

# Silent Sisters?

## The Meaning of 1 Cor. 14:34-35

(This article was originally one letter enclosed with another. It has been left in this format so as to convey the spirit in which it was written. The letters are more pastoral than scholarly, as they should be.)

You may contact Jon Zens at:

Searching Together, Box 377, Taylors Falls MN 55084-0377; 651-465-6516; [jzens@searchingtogether.org](mailto:jzens@searchingtogether.org);

Ebay store, [www.stores.ebay.com/searching-together-books](http://www.stores.ebay.com/searching-together-books)

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Dear Chris & Mary,

Chris, you asked for a presentation of what 1 Cor.14.34-35 means. Perhaps I can at least validate with some certainty what it cannot mean. I'm sending you a separate parcel by snail mail with a number of good articles that try to wrestle with what the only women-silent passage in the NT means. I would point you to the ending of my letter to Steve A. Which follows my comments to you. Here, I try to point out why the 'silence position' is not clear 'beyond reasonable doubt,' and make a plea for a 'loving approach' – which would grant sisters a corporate functioning within Scriptural bounds – instead of a 'conservative approach' – which silences sisters in the face of much possible contrary evidence.

As I stress in the opening of my letter to Steve A., many articulate cases have been made by both sides. Neither side's presentation is air-tight. But isn't this the case on every doctrinal issue? There are always several texts that seem to 'not fit' what a number of other texts 'clearly' suggest. Since there are varying levels of ambivalence in every issue, isn't it prudent with the Spirit's help to try and discern the basic flow of Scripture, and not block that flow by the use of 'minority' texts? In the case of female ministry, to use one text to cancel out what seems to be much positive evidence for female participation seems to be very dubious from a hermeneutical standpoint. With these basic points in mind, I offer the following summary of a sort of hermeneutical trail that leads me to question the dogmatic use of 1 Cor.14:34-35 to silence sisters in ekklesia gatherings.

1. On the Day of Pentecost 120 male and female disciples spoke in many languages the wonderful works of God. These tongues were understood (interpreted) by those gathered in Jerusalem from many nations. Broadly speaking, we can see Pentecost as the long-awaited reversal of the confusion of tongues that occurred when God judged the Tower of Babel (Gen.11). Then, God dispersed people in judgment; now, He gathers people from all nations into a New Humanity, where there is no Jew or Greek. Peter's proclamation begins by noting that Joel spoke of this day and age when both sexes would prophesy. There is nothing here to suggest that men will prophesy publicly, while females will prophesy privately, or that males can prophesy to a mixed audience, but women can only prophesy to females. Peter's citation of Joel is occasioned by the supernatural event in which both sexes had just spoken in foreign languages to the amazement of those who

heard. If it is clear that Joel and Peter envision a gospel age in which prophecy belongs to both brothers and sisters, why is it that among those who hold to the silence position women end up virtually never prophesying in any venue? Wouldn't it seem strange that women would prophesy on the birthday of the ekklesia, but then be silenced thereafter?

2. Paul's flow of thought in the three chapters of 1 Cor.11-14 seems to assume the participation of the whole ekklesia. In the early part of chapter 11, the prophesying of males and females is mentioned. Most exegetes agree that Paul here has in view the gathering of the saints. It assumes that men and women – multiple families – are together in a situation where angels are present. The silence position is forced to posit that the praying and prophesying of females does not take place in the ekklesia as gathered, but in some other context. But in 1 Cor.11, what other setting besides a church meeting makes any sense? A woman prophesying in the midst of her own family doesn't fit; a woman prophesying out in the open marketplace seems ajar. In light of Paul's indisputable desire for prophecy to be central in the body meeting (1 Cor.14), it would be most natural to see the praying and prophesying mentioned in 1 Cor.11 as taking place in the kind of meeting described in 1 Cor.14. The truth is, if this is so then the silence position has no leg to stand on. If Paul has sanctioned public female prophesying, then it is a fatal hermeneutical error to use 1 Cor.14:34-35 to cancel this out. Paul must have some narrower concern in the "silence" passage.

3. I find it fascinating that more often than not, those who require head-coverings on the sisters also require them to be silent. But this is not where Paul ends up in his presentation, is it? The properly covered women in 1 Cor.11 verbally pray and prophesy along with the men. To connect head-coverings with female silence is not in the text, and flatly contradicts Paul's argument.

4. In 1 Cor.12 Paul elaborates on the universal giftedness of the body, and there is nothing in this chapter to suggest that only male gifts are in view. "Now to each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one is given....to another....to another...to another....All these are the work of one Spirit and He gives them to each person, just as He determines" (vv.7-11). One of the gifts listed is "prophecy," which we know is practiced by both brothers and sisters.

5. Paul presents the more excellent way of love in 1 Cor.13. "Prophecy" is mentioned three times: "If I have the gift of prophecy....prophecies will cease....we prophesy in part." Again, there is every reason to believe that the "we prophesy" includes both sexes -- the whole church -- in Paul's mind.

6. In line with the flow we have seen so far, much of the language in 1 Cor.14 assumes total body involvement – "I would like all of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy....If therefore the whole ekklesia come together and all speak in tongues...but if all prophesy...[the unbeliever] is convicted by all and judged by all....when you come together each and every one of you has a psalm, a teaching....you may all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be comforted." There is no textual basis for limiting the repeated "all of you" to men. The natural way to take

“all of you” is inclusively – both men and women. All the evidence in 1 Cor.11:1 - 14:33 is against the conclusion that only males speak in the gathering Paul describes.

