkness rather than light because their deeds [are] evil" (John 3:19-21). At this time these men are promoting expanded roles for women which include allowing them to lead the assembled church in worship, although most "change agents" who want to see women lead in some ways stop short of contending that they can be placed in the role of

elders in the church. However, this hesitation will soon be overcome as the roles women play increase in various religious groups and in our own churches. If we can ignore some Scriptures that prohibit women from leadership roles in worship, there is no logical reason to expect the change to stop there. Soon, some of those among churches of Christ will be ignoring all that the Scriptures have to say about restricting the roles women can have by the authority of God.

Our previous article on First Corinthians 11:2-16 showed that there is a God-ordained hierarchy which positions woman under the authority of man. This present article will show that women were not authorized to take leading speaking roles in the worship of the New Testament church, and that the same kinds of restrictions apply to similar situations today.

WOMEN AND MIRACULOUS SPIRITUAL GIFTS

While the New Testament teaches that God did bestow similar miraculous gifts on both men and women (Acts 2:17; 21:8-9; 1 Corinthians 11:3-5; 12:4-12; 14:1-2, 12-15, 26-35), it also teaches that these gifts were temporary in purpose (Mark 16:17-20; 1 Corinthians 13:8-13; Ephesians 4:8-16). [See the July and August 1996 issues of FCGN for a discussion on the cessation of miracles.] During the time that miraculous gifts were operational, there were restrictions governing their usage. The Corinthian church had an abundance of these gifts, but were given to an improper use of them. Paul seeks to correct these abuses in chapters 12-14 of First Corinthians.

There is nothing related to our spiritual growth, worship, and service to God and man that miraculous gifts provided the first century church that is not available to us today through the inspired Word of God. Just as some in the Corinthian church had taken a childish "look at what I can do" attitude about their genuine miraculous powers, there are some today

who are equally childish about their desires to have these gifts (1 Corinthians 12:14-15; 13:1-3; 14:20, 26). Of course, no one **today** is truly miraculously gifted with such powers from the Lord, but many pretend to be, even claiming to use them in ways that prove to be contradictory to what the apostle Paul wrote in First Corinthians 12-14.

WORSHIP SERVICES IN CORINTH

There can be no doubt that the apostle was seeking to correct various abuses that had crept into the worship of the church in Corinth, when they were "come together," beginning in 11:17 through 14:40. Part of those abuses in worship involved the misuse of miraculous gifts (14:12, 19, 23, 26-40).

One can readily see that besides speaking in tongues (human languages) which no one present in the assembly knew, and everyone clamoring to have a leading part in the worship, that women were speaking out publicly in the worship. Paul gave teaching to correct all of these abuses of the worship assemblies.

The goal of all worship is to first worship God; and second, "Let all things be done unto edifying" (14:26). Three times Paul commanded absolute silence regarding particular worship situations. **First**, he commanded that if there was no one present to interpret the languages spoken by those who spoke in tongues, "let him [the tongues-speaker] keep silence in the church" (14:28). **Second**, the miraculously gifted prophets also had a procedure to follow. If one prophet was speaking and something "be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace" [keep silence, ASV] (14:29-32). **Third**, although there were spiritually gifted women in the church at Corinth, Paul commanded, "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. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church" (14:34-35).

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FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS**P. O. Box 251****Mammoth Spring, AR 72554**

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Phone (870) 625-3217

*(Continued from page 1)***THE MEANING OF "KEEP SILENCE"**

A form of the same Greek word for "silence" is used in each of the three cases above. In 14:28 and 14:34 it means "say nothing, keep silent."¹ In 14:30 it refers to one who is in the process of speaking and means "stop speaking, become silent."² It should be obvious from its use with the prophets and tongues-speakers that it does not mean that these men could not say anything at all in worship, but that they were to be silent regarding the particular situation under consideration. This also has a crucial application which we will make shortly regarding the prohibition of women speaking in the worship services. Some have contended that since the Greek word here means absolute silence, that these services must have been special worship services where only miraculous spiritual gifts were exercised. Accordingly, it is suggested that we do not have any such services today, since these miraculous gifts are done away (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:8-13; Ephesians 4:8-16). One argument made for these being special services is that since absolute silence was commanded of the women, then they could not even sing or make public confession that they believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. But, since we know that congregational singing was the practice of churches in the New Testament and that all (women included) are to make public confession of one's faith in Christ, then the worship services in

First Corinthians 14 must have been different from the regular worship of the church where women could sing and publicly confess Christ (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Romans 10:9-10).

