

# Paul and women

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## 1 Corinthians 7

***Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman."*** (1Co 7:1)

Some Corinthians were saying that the body is bad and bodily appetites such as a desire to have sex were deemed 'unspiritual'.

Paul disagrees (1Co 7:2-6). He argues that husbands and wives should engage in regular sex so they are lest they become tempted to engage in sexual immorality. Paul says that if a couple want to forgo sex in order to spend more time in prayer he can agree as long as it by mutual agreement and for a limited time only.

***I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.*** (1Co 7:7)

Paul wishes everyone was single because single people (unmarried or widowed) are to devote themselves to pleasing God whole heartedly. Married people have divided interests i.e. how to please God and how to please their spouse (the two are not always complimentary!). So Paul urges the single to remain so for God's glory.

But he recognises that not all are able to be single because some are strongly affected by their desire to have sex (so he urges them to get married) and he also recognises that while singleness is a gift from God, so too is being married.

So if you are married then stay married and engage in a normal relationship, if you want to get married then it is not a sin but one needs to understand that marriage is hard, if you are single then you might do well to stay so.

## **1 Corinthians 11**

In 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 there are a number of references to heads and head coverings. Basically Paul makes two points in this passage.

The first is that husbands are called by God to be leaders (heads) in their marriage relationships with their wives. This is not about being bossy but rather about being a kind of servant-leader to the wife acting for her, rather than his own, good.

The passage discusses how women should cover their heads when they pray/prophesy while men should not. I understand the head covering to refer to long hair (see 11:14-15). In other words women should pray/prophesy with long hair and men should pray/prophesy with short hair.

In Corinth it seems that there was a false idea that now that people were Christians they were 'spiritual' and gender differences no longer mattered (at one extreme this means not having sex). So women and men could dress and behave in ways that denied or minimised gender distinctives. Paul disagrees very strongly. He wants women to be women (in those days all women had long hair) and he wanted men to be men (short hair).

In applying the passage to today it is the main point about appreciating gender distinctives in Christ not whether men or women can or cannot have long hair. Paul does not want Christians to 'flatten out' gender.

Paul makes an argument for husbands being leaders on the basis that God made man first, the woman was made from the man and made to be man's helper, hence God's purpose is for the man to be the leader. Lest men should think themselves superior Paul also makes the point that every man since Adam has been born from a woman and ultimately both are God's creation. Paul believes that our genders are glorious and indicate a glory above that of the angels.

## 1 Corinthians 14

As in all the churches of the saints, the women should **keep silent in the churches**.

For they are **not permitted to speak**, but should be in **submission**, as the Law also says.

If there is anything they **desire to learn**, let them **ask their husbands at home**.

For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

The verses above are 1 Corinthians 14:33-35. They are part of a bigger passage 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 that is about avoiding disruptive speech during church gatherings.

In 14:26 Paul recognises that when people come to the gathering each person might have "a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation" that they would like to share. Paul thinks this is good as long as it is done in an orderly way so **that people are built up**.

So in verses 27-28 Paul says that people who speak in tongues can do so one at a time with someone interpreting what is said. They are not allowed to all speak at once and if there is no interpreter then Paul tells them that they must "**keep silent in church**". Without an interpreter people will not be built up.

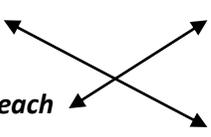
In verses 29-33 Paul says that prophets are to speak one at a time to avoid a whole lot of people talking at once. Paul says this is necessary to ensure that people can **learn** and be **built up**.

In verses 34-35 Paul talks about women speaking in church. Clearly he doesn't mean that they can never say anything in church because in 1 Corinthians 11:5 Paul mentions women praying and prophesying in church. So what Paul is forbidding here is **disruptive speech**. It appears that possibly some women were calling out to their husbands when the church was being addressed. Perhaps some women were asking questions or perhaps sharing their own thoughts and opinions on what was being said. If they had questions for their husband then home was the place to ask them. An attitude of submission and learning needed to be sought rather than one of being overly opinionated.

So the disruptive women, like the disruptive tongue-speakers and prophets needed to **keep silent in church**. Paul isn't being any more negative to women than to tongue-speakers or prophets. His desire is simply for orderly speech in church gatherings so that people can **learn** and be **built up** with everything being done decently and in order.

## 1 Timothy 2

(11) Let a woman **learn quietly** with all **submissiveness**.  
(12) I do not permit a woman to **teach** or to exercise **authority over a man**; she is to **remain quiet**.



(13)           **1.**     For Adam was formed first, then Eve;

(14)           **2.**     Adam was not deceived

but the woman and she became a transgressor.

(15)                     Yet she will be saved through childbearing,

provided they continue in faith, love, holiness and with modesty.

The context is Paul speaking to a situation in which women are attempting to **usurp a teaching function in the church**.

Paul gives two reasons from Genesis 1-3 as to why this should not be encouraged. The first is that Adam being created first is an indication of the man's headship and so the teaching function is primarily his.

The second is to point out that original sin in Genesis 3 involved a woman rejecting God's ordering of relationships and taking an authoritative role in which she instructed/taught her husband in false teaching. The same problem is occurring in Ephesus.

So Paul is making the point that he does not agree with women teaching men on the basis on men's headship. Eve's rejection of God's ordering provides an example of the problem.

However lest anyone should accuse Paul of regarding women as hopeless sinners, he affirms that women can be saved. Women experience salvation as they express their faith in obedience to God's calling in their lives, that is, by fulfilling their God-given role as mothers raising children. This being one aspect, although not the only one, of their living faithful, loving and holy lives before God.

Paul knows that sometimes women do not become married or have children. In fact he would encourage women to remain single or forgo having children for kingdom-related reasons but in most general circumstances God's purpose for women involves being a wife and mother just as it does for a man to be a husband and father. A person of faith lives out these relationships lovingly and obediently.