7. Given the plethora of evidence that Paul envisions whole-ekklesia participation in 1 Cor.11-14:33, it is a very strange interpretive twist indeed to suggest that the only “silence” passage in the NT (1 Tim.2:11-12 has nothing to do with women’s silence; the Greek word there means “quietness,” which is also used in 1 Tim.2:2 where our “quiet” [not silent!], non-rabbleroising life is mentioned) nullifies all the indications of female involvement in other passages and in the immediate prior context of 1 Cor.11-14. Since Paul sanctions sisters’ praying and prophesying in Christian gatherings, it is a hermeneutically unjustifiable use of 1 Cor.14:34-35 to render such female participation as unsanctioned. Therefore, Paul must have a narrower concern in view in these two verses. Paul’s response to abuses of the “open” Corinthian meeting was not to opt for a tightly-reigned gathering, but to correct the narrower problems. Likewise, since he has already assumed female inclusion, the answer to his narrower concern expressed in 1 Cor.14:34-35 cannot be to totally silence the sisters. You have to read the Epistle backwards in order to have any basis for such a conclusion – a conclusion that flies in the face of a long section of Paul’s thought. Reading the natural, forward flow of Paul’s reasoning up to 14:33 could not yield the “silence” position. A number of options have been offered as to what narrower concern Paul had in view in 1 Cor.14:34-35 (see enclosures), but I still think Rusty Entekin’s article on these verses is about the best ([www.thingstocome.org/silence.htm](http://www.thingstocome.org/silence.htm)).

8. I have offered this hermeneutical trail to suggest that using 1 Cor.14:34-35 to substantiate the “silence” position regarding females is untenable in light of much internal textual evidence. It is a very dubious conclusion. It could not be proven to an impartial jury beyond reasonable doubt. This being the case, to advocate a “conservative” position that silences the sisters in order to “be sure” Paul’s concern in 1 Cor.14:34-35 is covered would seem to reflect more of an old covenant approach. Given the reasonable doubt attached to the “silence” position, a “loving” approach would be more appropriate under the new covenant, in which females are allowed to pray and prophesy. Would church leaders and husbands want to stand before Jesus appealing to their “conservative” stand that silenced half the priesthood, or stand before Him in a “loving” stance that allowed what was clear enough – the praying and prophesying of the sisters? Any ambivalence in the evidence still would call into question the former and collaborate the latter. In light of Paul’s clear sanctioning of sister’s/brothers’ prophesying in 1 Cor.11, in light of Paul’s desire for prophecy to be central in the body meeting (1 Cor.14), and in light of Peter’s opening remarks (quoting Joel) on the Day of Pentecost regarding male/female prophesying, it is a strange and strained use of Scripture that would bar women from this function in the very setting where it is to be showcased. Nothing in the flow of 1 Cor.11:1 to 1 Cor.14:33 points to male-only praying and prophesying.

I pray that these thoughts and the supplementary materials will help you sort through this vital issue.

Jon

Letter to Steve Atkerson  
January 12, 2004

Dear Steve,

So here is the letter & articles I promised to send you. It's taken me longer to finally get it together, but here it is. My comments will consist of some further response to your 'Sisters in Service,' some response to your 'Jephthah's Vow' piece, and some food for thought on other issues about female ministry.

At the outset I want to make it clear, as I have stated before, that every position taken regarding female ministry can be challenged Biblically from certain angles. No viewpoint is absolutely air-tight. If we are agreed on this reality, then we must interface with certain hermeneutical questions that swirl around each individual text and context. But, it seems to me, since all positions are challengeable, at the end of the day the overarching question which must be faced is this: *which perspective on women's ministry provides the best framework in which to do the most justice to the relevant Biblical information?* Flowing out of this question would be several others of importance: *which perspective most allows for all the relevant texts to be heard naturally?; which perspective minimizes the use of one text to seemingly negate the impact of another?; which perspective requires the least amount of 'explaining away,' or questionable juggling, or creative inferences, or leaps of logic in dealing with the challenges to its conclusions?* The reality is that even in trying to honestly wrestle with such significant questions as these, we all end up making individual judgments that can be different from the person next to us. What is 'clear' to me is not to you. What you view as a valid assumption seems like a very stretched inference to me. These kind of differences between believers highlight and underscore the necessity of the Holy Spirit's ministry upon us as we interpret the Word, the importance of the mutual ministry of sharpening one another, and the imperative for each of us to seek deep humility before the Lord and His ekklesia, always assuming that even the least of His sheep might be brought across our path to explain the way of God more perfectly to us. I listen hard to what others have to say, and then I try to speak the truth in love, in hopes that the Holy Spirit will use my contribution to help the saints discern the mind of Christ.

Your updated version of 'Sisters in Service' is certainly improved, but I would like to point out some assumptions you still carry with you that I think you need to think through more carefully in light of God's Word.

Your assumption: a few ministries like apostles are reserved for men. You don't mention prophets in your list. In any event, the truth is that the NT gives the name of a female apostle (Junia) and we know there were women prophets. So in the 1 Cor. 12 list, apostles, prophets, we know that at least a few sisters would be included. Thus it is incorrect to assert, without qualification, that apostles and prophets were reserved for

males. The 12 were male, but the broad designation of ‘apostle’ was not limited to men. It is interesting to note that in Acts 1 the qualifications for replacing Judas do not include, ‘must be a male.’ Many scholars agree that the 12 male apostles of the New Israel correspond to the 12 patriarchs of the Old Israel.