However, it does not seem necessary to resort to such an explanation as the one above. It is true that the context of chapter 14 involves use of miraculous gifts in public worship to God, but these were not necessarily special worship services, separate from the normal worship services. In the absence of the completed revelation of the New Testament, which was still in the process of being revealed when First Corinthians was written, it is most likely that the exercise of miraculous gifts was necessary to instruct and guide a congregation in each worship assembly in areas not yet revealed and confirmed. Also, according to verses 23-25, these were worship services which were open to the "unlearned and unbelievers," so that Paul gave instructions governing this situation. I do not see that anything is gained by contending that these were special services, unlike anything we have today. Furthermore, it seems to me that if we contend that they had worship services different than we have today, because of the use of miraculous gifts, someone could argue that we can have different worship today than they had in the first century because we do not have those same gifts. In fact, some are arguing that we should allow the Holy Spirit to directly influence our worship today, much like Pentecostalism has argued for the direct operation of the Spirit in their worship services for decades. Is the Holy Spirit going to direct our worship in ways different from the avenues of worship used by the first century church? Absolutely not! Under the direction of the Spirit-filled Word of God, we pray, preach, sing, contribute financially, and observe the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-34; 16:1-2). Did the first century church do the same thing? Of course they did. The only difference is that they followed the direction of inspiration through the Spirit-given miraculous gifts and today we follow the Spirit-inspired written Word.

The question is, does the silence imposed on women in these verses extend to the corporate worship of the church, where everyone is doing the same thing together, such as singing; or does it preclude a woman making a simple public confession of faith in Christ before the assembly? I do not believe that these two items fall within the context of Paul's command in First

Corinthians 14:34-35. Please consider the following comments on this issue by brother Don McWhorter.

Nothing in the context deals with the corporate worship in which the entire congregation is participating jointly. Instead, it deals with who is *leading* the congregation in that worship. If the silence imposed in this chapter is absolute and unconditional, then men would also be forbidden to sing in corporate worship or to confess the lordship of Jesus because verse 28 imposes the same silence on men that verse 34 imposes on women... Admittedly the situation involved such miraculous gifts, but to confine it to [that] circumstance narrows it much more than the context does. *The context involves individual vocal teaching in the form of a public discourse before a public assembly of the church. It is in this setting that the subject of silence is discussed for both men and women.* Don't miss that point. To do so is to miss the point that is the key to the entire chapter.³

Another twist, taken by those who are intent on expanding the role of women into leadership in worship, is to say that since these restrictions dealt with miraculous spiritual gifts that we do not possess today, then the prohibitions placed on women in the passage are not binding today. Really? Then there would not be any requirement for worship to be "edifying" (14:26), or the need that "all things be done decently and in order" as Paul stated in the conclusion of this chapter (14:40). To remove such requirements regarding worship would be to throw it open to the kind of wild activities that characterize some Pentecostal assemblies I remember from my childhood days, which may still be seen in some places. But, a point to be made here is, that if God would not permit miraculously gifted and inspired women in the first century to take leading roles in worship, **then there is certainly no authority, permission, or encouragement for uninspired women of today to take or accept such leading roles!**

SUBMISSION THROUGH SILENCE

The plainness with which Paul speaks in 14:34-35 helps us to understand the more difficult passage in 11:2-16. Evidently, Paul's intention in 11:2-16 was to show the need for the woman to be in submission to the man. He did not deal specifically with the topic of public leadership of the woman in the worship assembly until he came to 14:34-35. In this latter passage it is clear that there is a requirement for a woman's complete

silence in the areas of leading in public prayer, or delivering a public discourse by speaking in tongues or prophesying in the mixed public assemblies of the church. Therefore, whether or not 11:2-16 was dealing with public assemblies, Paul's emphasis was on the proper submission of women. He then shows in 14:34-35 that proper submission excludes women taking or receiving leadership roles in the worship of the assembled church.

