

## A Woman's Work in the Local Church

### INTRODUCTION.

A. Within the religious world, there is a vast array of beliefs regarding the role of women within the church. Some religious groups have gone so far as to believe that women can serve any role a man may serve. Women have been appointed as “deaconess,” “pastors,” “ministers,” etc.

1. There are denominations which have altered the role of women in the “worship” services. For example, the United Methodists churches appoint “clergy” women to lead their churches.

2. In showing how far this digression has progressed, I would like for you to consider the example of the West Islip Church of Christ in West Islip, New York. The following is taken from their website at [www.wichurch.org](http://www.wichurch.org).

“We praise God joyfully and reflectively in worship services designed to let everyone participate—men and women, young and old. (For more information on women and men sharing equally in the church’s work, worship, and leadership, click here.)” ([www.wichurch.org](http://www.wichurch.org))

also . . .

“Our ministers, Katie Hays and Lance Pape, serve under the guidance of the Council. Katie Hays serves the congregation through preaching, teaching, and pastoral care; her areas of special focus are service and outreach. . . . Katie’s husband Lance Pape shares in the preaching, teaching, and pastoral care; his areas of special focus are worship and fellowship. In his spare time, Lance works to promote gender justice in Churches of Christ through his website, [Gal328.org](http://Gal328.org) . . .”

B. The aforementioned church is a part of a group of churches which promote “gender justice” within the churches of Christ. Lance Pape, one of the “ministers” for the West Islip Church of Christ manages a website dedicated to the promoting of “gender justice” in the churches of Christ. The website is called [Gal328.org](http://Gal328.org). According to the website, here is their definition of “gender justice.”

“In general, gender justice means recognizing that men and women are created by God, redeemed by Christ, and gifted by the Spirit truly without distinction or partiality. In Christian community, gender justice means encouraging both men and women to exercise their Spirit-given gifts in the church’s work, worship, and leadership, and celebrating the truth that the Spirit grants such gifts without respect to gender. Concretely, gender justice in the Church of Christ includes opening traditionally masculine leadership roles and activities (deacon, elder, minister,

worship leader, preacher, teacher, etc.) to women, and encouraging men to discover and cultivate their gifts for activities traditionally performed by women.” ([www.gal328.org](http://www.gal328.org))

- C. As is clearly indicated, there is a growing trend within some “Churches of Christ” to alter the God given roles for women within the local congregation. On the Gal328.org website, the following “Churches of Christ” have been identified as having embraced, to some degree, the concept of “gender justice.”
1. Bering Drive Church of Christ (Houston, TX)
  2. Bowie Church of Christ (Bowie, MD)
  3. Brookline Church of Christ (Boston, MA)
  4. Cahaba Valley Church, An Ecumenical Church of Christ (Birmingham, AL)
  5. Culver Palms Church of Christ (Los Angeles, CA)
  6. Malibu Church of Christ (Malibu, CA)
  7. Manhattan Church of Christ (New York, NY)
  8. Stamford Church of Christ (Stamford, CT)
  9. Stoney Creek Church of Christ (Stoney Creek, Ontario)
  10. West Islip Church of Christ (Long Island, NY)
- B. It is the purpose of this lesson to show God’s will regarding the role of women in the local church.
- C. In order to show the woman’s part in the work of the local church, we must address the question of what is the work of the local church.

## **I. FIRST THINGS FIRST.**

- A. I believe that all men and women are equal in the site of God.
1. Galatians 3:28 - *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* (NKJV)
  2. 1 Corinthians 11:8-12
    - a. *“For man is not from woman, but woman from man.”* (v. 8)
    - b. *“Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God.”* (vss. 11-12)

- B. However, as this lesson will show, the roles of men and women differ greatly. For instance, within the family:
  - 1. The husband is the head of the wife.
  - 2. The wife is to be in submission to her husband.
- C. Within the church, there are also separate roles for the men and the women. Remember, these roles do not affect their equality with God. All men and women are equal. However, men and women's role in the church differ.
- D. Let us show this by first considering the work of the local church.