The oversight of the ekklesia is committed to elders (presbuteroi), but Paul also mentions female elders (presbutidas) whose functions are given.

Your assumption: “God made the man first, giving him the commission prior to Eve’s creation.” Genesis, however, states that both were contemplated as ‘the image of God,’ and were co-regents – “then God said, ‘let us make Adam in our image, in our likeness, and let them [not him] rule over all the earth.’” The commission is given in the plural, not singular. This is further confirmed in Gen.5:2, “when God created Adam, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them ‘Adam.’” Before the fall, aren’t Adam and Eve contemplated as partners, co-regents, in the commission to subdue the earth? In any event, the commission is not given to the man alone without the woman’s presence.

Your assumption: “The resulting curse of Gen.3:16...” I don’t mean to be picky, but ‘curse’ is not in this text. Only two entities are specifically ‘cursed,’ the serpent and the ground. God’s words to the woman in v.16 delineate the key elements in ‘the way things will be’ as sin affects the husband-wife relationship.

Your assumption: Under ‘Cain’s Wife,’ you note that husbands, not wives, are mentioned. To me, noting this is like noting that only men were priests under the old covenant. It’s not really relevant, because now under the New Covenant all brothers and sisters are priests. Likewise, some women are mentioned in Christ’s genealogy. Deborah and Huldah were prophetesses and their husbands’ names are given.

Your assumption: “God’s primary focus remained on men for the more public aspects of his work on earth.” What you fail to couple with this idea, however, is that there is no evidence that functions like Judge & Prophet were inherently ‘manly’ activities. There was nothing ignoble or out of place for a woman to be a prophet, even if the ratio was 500 male prophets to 10 female prophets. The truth is we have more information in the NT about the public ministry of women (Paul’s ‘co-workers,’ etc.) than we do about 9 of the 12 apostles.

Your assumption: To work through Noah’s wife ‘might have undermined Noah as the head of his family and worked at cross purposes with God’s intent to encourage men to be the leaders,’ etc. The dogmatism of this statement is nullified by what you go on to say. First you make the above strong remark, but then you immediately go on to point out several examples where the Lord spoke through the wife first. The reality is, there is no rule about this. In Christ what difference does it make if the Lord reveals something first to the husband or wife? They both want the mind of the Lord together. The Lord dealt with both Mary and Joseph in the complex of events surrounding Christ’s birth. In 1 Cor.7 the husband and the wife must mutually agree on a temporary separation; the husband cannot make a unilateral decision in this regard.

Your assumption: Under ‘Sarah,’ you make a big point about Abraham getting most of the attention, which is true. But you leave out other pertinent information. Why don’t you point out too that God specifically told Abraham, ‘Listen to whatever Sarah tells you,’ etc. (Gen.21:12)? Sarah is mentioned by name four times in the NT – that’s pretty good press – and in Isa.51:2 the couple is seen as Israel’s foundation, not just Abraham – “Look to the rock from which you were cut...look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth.”

Your assumption: The Abrahamic covenant was based on circumcision, which was applied to males only. You see this as a reinforcement of the emphasis on males as leaders. But since, as you go on to point out, circumcision is nothing under the New Covenant and baptism is applied to both brothers and sisters, what is accomplished by pointing back to type/shadow which no longer carries any weight? Circumcision had to do with procreation in an historical lineage that ended with Christ, not with male leadership.

Your assumption: Angels appeared in male form probably to reinforce men as leaders. Since angels are essentially sexless beings, I think you are stretching things to connect masculine angelic incarnations with male leadership. The Scripture never makes or suggests such a connection.

Your assumption: Only men were priests under the OC; Temple singers were male. Of course, such things were God’s design back then, but what is the point of highlighting things that no longer have any relevance? Under the NC all are priests and all can sing. If anything, might not such NC realities be pointing to the fact that the OC focus on men is finished? You point out in the next paragraph that ‘the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile is gone,’ but shouldn’t it be pointed out that the same text teaches that in Christ there is no male or female?

Your assumption: Deborah delivered a private prophecy to Barak, therefore her entire prophetic ministry was private. Such logic reveals some sort of bias. If a person is a prophet, the natural thing to assume is that there will be public and private aspects to their ministry. To reason that because Scripture cites a private incident that therefore all her prophesying was private is patently false. You would never apply such skewed logic in other cases.

Your assumption: Deborah was not really God’s intended Judge. You can’t bring yourself to freely include Deborah in Judges 2:16, which would be the natural way to interpret Scripture. You fail to point out that Barak wouldn’t go out to battle without her, so your point about her going to him is weak. Keep in mind that Deborah was different from her male Judge counterparts, for she was already an established prophet before being set apart by God as Judge. Your citing of Hebrews 11:32 where Barak is mentioned and not Deborah is very weak. There are a number of prominent male OT figures who are not listed by name in Heb.11, and the author lumps many men and women of faith together in his mention of nameless ‘others’ who were mistreated because

of their trust in the Lord. Citing Barak in no way is meant to teach or imply that Deborah is less of a hero in the narrative. You wouldn't apply such logic to other cases where a name is omitted.