Paul also shows that this submission of women in recognizing the restriction against leadership in worship is not a cultural conformity limited to the first century. He points to "the law" having established this matter long before first century culture. That "law" had to refer to the teaching of the priority of man over woman in creation, the woman being made for man (not man for the woman), and the fact that Eve was deceived into sin (cf. Genesis 2:18-24; 3:1-6, 16; 1 Corinthians 11:2-9; 1 Timothy 2:11-15). [See also the two articles in this series, "The Genesis Connection and the Role of Women in the Lord's Church," November and December 1996.]

The requirement of **submission** was so important that it was to show itself in **silence** regarding any leading role in public worship. Each command to "keep silence," even to the men of First Corinthians 14:28, 30, as well as the women in 14:34-35, related to the idea of public discourse in the assembly. This demand for silence was restrictive enough that the woman was not allowed to use questions as an excuse to speak out publicly in the worship assemblies. Such would be disruptive of the services, violating the type of silence imposed on her. This silence did not extend to speaking when singing in unison with the rest of the assembled church, nor would it exclude her necessary public confession of faith in Jesus as the Christ.

QUESTIONS FOR "HUSBANDS" ONLY?

Verse 35 tells inquiring women to ask their "husbands" at home, again citing as the reason that "it is a shame for women to speak in the church." The word "shame" means what is "disgraceful."⁴ One may ask, "What of unmarried women?" It is reasonable that since the "women" in this passage is said to be "any adult female... 1 Cor. 14:34f,"⁵ the more obvious reference to men would be men in general, "in contrast to women."⁶ If the word here does mean husband, rather than men in general, it is likely because most women

would be married, as are most men. However, even unmarried women would have some man in their families or circles of friends to whom they could direct their questions later and not disrupt the worship of the church. It could be a believing husband, but it might be a father, brother, uncle, a close friend, or an elder or preacher of the church. In the context of First Corinthians 14 there is no reason to limit the women and men in the text to husbands and wives, although the same words are sometimes used of husband/wife relationships (cf. Ephesians 5:22-33).

CONCLUSION

Although the use of miraculous gifts has passed, the principles regulating worship so that "edifying" takes place and that things are done "decently and in order" are still binding. This includes the prohibition of women speaking out in leadership roles in public worship assemblies. This restriction is rooted in the "law" given by God in Eden (Genesis 2 & 3; 1 Corinthians 11:3-9; 1 Timothy 2:11-15). One must ignore plain teaching in the Scriptures to say or do otherwise. Elders do not have the right to decide that they will let women speak out in leadership roles in the worship of the church. It is a shame upon them as elders and a shame upon the women who take on those responsibilities, **for God's Word prohibits the practice.** Thus, women taking leading roles in the public worship of the church can only come through the commandments of men and, as such, **it is vain worship** (Matthew 15:9). This is not a practice planted by the authority of God, and the practice and practitioners will be "rooted up" (Matthew 15:13-14). [Our next article to conclude this series will come in the fall, when we discuss 1 Timothy 2:11-15.]

ENDNOTES

¹ Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, & Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), "sigao," 749. Hereafter abbreviated as *BAGD*.
² Ibid.
³ Don McWhorter, *God's Woman: Feminine or Feminist?* (Huntsville, AL: Publishing Designs, Inc., 1992), 102-104. This is an excellent little book that I heartily recommend for your study on the subject of the role of women in the church. You may write the publisher at P.O. Box 3241, Huntsville, AL 35810.
⁴ *BAGD*, "aischros," 25.
⁵ Ibid., "gune," 168.
⁶ Ibid., "aner," 66. However, the authors say its use probably means "husband" in 1 Cor. 14:35.

That Was My Invitation

by Dean Fugett

It had been another one of those kind of weeks. You know, when everything seems to go wrong, the whole world seems to be against you, and you have no one who cares that you are hurting and needing a little lifting up. The boss seemed to be watching me, just waiting for me to make a mistake – and I did. Workers around me were snapping and grumbling, grabbing the best materials and opportunities. My bills all seemed to come due and extra expenses on the old car took too much of my pay check. Depression had set in and I just couldn't get my chin off the floor. I just didn't think I could take any more...

I was sitting there on Sunday morning wondering if life was worth living, if there was any valid reason to go on. Then I thought about religion. It seems that we always think about religion last; at least I did. I began to think about a couple of people at work who always seemed to have a smile, who were always considerate of others, who didn't jump into the "dog-eat-dog" fray, who always had a kind word when they spoke. I also remembered that one had mentioned to me several times that he would like for me

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to attend worship and study the Bible with him. I hadn't had time then, but now I remembered. They had said something about the church of Christ where they attended not far from my apartment. I decided. I dressed and made my way toward the church building that I had seen from time to time a few blocks away.

