

Women Praying In The Church

Resolving the apparent contradiction between 1 Cor. 11:5 and 1 Cor. 14:34.

1 Cor. 14:34-35 say that women are to be silent in the church while 1 Cor. 11:5 says that women are to cover their heads while praying or prophesying. The following excerpt from the link shown resolves the apparent contradiction.

Laney writes (<http://www.bible-researcher.com/women-prophesying.html>):

A viewpoint that is deserving of further consideration is the possibility that Paul was addressing two different situations in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14. Could Paul have been referring in 1 Cor. 11:2-16 to women "praying and prophesying" in contexts other than the meeting of the church? If so, is it possible that his restriction in 1 Cor. 14:34-35 applies only when the church is gathered in public assembly for the preaching of the Word and observing the ordinances of communion and baptism? It has been objected that 1 Corinthians 11 addresses the issue of communion, certainly a church event. But there is a clear transition between Paul's discussion of the head covering in 1 Cor. 11:2-16 and his teaching regarding the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor. 11:17-34. Only in the second section of chapter 11 does Paul mention the believers as coming together: "you come together" (1 Cor. 11:17); "when you come together" (1 Cor. 11:18); "when you meet together" (1 Cor. 11:20); "when you come together" (1 Cor. 11:33). Paul is clearly thinking of the gathered church in 1 Cor. 11:17-34. But no such allusions appear in 1 Cor. 11:2-16. One could make a strong case for the view that Paul is addressing two different contexts in chapter 11 - the first where believers are gathered in small groups for prayer, and the second where the church is gathered for teaching, preaching and communion [**Churches in the house were common** - 1 Cor. 16:19, Rom. 16:5, Col. 4:15, Philemon 1:2]. The ministry boundaries for one situation may differ from that of the other ... this could have significant implications for our study of 1 Cor. 14:34-35. Is it possible that Paul is giving a restriction on public speech in the church, a restriction which would not apply in the home or other informal group meetings? **Paul does contrast the church and the home in 1 Cor. 14:35 where he points out that it is permissible for women to ask questions in one place but not in the other.** The possibility that Paul is addressing two different contexts in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 is worth pursuing.

Laney's conclusion that this interpretation "is worth pursuing" would seem to be an understatement. It obviously commends itself, and it has been the opinion of many commentators in the past. In addition to the scholars quoted above we could also cite Hermann Olshausen, Charles T. Ellicott, J. Agar Beet, W. E. Vine, Frederik W. Grosheide, Gordon Clark, and Philip Bachman. (17) And Laney is right that "this could have significant implications for our study of 1 Cor. 14:34-35." The major implication is that nothing prevents us from taking 1 Cor. 14:34-35 in its plain sense as a prohibition of women speaking to the congregation at all. One cannot help but think that this unpopular implication is the main reason that so many recent writers have insisted that the "prophesying" of 1 Cor. 11:5 can only take place in a worship service.

Mick Alexander

leeandmick@gmail.com

<http://www.christianissues.biz/miscellaneous.html#womenprayinginthechurch>