Your assumption: Deborah arose to power because the men were weak and society was decayed. You bring such ideas to the table, but they are not in the texts. There is no indication in God's Word that Deborah was a Judge because the men were weak. The other Judges before and after Deborah were men during the same degenerate period, so what does that show? Your assumption implies that God only uses women when there is no man around to do the job. The Scriptures simply will not sustain such a jaundiced assumption. In the NT, Paul had women co-workers. It was never a question of there not being enough men around and having therefore to dip deeply into the barrel and get the sisters involved.

Your assumption: Huldah's ministry as prophet was only done privately. The natural assumption would be to assume that a prophet in Israel had both public and private outlets. To take one example of private prophesying and conclude that all she ever did as a prophet was private, is bogus logic. Later you say, "perhaps Huldah had a more public ministry as well, but if so the Scriptures do not give any example of it." The fact that her male counterparts were bypassed would indicate she was a greatly respected public figure. To require an example of public ministry is unnecessary. The function of prophets was to call Israel to covenant faithfulness. There are many hints of prophets' public responsibilities. Neh.9:30, 'by your Spirit you admonished them [Israel] through your prophets.' 2 Ki.17:13, 'the entire law I commanded your fathers to obey and that I delivered to you through my servants the prophets.' 2 Ki.17:23, 'the Lord removed them from his presence, as he had warned through all his servants the prophets.' Jer.7:25, 'from the time your forefathers left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again, I sent you my servants the prophets.' As Miroslav Kis observes, 'prophets are those called to speak before the people and for God. The choice of a particular person does not seem to be based on gender, ethnicity, socio-economic, or educational status' ('A Biblical Sketch of Pastoral Ministry,' Ministry, Jan. 2004, p.7). Your male-public / female-private prophetic dichotomy is your unfounded assumption, not a natural take on the revealed function of all the prophets.

Your assumption: Huldah's ministry had nothing to do with teaching, she was like a news reporter teaching current events. Whatever you say about Huldah has to be equally applied to her male counterparts, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elijah, etc. Are you prepared to try and defend the notion that instruction was always absent from the prophets' ministry? The essence of their job was to call Israel back to the covenant requirements. I think this well illustrates how far you have stretch in order to excise 'instruction' from the prophetic ministry. To compare all that Huldah did to a news reporter teaching current events is to flagrantly water down what actually happened in the story. She confirmed the Lord's purposes for the king, the people and Judah. The Lord spoke an encouraging word for the king through the prophetess, and they took her answer back to him.

Your assumption: Noadiah (Neh.6:14) is a weak case to cite regarding the ministry of women. She does illustrate, however, that there was nothing shocking or incongruous about a woman being a prophet, and that there were (a few) false female prophets, just as there were (many more) false male prophets. The issue is not the gender of a prophet, but whether or not God's hand has set apart a person for such ministry.

Your assumption: Anna prophesied in private. As I pointed out to you before, Simeon gives a 'private' prophecy in this context. Do you conclude then that his ministry was always 'private'? But just what is 'private'? Simeon was in the temple courts. Anna never left the temple. Is the temple a 'private' or 'public' place? Seems pretty public to me. Why must we choose between Anna shouting or gently talking person to person? The Jews being a people who like to jaw, the likelihood is that Anna would mostly be speaking conversationally with groups of people in the temple setting.

Under 'Mary Magdalene' it would be fitting to point out that women being the first witnesses of the empty tomb and the risen Christ is very significant, since the testimony of females in those days was disallowed in courts.

Your assumption: In all the recorded examples of female prophesying, they did so more privately, unlike their male counterparts. As I've said before, it is a very natural assumption to conclude that male and female prophets functioned in a similar manner, both publicly and privately. There are a host of Scriptures that generically describe the functions of male and female prophets using the words 'prophets,' 'my prophets,' 'my servants the prophets,' and 'all the prophets.' The more likely assumption is that the prophets of both genders functioned in the same ways. Further, Deborah, as prophet and judge, was undeniably public in her ministry. Just how is Anna's ministry in the public temple to be construed as 'private'? The false prophetess in Rev.2 had a public ministry, which would certainly imply that there were true prophetesses with corresponding public ministries.

In the last paragraph under 'Pentecost' you say, 'there are no historical examples of a woman prophetess standing before a congregation' and giving instruction. What about Jezebel in Rev.2:20? She was false, of course, but here you have a 'prophetess and she teaches...' This certainly raises questions about your hard and fast distinction between prophesying and teaching. It's pretty clear, isn't it, that what prophets do results in folks being 'taught'?

Later in this same paragraph you say, "there is nothing wrong with men and women 'learning' from each others' prophecies, testimonies, songs, experiences, etc." I don't quite understand how this is practically worked out if women, according to you, must be silent during the 1 Cor.14 meeting. Paul wants prophecy to be central in such a gathering, but you say women can't prophesy in this gathering. But Peter said 'men and women will prophesy' on the day of Pentecost. He didn't qualify it, 'men can prophesy publicly, but women can prophesy only in settings outside the ekklesia gathering.' 'All prophesy' in 1 Cor.14 would most naturally include the brothers and sisters.

