

I Corinthians 14:34-36
The complementarian position

For more information on this subject go to apptoteach.org theology file #407

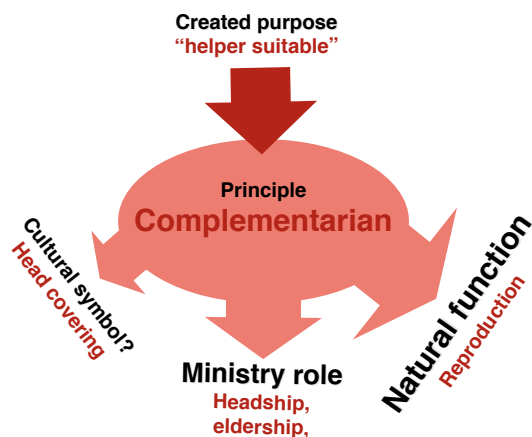
I Corinthians 14

“³³ . . . As in all the churches ³⁴ let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says. ³⁵ And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. ³⁶ Was it from you that the word of God {first} went forth? Or has it come to you only?”

It seems clear that Paul did not permit women to speak in church meetings.

Arguments for the complementarian position

1. **A normal reading of the text.** Some form of “gender roles” in church ministry is in view.
2. **Teaching and Practice of N.T.** There is a general consistency between doctrine and practice.
3. **History.** This view has long been preferred.
4. **Explanations of problem texts.** There are answers to text that seem to contradict this position.
5. **Application.** This view need not be applied in ways that marginalize women’s gifts.



I Corinthians 14

“³⁷ If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment. ³⁸ But if anyone does not recognize {this}, he is not recognized. ³⁹ Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. ⁴⁰ But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner.”

It seems clear that Paul gave this teaching the highest authority.

I Corinthians 11:1-16

“¹ Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.
“² Now I praise you because you remember me in everything, and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. ³ But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and **the man is the head of a woman**, and God is the head of Christ.”

Headship as source is never divorced from the idea of authority.

I Corinthians 14

“³³ . . . **As in all the churches** ³⁴ let the women keep silent in the churches

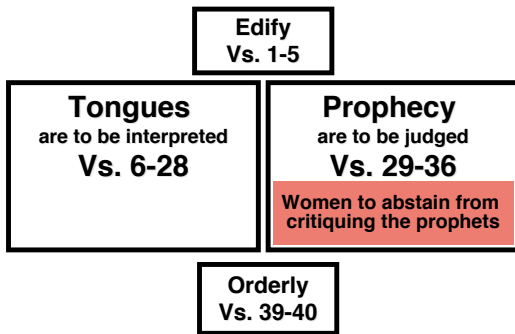
- ✓ **This phrase could go with verse 33 or with verse 34.**
- ✓ **Most interpreters feel the connection with verse 34 is the most natural.**
- ✓ **The fact that the plural “churches” is used later in verse 34 favors this.**
- ✓ **This suggests a broad (not occasional) application of the teaching.**

I Corinthians 14

“³⁴ let the **women** keep silent in the churches; for **they** are not permitted to speak, . . . ³⁵ And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a **woman** to speak in church.”

- ✓ **The issue is gender.** It is not about education, heresy, or disruptive behavior.
- ✓ **The issue may be limited to wives.** The same Greek word is translated “wife” and or “woman.”

The structure of I Cor.14



I Timothy 2

“¹¹ Let a **woman** quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. ¹² But I do not allow a **woman** to teach or exercise authority over a **man**, but to remain quiet.”

- ✓ **Wives (not all women) are in view.** The Greek word could mean either. The reference to Adam and Eve and the context (raising children) and the parallel in I Cor.14 and Eph.5 suggest this.
- ✓ **All women are in view.** Roles

I Corinthians 14

“³⁴ let the women keep **silent** in the churches; for they are **not permitted to speak**, . . . ³⁵ And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.”

- ✓ **The issue is speaking (teaching?).** The Greek word for “silent” (sigao) used here is not the word “quiet” (hesychia) used in I Tim.2:11 .
- ✓ **The kind of speech is unclear.** Challenging the prophetic message of a man may be the sense from the context.

I Corinthians 14

“³⁴ . . . but let them **subject** themselves, just as the **Law** also says. ³⁵ . . . for it is **improper** for a woman to speak in church.”

- ✓ **The reference to “Law” and “propriety” is unclear.** The most likely reference is to the accepted roles from O.T.
- ✓ **The object of “subject ” is also unclear.** It could mean “bring themselves under control.” Women were not to judge or challenge the prophetic message.

I Timothy 2

“¹¹ Let a woman quietly (**peacefully**) receive instruction with entire submissiveness. ¹² But **I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet (peaceful).**”

- ✓ **Heresy in Ephesus.** The women of Ephesus were out of line - teaching heresy without having been taught the truth.
- ✓ **Ascribed gender roles.** Roles in church life are to reflect the design purpose of God’s creation.

I Timothy 2

“¹¹ to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.”

- ✓ The term “to teach” is a common word usually meaning “public discourse.”
- ✓ Three facts about “exercise authority over.”
 1. It is used only here in the N.T.
 2. Before the N.T. it was “take authority” after Paul’s day it meant “be in authority.”
 3. When used with another infinitive it means “be in authority.”

I Timothy 2

“¹⁵ But {women} shall be preserved (saved) through the bearing (raising) of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.”

- ✓ An O.T. cultural understanding of gender roles. This reflects a cultural tradition that no longer makes much sense.
- ✓ The woman’s role in parenting is her greatest contribution. Her significance rests with her natural strength in nurturing and bonded relationships.

Biblical teaching - Conclusions

- ✓ Men and women are equal in their standing before God. Spiritual equality does not demand common roles.
- ✓ Ascribed roles are common in Scripture. Israel and the Levites are examples.
- ✓ Women have leadership and teaching gifts and abilities. Abilities do not equate with roles or positions.
- ✓ The leadership and teaching role of the church elder are given to men. This does not mean that women cannot teach or lead in many areas.

I Timothy 2

“¹³ For it was Adam who was first created, {and} then Eve. ¹⁴ And {it was} not Adam {who} was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression.”

- ✓ Midrash. Paul uses the O.T. to support a point while ignoring its original context and meaning.
- ✓ Creation order = design hierarchy, Roles reflect gender strengths and weaknesses. Women and men differ in ways that effect leadership and teaching.

I Timothy 3

“¹ It is a trustworthy statement: if any man (one) aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. ² An overseer then must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, . . .”

- ✓ Paul’s focus on “men” has more to do with their unique challenge. In Greek culture men could divorce while women could not.
- ✓ It is clear that Paul is gender specific in referring to overseers. If he felt that women should also aspire to eldership, he certainly would have made that clear here.

Application in the church

There should be some practical expression reflecting gender distinction in teaching and leadership.

The simplest application would be to recognize men as elders and then include women in ways (advisory counsel, staff, deacons) where their gifts could make an impact and their wisdom respected and valued.