## II. WHAT IS THE WORK OF THE LOCAL CHURCH?

- A. A work of the local church is to assemble together. There are different examples of the local church assembling together.
  - 1. **Purpose:** Worship assemblies. Consider the following acts which both edify (teach) the saints and worship the Heavenly Father.
    - a. Partaking of the Lord's Supper. (Acts 20:7) (Limited to the first day of the week.)
      - (1) Worship: proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.
      - (2) Teach: Reminds all who are present of the great price which was paid. It renews us and keeps us strong. (Cf. 1 Corinthians 11:29-30)
    - b. Laying by in store. (1 Corinthians 16:1-2) (Limited to the first day of the week.)
      - (1) Worship: Recognizing the significance of the Lord's work. Our willingness to give shows our appreciation to the Lord for all that He has done for us.
      - (2) Teach: It sets an example to the young and to the lost of how the work of the local church is to be funded.
    - c. Singing. (Ephesians 5:19) (Anytime the church assembles.)
      - (1) Worship: "*making melody in your heart to the Lord*" (Ephesians 5:19) and "*psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*" (Colossians 3:16)

- (2) Teaching: “*speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs*” (Ephesians 5:19) and “*teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.*” (Colossians 3:16)
- d. Praying. (1 Timothy 2:1-2) (Anytime the church assembles.)
- (1) Worship: “*I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men,*” (1 Timothy 2:1-2)
  - (2) Teaching: The righteous prayers which are led by righteous men also serve as an example to all who are present. The examples should teach everyone how to pray, for what to pray, and in what manner.
- e. Preaching (teaching). (Anytime the church assembles.)
- (1) Worship: Honor is shown to our Heavenly Father every time His word is heard and applied. Just as the psalmist did, set us show the same praise and gladness when we hear the word of the Lord.
    - (a) “*But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night.*” (Psalm 1:2, NKJV)
    - (b) “*I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.*” (Psalm 119:16, NKJV)
    - (c) “*Your testimonies also are my delight And my counselors.*” (Psalm 119:24, NKJV)
    - (d) “*And I will delight myself in Your commandments, Which I love.*” (Psalm 119:47, NKJV)
  - (2) Teaching:
    - (a) Paul and Barnabas assembled with the church at Antioch and taught many people. (Acts 11:26)
    - (b) Paul preached to midnight. (Acts 20:7)

- (c) The church at Corinth came together for edification. (1 Corinthians 14:23-26)
  - 2. **Purpose:** Tend to certain responsibilities. The apostles called the church together to make arrangements to care for the needy widows. (Acts 6:1-4)
  - 3. **Purpose:** To report results of evangelism. (Acts 14:27)
  - 4. **Purpose:** To discuss matters of difference. (Acts 15:4 - *“And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them.”* NKJV)
  - 5. **Purpose:** To discipline the unruly. (1 Corinthians 5:4-5)
- B. A work of the local church is evangelism.
- 1. Paul referred to the church as the pillar and ground of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:15)
    - a. The Greek word for pillar means, “1) a pillar 2) a column . . . 3) a prop or support.” (Thayer)
    - b. The Greek word for ground means, “1) a stay, prop, support” (Thayer)
  - 2. The local church is to support and uphold the Truth. The local church accomplishes this by two means:
    - a. By publicly teaching the gospel to the lost world.
    - b. By lighting our light shine before men through obedience to God’s word.
  - 3. While assemblies can be a way to teach the lost, assuming the lost comes to the assemblies, this area of the work of the church is accomplished when members of the church evangelize through home Bible studies, distributing teaching literature, or even inviting others to one of our worship services or Bible classes.
- C. A work of the local church is benevolence. Some examples can be seen in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9.

### III. WOMEN’S INVOLVEMENT IN THE WORK OF THE LOCAL CHURCH?

- A. Guidelines: 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 - *“Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. 35 And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.”* (NKJV)

1. The context surrounding verses 34-35:
  - a. In verses 6-12, Paul explains that the purpose of the various gifts should be for the edification of all who are present, both the learned and the unlearned.
  - b. In verses 13-19, Paul shows the importance of understanding what is being spoken. He states in verse 18 he would rather speak five words with understanding than ten thousands words in a tongue.
  - c. Verse 19 - *“yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.”* (NKJV)
    - (1) “yet in the church” - church - ekklesia {*ek-klay-see’-ah*} - “1) a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly . . .”
    - (2) Verse 19 helps us to establish the context regarding the application of the instructions contained in this chapter. Paul says “in the church” or “in the assembly.” Paul is referring to the assembly of the saints for the purpose of edification.
  - d. Verse 23 - *“Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?”*
    - (1) “comes together” - sunerchomai {*soon-er’-khom-ahee*} - “1) to come together 1a) to assemble . . .”
    - (2) Again, we see a reference to an assembly of the church. In this assembly, there was the possibility of “uninformed” or “unbelievers” being present.
  - e. Verse 26 - *“How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.”*
    - (1) “come together” - same as in verse 23.
    - (2) During this assembly, there was the apparent exercising of various gifts, i.e. psalm, teaching, tongue, revelation, interpretation. During this assembly, everything was to be

done for edification.

f. In verses 27-40, Paul establishes some rules of order for this assembly. By following these rules, the assembly would edify those present.