Under 'Phoebe' you say, she was "described as a 'servant' ...of the church, Rom.16:1." You make it appear generic, but the text says, 'being a deacon of the ekklesia in Cenchrea.'" This indicates that she had been recognized for a ministry in that church context, and Paul is introducing this sister who brought his epistle to Rome. The evidence indicates that she was commended as a deacon (there is no feminine form for this word) by the Cenchrean assembly. She was not an elder, but she was a 'prostatis' (cf. Nyland's comments on this word in "Papyri, Women & Word Meaning in the NT," pp.4-5, enclosed).

Your whole first paragraph on 'Junia' needs drastic revision. Please read Linda Belleville's paper (enclosed), 'Junia, Outstanding Among the Apostles: A Re-Examination of Rom.16:7 in Light of Primary Source Materials.'" Your statement, 'it is not clear at all that Junias was a feminine name,' is flat out incorrect. 'Junia' was taken as feminine until 1100-1200AD, when the masculine form crept in without justification. Early church figure John Chrysostom assumed she was a woman and an apostle, which is all the more remarkable since he was no friend of women broadly speaking. The Greek construction, as Belleville shows, lends no support to the notion that 'the apostles spoke highly of Junias.' It means, 'outstanding among the apostles.' Piper and Grudem are also mistaken in their total of three usages, as there are seven in the database (Belleville, p.3, footnote 12). As a result of unscriptural traditions that affect translations, gross inaccuracies result. For example, in Herebert Lockyer's 'All the Women of the Bible,' there is no entry for Junia.

Under 'Neither male nor female' you say, 'women may prophecy, evangelize, pray, speak in tongues, sing, testify, deacon, explain, and do a host of other things.' But how does this actually work out in practice? In practice it seems that what you give with one hand, you take away with the other. Paul locates tongues (and their interpretation) and prophecy by all in the 1 Cor.14 gathering, yet, as I understand your views, you silence women (except for singing) during this crucial meeting of the body. So what you say above sounds good in theory, but you do not allow women to pray, prophesy and speak in tongues during a 1 Cor.14 time. In Acts 2 Peter taught, per Joel, that men and women would prophesy in the Messianic age. Paul sees prophecy as the center point of the 1 Cor.14 meeting. So the most natural and important place that women and men could prophesy together becomes male-only in your practice. Paul even mentions the 'whole church' and 'all' involved in the prophesying of 1 Cor.14, but you limit it to men. Why? You say you have no problem with women functioning as prophetesses, but when could they ever say anything to the assembly in your scheme of things? If the Lord gave a song to a sister and she wanted to sing it to the assembly, would you allow this?

Under 'Euodia and Syntyche' you say, 'there is no NT record of any of these women [Lk.8] going on to become teachers, or elders.' They couldn't become 'presbuteroi' because the word only applies to elder men. But they could have become 'presbutidas,' which refers to elder women.

Under 'Jezebel' you say, "the text [Rev.2] never states that she was a 'teacher.'" However, as I pointed out earlier, your hard and fast distinctions between prophesying

and teaching are not validated by the NT. The text uses the verb 'didasko' (to teach) with reference to her activity, 'she teaches and deceives my slaves...' So she wasn't 'a teacher,' but this shows that prophetic activity results in teaching. And it would be natural to suppose that her activity took place while the body was assembled.

You say, 'Why is it that Jesus only chose men to be his apostles (the Twelve)...' However, beyond the 12 he chose at least one woman who was said to be, 'outstanding among the apostles,' so your statement needs to be rectified. The apostle-function was not limited to men.

You connect the male-incarnation of Jesus and God reinforcing the 'creation order for men to be in positions of leadership in religious matters.' I have serious doubts that this was in the forefront of why Jesus was masculine. The original 'Adam' was contemplated as the male-female image of God, and they were both as co-regents given the mandate to subdue the earth. Your notion is pure speculation, as the Word nowhere makes such a connection.

Under 'Acts 6' you say, 'If Phoebe was really a deaconess (Rom.16:1), where were her sisters?' What on earth does this mean? She traveled quite a bit and on one trip delivered Paul's letter to the Romans. She had been commended as a deacon by a specific assembly, Cenchrea. What does 'where are her sisters' mean?

Under '1 Cor.11' you say, 'one lesson to learn from 1 Cor.11a [do you mean 11:5a?] is that a woman's prayer and prophecy, done properly, is not a threat to her husband's headship.' The whole ethos of this passage is public. The great majority of commentators see 1 Cor.11:5 as taking place when the church is gathered. William Beardslee is representative: 'Paul strongly believes that women who speak in worship (pray or prophesy) are to present themselves in a conventional form of appearance....Perhaps the shift in tone that follows verse 2 shows that the tradition he had taught (and for which he praises them) included the practice of women speaking in worship' ('First Corinthians: A Commentary for Today,' Chalice Press, 1994, pp.104-105; cf. Zens, 'Aspects,' 1981, pp.5-7). I gather 'done properly' to you means outside of the 1 Cor.14 gathering, yet 1 Cor.11 seems to allow for women to pray and prophesy in such a gathering. Why would Paul talk about proper dress and head-covering if the praying/prophesying was non-public? The natural setting appears to be a meeting where men and woman are gathering together for mutual edification. Please read Linda Belleville's paper on 1 Cor.11:2-16 (enclosed).