Worship had already begun, so I slipped onto a back pew, just to be in an atmosphere of spirituality to see if I could find something - anything - to pull this life back together. The words of the songs seemed written just for me. "Be with me Lord, I cannot live without you...", "Bring Christ your broken life..." The man who led the prayer seemed tuned in to my problems and my thoughts as he asked the Lord for help for the congregation in ministering to the hurting in their community and for the hurting to come to an understanding of God's willingness to heal and help. Then, the preacher seemed to be looking right at me as he spoke to my needs. He spoke of a Savior who loved me, who took the time to listen and help others during his life time as he taught them of a life that was better than anything they had known. He spoke of apostles and disciples who had spiritual help in bearing burdens greater than mine. Then, he spoke of an invitation offered by Jesus to everyone: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29).

This was what I needed!! He said that troubles would still come, but everyone in that building would help me carry the burdens, bear the toil, hold up my hands. He spoke of a new life, a new beginning, - "born again" by faith and baptism (Mark 16:15-16; John 3:3-5). Surely, this was my opportunity to get a new perspective and a new hope. They all stood and began to sing a song to "invite" me to accept what had been presented out of the Bible. This was MY INVITATION...

"I am coming to the cross; I am poor and weak and blind; I am counting all but dross: I shall full salvation find..." My thoughts were racing; my heart was pounding. This was MY invitation. I started to move - But then I heard something! Young people across from me were playing. They were giggling, talking, rude, disrespectful... Didn't they realize what was going on? My thoughts were in-

errupted. At the end of the pew two adults were playing with a baby. One lady was picking at her fingernails. Several were just standing, looking around, not singing. Some were packing items into their purses. Two men looked at their watches. Were they not aware that the Lord's invitation was being considered??? One family exited out the back door as they began the next verse. "Long my heart has sighed for thee; Long has evil reigned within; Now thy message comes to me..." Now the young people were dropping scrap pieces of paper on which they had been scribbling onto the floor. One young lady just stood chewing her gum. I began to look around the auditorium. Some were concentrating on the words of the song. "Here I give my all to thee..." Two little boys pushed each other to the floor; the parents laughed. A father picked up his child and walked out into the lobby for a drink of water. What are they thinking? Certainly not about the invitation - MY invitation! Did they care about my soul, my needs, my pain? They seemed so far away...

I pulled my thoughts back to My invitation, "Humbly at thy cross I bow, seeking thy salvation now." The last note was dying away. Many were returning their books to the racks. I wanted to cry, "WAIT!!" But it was over. Over! The moment was gone; the mood broken. This had been MY INVITATION but now it was past. I gathered up my needs, pain, loneliness and exited the auditorium, back into the abyss of my empty life. As I walked out among those who had surrounded me in the auditorium, my mind kept repeating "That was My invitation... but..." I never went back there!!!

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[Editor's Note: Brethren, this is a significant article on an important point. How many times have you or someone for whom you are responsible showed a careless or indifferent attitude during any part of our worship to God? Think of the potential for harm by such actions. In addition to dishonoring God by failing to worship, we can disrupt one's hearing of the sermon at just the point that person may need to hear, or as the article above teaches, we can disturb the thought processes which are working to lead someone to respond to the gospel invitation. None of our worship is unimportant! The invitation for souls to respond to God's grace should fill our hearts with anticipation and enthusiasm that one may become a child of God or an erring child will return. Make your worship full of spirit and truth!]

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GOD'S AUTHORIZED WORSHIP
- COLOSSIANS 3:17

- LORD'S SUPPER** - The New Testament and early church history record that Christians met on the first day of every week (Sunday) to worship God and remember Christ (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-34; 16:1-2).
- PRAYERS** - (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18).
- SINGING** - God's word authorizes only vocal music and specifically singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12). The New Testament shows no use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God by the church Christ established. Church history notes no such use for nearly 700 years after the New Testament was completed. It is an innovation of men, not of God.
- GIVING** - Free-willed, cheerful, generous, and every week (Acts 20:35; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
- PREACHING OF THE WORD** - The gospel of Christ, not men's doctrines nor entertainment, saves and strengthens us (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 1:18-23).

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