(1) Rule #1: For those with the gift of speaking in tongues, they were only to speak two or three and each in turn. There had to be present one who could interpret what was being said. If no one was present to interpret, then the one speaking in tongues was to be silent. (v. 27-28)

(2) Rule #2: Regarding those with the gift of prophecy, there were to be two or three who would speak. If, however, while one was talking, something was revealed to another, the first doing the talking was to be silent. (v. 29-32)

(3) The reason for these rules: *“For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.”* (v. 33)

(4) Rule #3: The women were to be silent during the assembly of the saints. (v. 34-35)

(5) Rule #4: All things were to be done decently and in order. (v. 40)

2. Having established the context surrounding 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, let’s read the passage again: *“Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. 35 And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.”* (NKJV)

3. To fully understand the limits placed upon the women in this chapter, we must first understand the meaning of a few words.

a. Women - *gune* {*goo-nay*} - 1) a woman of any age, whether a virgin, or married, or a widow 2) a wife 2a) of a betrothed woman

b. Churches - *ekklesia* {*ek-klay-see’-ah*} - this word is translated as church 115 times and assembly 3 times. *Ekklesia* means, “1) a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly.” (Thayer)

- (1) There are instances where ekklesia refers to the universal church, the body of Christ. (Matthew 16:18)
  - (2) There are instances where ekklesia refers to local churches of Christ. (Romans 16:16)
  - (3) Within the context of this passage, ekklesia seems to be referring to an actual assembly of the saints. Specifically, in this context, the assembly seems to be for the purpose of worshiping God and edifying the saints.
    - (a) Verse 19 - “yet in the church”
    - (b) Verse 23 - “the whole church comes together.”
    - (c) Verse 26 - “you come together.”
- c. Silence - sigao {see-gah'-o}- 1) to keep silence, hold one's peace 2) to be kept in silence, be concealed
- (1) Sigao is also used in verses 28 and 30.
    - (a) In verse 28, Paul is telling the man who can speak in tongues not to address the assembly if there is no one present to interpret. This prevented the man from publicly addressing the assembly.
    - (b) In verse 30, Paul is telling the prophet to cease addressing the assembly if another person has a revelation. This prevented the man from publicly addressing the assembly.
  - (2) If we approach verse 34 with the understanding that, within this context, the usage of silence (sigao) means not to address the assembly, then in verse 34, it would seem that Paul is telling the women not to address the assembly of the saints, or to speak in a lead position.
- d. Speak - laleo {lal-eh'-o} - “1) to utter a voice or emit a sound 2) to speak 3) to talk 4) to utter, tell 5) to use words in order to declare one's mind and disclose one's thoughts” (Thayer) (*Used also in verse 35.*)

- (1) Laleo is used several times in this passage. In the usages prior to verse 34, laleo refers to a person addressing the assembly.
  - (a) Verse 27 refers to a man speaking in tongues.
  - (b) Verse 28 tells the man speaking in tongues to keep silent, only speaking to himself if no interpreter is present.
  - (c) Verse 29 refers to a prophet speaking.
  - (d) As a careful study of this passage will reveal, the speaking in tongues and the speaking of the prophets were intended to edify the congregation. Therefore their speech would have been in a public fashion, addressing the assembly.
- (2) Within the context of this passage, it would seem that laleo (speak), as used in verse 34, would be referring to the women not being permitted to speak, addressing the assembly.
- e. To be under obedience - hupotasso {*hoop-ot-as'-so*} - “1) to arrange under, to subordinate 2) to subject, put in subjection 3) to subject one’s self, obey 4) to submit to one’s control 5) to yield to one’s admonition or advice 6) to obey, be subject” (Thayer)

4. Conclusion:

- a. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 forbids women from teaching in a public manner the assembly of the local congregation. The woman is to recognize her role in the church and willingly submit herself accordingly.
- b. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 does not advocate the total silence on the part of the woman. To say this passage teaches total silence would be to contradict other Bible passages. For instance:
  - (1) A woman can speak through the avenue of songs. (Ephesians 5:19) In this passage, the word speak is the same Greek word used in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. In one passage, Paul tells women not to speak, but then in another passage, he commands everyone to speak to one another in songs. Is this a contradiction? Certainly not, as long as we remember that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is telling women not to speak

publically, addressing the assembly. When a woman speaks through songs, she is not addressing the assembly in a public fashion.