If 1 Cor.11 has a 1 Cor.14 setting in mind, then that would point to viewing 1 Cor.14:34-35 as having a more limited concern. It seems to me that Rusty Entrekin's and Marc Scrivener's papers on 'Silence' show decisively that totally silencing women in the 1 Cor.14 meeting is not Paul's goal, nor is such a goal justifiable and necessary linguistically. Further, by your own admission, women could speak to the assembly in many ways without being teachers or elders. So why silence them totally when they could speak with edification in numerous ways without infringing on your stated concerns, being teachers or elders?

Under 'Eph.5' in the first sentence you have "'as to the Lord' (5:1)." Did you mean 5:21?

Regarding 1 Tim.2:11-12, please listen to Linda Belleville's cassette (enclosed), "What English Translators Haven't Told Us About 1 Tim.2:11-15." Your rendering, 'have the authority of a man,' is questionable at best. Having men as leaders in home and church does not require the silence of women that you impose. You list four 'authorities' a man could have. Again, all those things being in place in no way implies or requires that women must be silenced. The KJV has in 1 Tim.2, 'Let them learn in silence,' which is very misleading. The same word is used in 3:2 and means quietness, not making a fuss. We don't live our daily lives in 'silence,' but we are to live as those not making a disturbing hub-bub. When your wife teaches your kids at home you can expect them to learn in quietness, but quietness in no way implies or requires 'silence.' The kids can ask questions, talk about various issues, be very conversational, and yet still be learning in quietness. I think this same principle should apply to the sisters in assembly meetings.

One of the 'authorities' for men you list is, 'the authority to wrestle with the other men in the church in achieving consensus.' For only half the church to arrive at consensus seems very strange. Women should be present and able to present their questions and concerns. They could be very conversational, like the men, and still manifest 'quietness.' Donald Joy isolates a real insight when he says, "we are always impoverished when a single sex group meets, discusses, and makes decisions, since only part of the full-spectrum personhood seems to be present" ('Bonding: Relationships in the Image of God,' Word, 1985, p.19). The NT teaches that the whole body should work together for one-mindedness, not just the men. If only the men are functioning, then how can 'whole-church consensus' and 'open, participation-of-everyone meetings' be realities?

On the surface, Steve, it appears that your public language reflects the non-inclusion of the sisters.. At the NEHC conference in CT you addressed the audience at least three times as "Guys." In the question and answer time you said several times, "the men of our church believe..." What is such language meant to convey? That the women do not believe what the men do? That only the men have anything to do with what the church believes? The language comes across like women don't count. In a book on Islam, the story is told of a reporter talking with an Afghani farmer in post-Taliban times. "The farmer talked to the reporter about life with his three children. His wife added, 'Yes, we have three boys, but we also have four girls.' In the accounting of his family, this Afghan farmer did not consider his daughters worthy of mention" (S.L. Eppiling, 'Daughters in Islam,' Voices Behind the Veil: The World of Islam Through the Eyes of Women, Kregel, 2003, p.125). I know you wouldn't want to reflect the attitude of this farmer, but your language seems to view the women as omitted.

Under '1Tim.3' you say, 'Christ never intended for women to serve as elders in the church.' Women elders is a contradiction, since the word 'presbuteroi' means old men. Some women, however, are called by Christ to be 'presbutidas,' elders.

In the conclusion you say, 'godly women who held the authority of (or over) men in the OT.' That's not the right way to put it at all. Being a prophet was not inherently a male function. It would be more proper, therefore, to say 'godly women who, like their male counterparts, had the authority of God before the people of Israel.' 'Just three over a 1500 year period' is hardly a fair way to put it. We can assume there were others not mentioned, just as we don't assume the other 9 Apostles had no ministry because it is not recorded in Scripture. The fact that Philip had four daughters who prophesied implies that there were other sisters who functioned in a similar way. Throughout this article you draw unjustified conclusions from the 'omissions' (silence) of Scripture. To say, 'the exception proves the rule' is absolutely misleading. In saying this, you assume that being a prophet was inherently a man's job, and that is patently false. A more accurate way to state the facts would be, 'the presence of a few women prophets shows that the function itself is not gender-specific, and the proportion of men and women who fulfill the prophetic role is up to God's choice.'

You replied to my 'Women Weren't Silent' with 'Jephthah Sacrificed His Daughter – Why Shouldn't We?' I'd like to make a few comments in response to that piece.

Your assumption: Jephthah sacrificed his daughter. There is important evidence that suggests he never actually sacrificed his daughter (see enclosed articles from Tyndale & Ritenbaugh). So your whole premise is questionable.

Your assumption: There is a parallel between Lev.18:21 and Judges 11:29ff. The fact is there is no connection between these two passages, so your linking them together is fallacious. Lev.18:21 speaks of offering children to false gods. Jephthah didn't do that. His reference point was the Lord, not Molech or Baal. So basically everything you go on to say is based on a totally false linkage of these two biblical contexts. Comparing Lev.18:21 and Jug.11:29 is not apples to apples, so the whole analogy that you apply to my article breaks down. You are building on a false foundation.

You suggest that my position gives a hermeneutical priority to historical narrative instead of to clearly didactic passages. You skip over the significant fact that the immediately preceding historical narrative of men and women speaking in tongues is the foundation for Peter's didactic remarks, drawn from Joel, that men and women will prophesy in the Messianic times. Since Paul envisions 'all' in the 'whole church' prophesying in 1 Cor.14, it is quite natural to see brothers and sisters praying and prophesying together. This would suggest then that 1 Cor.14:34-35 is not intended to silence female prophesying.

