

THE GREENWOOD BULLETIN

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When May a Christian

Woman Speak?

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I have been asked to address this topic and I am pleased to do so. It may be that this will not answer some more specific questions that some would like to have answered. Although I am aware that questions exist in the minds of some, I have not yet been made aware of precisely what those questions are. So I will begin with a "shotgun" approach to the broader question in the hopes that more specific questions will be answered in the process. If questions remain I hope that they will be asked in more specific terms. We will be pleased to attempt an answer when such questions are received.

Women spoke with Divine approval on several occasions during the life of Christ. The woman of Canaan had a verbal and public exchange with Christ that

demonstrated her faith and won the approval of our Lord (**Matthew 15:21-28**). Martha spoke to him in the context of a "Bible study" and received instruction (**Luke 10:38-42**). Jesus had another "Bible study" with the woman at the well in which she was free to ask and answer questions (**John 4:7-29**). Jesus had a verbal exchange with Mary Magdalene in which He instructed her to go and tell the brethren of His ascension (**John 20:11-18**). Many others could be mentioned (**Mark 5:25-34; 7:25-30**).

Women spoke while other Christians were gathered* without being rebuked. Sometimes they were invited by inspired men, on such occasions, to speak. Rhoda spoke to a gathering* of Christians (**Acts 12:13-19**). Sapphira was questioned and invited to speak in an gathering* of the apostles and other Christians (**Acts 5:7-10**). Anna the prophetess "spoke of Him [Christ] to all those who looked

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for redemption in Jerusalem" (**Luke 2:38**). The widows who were present when Peter came to raise Dorcas apparently spoke as they showed the things that Dorcas had made (**Acts 9:39-41**).

Women engaged in teaching in the early days of the church. Priscilla assisted her husband in explaining to Apollos the way of the Lord more accurately (**Acts 18:26**). All Christian women, like all Christian men, have a duty to "always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks... a reason for the hope that is in [them]" (**1 Peter 3:15**). Older women have a duty to teach the younger women their Christian duties and opportunities (**Titus 2:3-5**). Women were among the "saints who are at Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus" to whom Paul was inspired to write (**Ephesians 1:1**) and they were commanded to participate, jointly in "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (**Ephesians 5:19; see also Colossians 1:2 and 3:16**). Philip the evangelist had four virgin daughters who prophesied (**Acts 21:9**). They were miraculously endowed with the ability to teach God's truth.

If we were left with only these instructions and examples, we would have to conclude that Christian women are authorized to speak and to teach in all ways and in all places just as men. But there are at least two additional passages of scripture that somewhat modify the Christian woman's general duty and privilege to speak and to teach. First, Paul was inspired to instruct Timothy to "[L]et a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence" (**1 Timothy 2:11, 12**). The word that is twice translated "silence" here is *hesuchios* and it means "quietness, causing no disturbance to others..." (Vine). So women are to be taught not to usurp authority over or to teach over a Christian man, but to have a humble and meek disposition. Second, Paul was inspired to instruct the church in Corinth concerning abuses in their assemblies in which miraculous gifts were being exercised (**1 Corinthians 11:17-14:40**). His use of the word "church" here, obviously has reference to THE assembly upon the first day of the week when all of the members of the local church were assembled and

during which the Lord's Supper was eaten and, in their day, miraculous gifts were exercised (**1 Corinthians 11:17-34; 14:23**). In this setting, several categories of Christians were to remain silent (this word, *sigao*, means silent). Those who could not speak so as to be understood by the hearers were to remain silent unless an inspired interpreter was present (**14:13-28**). All those who were not among the two or three speakers for the occasion were to be silent (**14:29**). Among those two or three, those whose turn to speak had ended were to be silent (**14:30**). Their wives (or their "women" -- same word in Greek) were to remain silent (**14:34, 35**). Obviously, the vast majority of those present were commanded to remain silent during the greater part of the assembly for worship. Otherwise there would have been much confusion and "God is not the author of confusion" (**14:33**).

Obviously, the wives of the prophets could ask their husbands at home if they had questions remaining unanswered. But this reasonable alternative did not mean that they were not permitted to ask someone else a question at some place other than in their

own homes. I, for one, would love to have the opportunity given to the wives of the prophets at Corinth (and to every other man and woman there). If I could get into a time machine today and take my sincere questions to an inspired prophet in order to obtain an inspired answer I can assure you that I would jump (maybe take a "quantum leap") at such an opportunity!

The fact that these women (and anyone else with questions left unanswered in the public prophesying) were to ask the prophets for answers outside of the assembly does not remove the general obligation on the part of all Christians to teach others the truth of God's word outside of the assembly in which the whole church is brought together to, among other things, partake of the Lord's Supper.

Arranging to get together at other times (other than the assembly of the whole church together when the Lord's Supper is eaten upon the first day of the week) to study the Bible is essential and Bible class is an expedient and a very helpful opportunity for all to learn and for some to teach in ways that are completely according to God's expressed will. Obviously,

both teaching and learning are activities in which all Christians are commanded to participate. Doing so is authorized. Describe these activities in any accurate way and the authority for having them does not disappear. Call them Bible studies, Bible classes, Bible drills, recitations, lesson presentations, teaching opportunities, learning opportunities, scripture training sessions, or anything else that accurately describes them. God is pleased when His children both learn and teach His word in ways that are authorized. Those who teach, both men and women, should have the honor and respect of all.

YOU ought to be a teacher by now. If you need to spend some more time as a student, that is understandable, but aim to become a teacher. "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God..." (**Hebrews 5:12**). (Editor's Note: The author used the word "assembled" and "assembly" in these places. The scripture uses the term "gathered" (Acts 12:12). I have substituted the Biblical description to avoid confusion between the occasions cited and the assembly of 1 Cor. 14). (Steve's comment – there are many

different opinions about women speaking and this article expresses such an opinion.)