- (2) A woman can make a public confession of her belief in Jesus Christ. (Romans 10:9-10) If we are going to extend the invitation to become a Christian to everyone present, including men and women, at the end of the sermon, then it is necessary that he or she who becomes a Christian confesses his belief before all who are present. Whether the woman nods her head or verbally says, "Yes, I believe," she is still telling all present that she believes in Jesus Christ.
- (3) Also, we must remember that the woman shares a responsibility with her husband to rebuke her children when they act up during the worship services. Quite often, such rebuking will require some type of spoken word. This surely is not what Paul intended when he told the women to keep quite during the assemblies.

B. Guidelines: I Timothy 2:11-15

1. Definitions:

- a. Woman - *gune* {*goo-nay*'} - same meaning as in I Corinthians 14:34.
- b. Silence - *hesuchia* {*hay-soo-khee'-ah*} - "1) quietness 1a) description of the life of one who stays at home doing his own work, and does not officiously meddle with the affairs of others 2) silence" (Thayer)
- c. Subjection - *hupotage* {*hoop-ot-ag-ay*'} - "1) the act of subjecting 2) obedience, subjection." (Thayer) *Hupotage* is from the Greek word *hupotasso* used in I Corinthians 14:34.
- d. To usurp authority - *authenteo* {*ow-then-teh'-o*} - ". . . 2) one who acts on his own authority. . . 3) an absolute master 4) to govern, exercise dominion over one" (Thayer)

2. What is Paul not teaching? Paul is not forbidding the women from teaching in general. We know this because Paul taught the older women to teach the younger women in Titus 2:3-5. We also see that Priscilla was instrumental in teaching Apollos. (Cf. Acts 18:26)

3. What is Paul teaching?

- a. Paul is teaching the women that they are not to teach over nor to have

authority over the man. The women are to learn in silence.

- b. As shown earlier, the Greek word translated as silence can refer to quietness or silence. As we have shown earlier in the lesson, the Lord does not expect the women to be speechless during the worship services.
- c. The silence referred to must be understood in conjunction with the woman not having authority over the man. The woman is not to preach publicly over men, instead she is to remain in subjection. It is her role within the church.

#### **IV. WHAT CAN THE WOMAN DO IN THE WORK OF THE LOCAL CHURCH?**

A. Women can participate in the edification process.

1. Women can participate in the various assemblies.

a. Women can partake of the worship assemblies by partaking of the Lord's Supper, giving of their means, singing, praying, and following along during the sermons.

(1) Acts 12:12 - there were women present when the disciples came together to pray for Peter.

(2) There is nothing found within the context of Colossians 3:16 or Ephesians 5:19 that would forbid women from singing.

b. Women can participate in Bible studies. As long as the women do not teach or usurp authority of the man, they can participate as the teacher of the class allows. They can ask questions, make comments, etc. as long as they do not usurp the man's authority. (Actually, this rule of proper behavior, while stated for the woman, should apply to the men of the class. Both men and women should show respect to the teacher of the class and not seek to usurp his authority.)

2. Women can pray for other Christians and they can personally encourage other Christians outside of the assembly.

B. Women can participate in the evangelism process.

1. The women of the congregation are just as much a part of the pillar and ground of the Truth as are the men.

2. The women can do their part in personally teaching other people. They can have Bible studies with other people, they can hand out literature, they can invite other people to the assemblies of the saints, etc. (Ex. Acts 18:26 -

Aquila and his wife, Priscilla taught Apollos.)

- C. Women can participate in the benevolent work of the church.
  - 1. Women can lay by in store to give to the needy saints.
  - 2. Women can minister individually to saints who are in need. (Ex. Phebe - Romans 16:1-2 and Dorcas - Acts 9:36-39)

**CONCLUSION.**

- A. Some may view this lesson as being chauvinistic, giving preferential treatment to the men. However, all this lesson has shown is God's plan for the local church.
  - 1. God does not show partiality. However, He has established roles within the local congregation for every Christian.
  - 2. Christian women should not view God's limitations for them as limits for lesser people, but as a definition of what God expects of them.
- B. If you are a Christian woman, then please give thought to what God expects of you, then make the determination to serve Him within those bounds to the best of your ability.

-----  
A Woman's Work in the Local Church - February 13, 2003 - File #: 643  
by John M. Duvall - Lawton, OK