You say, 'extreme caution should be taken when drawing theology from historical narrative.' It seems to me that you really need to think this through further. You strongly maintain that the patterns found in historical narratives are binding, that is, they take on a didactic function. The truth is, there are no clear didactic passages that teach that Christians must meet in homes. Suggesting that believers gather in homes is based entirely on historical narratives. Even the mention of home meetings in the epistles are still presented as historical observation, 'the ekklesia that meets in your home.' There is

no didactic imperative attached to house church theology. It is based entirely on historical narratives. So is it really so far out of line for me to point out that the pattern of the non-silence of women on the day of the ekklesia's birth, which is immediately confirmed at the outset of Peter's didactic proclamation, is not without monumental import? To ask, 'If women were not silent on the day the Spirit came, why would we expect them to be silent in the weekly gatherings?,' comes from both narrative and didactic considerations.

Your quotation of non-silence advocate, Gordon Fee, in which he states that the 'silence' enjoined in 1 Cor.14:34-35 is absolute, is certainly one view that can be set forth, but the reality is that many people, especially Entekin and Scrivener, show that such an approach is unnecessary from contextual and linguistic perspectives. I commend to you David Hamilton's '1 Cor.14:26-40, Should Women Keep Silent?' (part 1) and 'Learning How to Minister from 1 Cor.14:26-40' (part 2). He does a masterful job of showing the inadequacies of the 'silence' position. His views are not air-tight, of course, but they certainly cast 'reasonable doubt' on the necessity of your 'silence' position.

I know I'm dumping a lot of material on you. I know that if I got a pile like this from someone, I could not process it all right away. The materials enclosed are in alphabetical order by author. It is a given that I do not agree with every sentiment expressed in these articles, but I do think they offer important information. I do want to strongly urge you to please read as soon as possible E. Earle Ellis' essay, 'Paul and the Eschatological Woman.' It is absolutely the best reasonably-sized article that brings together what I see as an honest summary of the NT material. He maintains male headship in a way that embraces female ministry. What fault would you find with it?

In closing, I would like us to consider a hypothetical courtroom scene, with only believers in the positions of judge and jury. No view is 'on trial,' but two views are being presented for the court's consideration: (1) a basic feminine silence perspective, represented by Robert Culver, 'The Traditional View,' Women in Ministry, IVP, 1989, pp.25-52 and Steve Atkerson, 'On the Lord's Command That Women Remain Silent,' [www.ntmf.org](http://www.ntmf.org); (2) a basic feminine participation vantage point, represented by L.E. Maxwell, Women in Ministry, Christian Publications, 1995, and Zens/Bjork, 'Women in the Body of Christ: Functioning Priests or Silent Partners?,' Searching Together, 31:1-3, 47pp. If the goal was for a viewpoint to be true 'beyond reasonable doubt,' which view would come closest (since no view is air-tight) to doing justice to the information supplied by the OT and NT? I suggest that there is more reasonable doubt attached to the silence position, for these fundamental reasons;

1. There is only one text in the Bible that mentions the 'silence' of women, 1 Cor.14:34-35. The 1 Tim.2 text has nothing to do with women's 'silence,' as the KJV wrongly communicates.
2. There were female prophets, and prophetic activity immediately precedes the 'silence' text in 1 Cor.14. The 'each and every one of you' in 1 Cor.14:26 suggests the edifying activity of both sexes.

3. Paul wants prophesying to be central in the meeting of the saints. In 1 Cor.14 prophecy is described as an activity of the entire church. 'Edifies the ekklesia,' v.4; 'I wish that all of you...that the ekklesia may receive edifying,' v.5; 'edifying the ekklesia,' v.12; 'in the ekklesia I would rather...', v.19; 'if therefore the whole church comes together into one place, and all speak with tongues...but if all prophesy...he is convinced by all and judged by all,' vv.23-24; 'when you come together, each of you has a song...', v.26; 'for you may all prophesy one by one,' v.31. There is nothing here to limit participation to males. The natural interpretation would be that the brothers and sisters are participating together in edifying ways.
4. The whole flow of Paul's thought in 1 Cor.11-14:33 contemplates the input of all the body parts. Men and women pray and prophesy, ch.11; men and women are at the Lord's table together, ch.11; every body part, male and female, has a manifestation of the Spirit for the good of the body, ch.12; 'we prophesy in part' would include both sexes, ch.13; 'all prophesy' would include the sisters, ch.14. Thus to use 1 Cor.14:34-35 to cancel out the functioning of all that is clearly revealed in the immediate context seems stretched and unnatural. This would suggest that 1 Cor.14:34-35 has something else in view other than to totally silence the sisters during the meeting.
5. 1 Cor.11:4-5 reveals that men and women prayed and prophesied together. A body gathering seems to be presupposed here. Otherwise, why would Paul be concerned about the women prophesying when something about their outward appearance was inappropriate? The vast majority of those who have dealt with this passage see it as having a church meeting in view (cf. Zens, 'Aspects,' 1981, pp.5-7). If this is true, then it shows that the true meaning of 1 Cor.14:34-35 cannot be to silence the prophesying and praying of the ladies. This passage is in close proximity to 1 Cor.14:34-35 and therefore casts a great deal of doubt on using the 1 Cor.14 passage to stop female prophesying.
6. Acts 1 and 2 reveal the activity of women and men in prophesying and prayer. The historical narrative and Peter's didactic proclamation on the day of Pentecost reveal the functioning of both sexes - 'your men and women will prophesy.' The natural flow in 1 Cor.11-14:33 reflects the participation of both sexes predicted by Joel and announced by Peter. It seems very strained and unnatural to suggest that in the very place where Paul wants prophesy to be center stage - the meeting of the body -- females would be forbidden to function. Women were not silent on the day the ekklesia was birthed, and that cannot be without significance, especially in light of Joel's prophecy.

I submit that an impartial Christian courtroom would have great difficulty seeing the 'silence' position, based on 1 Cor.14:34-35, as being 'beyond reasonable doubt.' There is so much in the immediate context that assumes the input of the sisters, that to use 1 Cor.14:34-35 to silence them is a very questionable hermeneutic. While the other position heard by the court would have its problems too, I think they would conclude that allowing the women to function with the blessing of their husband's headship is a reasonable viewpoint.

In light of these perspectives, Steve, I appeal to you again to re-think your position in this matter. You stake everything, in the final analysis, on a 'conservative approach' in which you make sure you cover a concern of the apostle in 1 Cor.14:34-35. But I suggest that since there is a whole lot of 'reasonable doubt' about using that one text to silence the sisters, that you would be more in line with Christ's mind to pursue a 'loving approach' that would not be so concerned to cover the 'letter' of one text (and there are interpretations of the text that do not require the conclusion of 'silence' as you now understand it, per Entekin & Scrivener), but be concerned to do justice to the 'spirit' (tenor) of the NT, which does not envision the silence of the sisters. Women can function as prophetesses, 'presbutidas' (eldresses), prayers, tongues-speakers, testifiers, evangelizers, prophesiers, singers, etc., under the blessing of their husband's headship, and not violate the concerns you have that they not be elders or teachers in the ekklesia. This last sentence, to me, best summarizes the information supplied to us in the Bible. If this be true, your questionable use of one text to cancel out much of female ministry is a big mistake. To unnecessarily put the kibosh on half the priesthood is a serious error, in light of our heralding of the priesthood of "all" believers. To use 1 Cor.14:34-35 to cancel out the prophesying of "all" which stands in the immediate context is a serious hermeneutical flaw in your position. The most natural way to look at 1 Cor.14 would be to see the 'whole church' as brothers and sisters prophesying, and to then view Paul's concern in vv.34-35 as relating to a narrower issue.

Love you, brother, and hope to see you in March, as the Lord leads!

Jon

I believe there is information in these materials that will further contribute to the 'reasonable doubt' connected to your current position re: 1 Cor.14:34-35.

Enclosures:

Linda Belleville, 'Exegetical Fallacies in Interpreting 1 Tim.2:11-15,' Priscilla Papers, Summer 2003.

Linda Belleville, 'Junia...A Re-examination of Rom.16:7 in Light of Primary Source Materials.'

Linda Belleville, 'Kephale & the Thorny Issue of Headcovering in 1 Cor.11:2-16.'

Linda Belleville, 'What the English Translators Haven't Told Us About 1 Tim.2:11-15' (cassette)

Gilbert Bilezikian, 'A Challenge for Proponents of Female Subordination to Prove Their Case from the Bible.'

Bernadette Brooten, 'Junia...Outstanding Among the Apostles (Rom.16:7).'

Pam Eisenbaum, 'Is Paul the Father of Misogyny and Antisemitism?'

E. Earle Ellis, 'Paul & the Eschatological Woman,' Pauline Theology, Eerdmans, 1989.

Marshall Entekin, "What Did Paul Mean By, 'Let Your Women Keep Silence in the Churches'?"

B.N. Fisk, 'Women & Men in the Church of Corinth: Interpretive Puzzles in 1 Cor.14:34-35.'

Rebecca M. Groothuis, 'Leading Him Up the Garden Path: Further Thoughts on 1 Tim.2:11-15.'

David Hamilton, '1 Cor.14:26-40,' Parts 1 & 2, Priscilla Papers, Summer & Fall, 2003.

L.E. Maxwell, *Women in Ministry: A Historical & Biblical Look at the Role of Women in Christian Leadership*, Victor, 1987.

Ann Nyland, 'Papyri, Women & Word Meaning in the NT,' *Priscilla Papers*, Fall, 2003.

Steve Parker, 'He Shall Rule Over You,' *Quodlibet Online Journal of Christian Theology*, Winter 2001.

Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of God: Women, Sexuality & the Catholic Church*, Penguin, 1990 360pp.

Richard Ritenbaugh, 'Jephthah's Vow: Did He or Didn't He?' [bibletools.org](http://bibletools.org)

Marc A. Scrivener, "Regarding the 'Silent Women' Doctrine," [masministries.injesus.com](http://masministries.injesus.com)

Tyndale, 'Jephthah's Vow: Would An Israelite Kill His Only Daughter?'

[www.tyndale.com](http://www.tyndale.com)

Jon Zens, 'Aspects of Female Priesthood: A Focus on 1 Cor.11:2-16 & 1 Cor.14:34-35,' *Baptist Reformation Review*, Fall,1981, pp.3-18.

Jon Zens w/ Cliff Bjork, 'Women in the Body of Christ: Functioning Priests or 'Silent' Partners?,' *Searching Together*, 31:1-3, 47pp.