

“Church & Gender” Study Guide

Lesson 9: Women in Corinth

Outline

1. 1 Corinthians 11-14 are generally read under the broad rubric of “public assembly”—a time when the church gathered together.
2. 1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16
 - a. Hicks’ Questions:
 - i. What gathering? Public? Private? Mixed?
 - ii. What is the meaning of “head” in 11:3?
 - iii. Context of prayer and prophecy in 11:4-6?
 - iv. What does “honor” signify?
 - v. Meaning of the “headcovering” in 11:3-16?
 - vi. Meaning of appeal to creation in 11:7-9?
 - vii. Significance of “authority” in 11:10?
 - viii. How does 11:11-12 balance 11:3-10?
 - ix. Why does Paul appeal to hair length?
 - x. What is the significance of 11:16?
 - b. Ben’s Two Cents ...
 - i. Corinth was fighting over cultural dress customs in worship (Jewish vs. Greek).
 - ii. Paul responds with the customs he had learned from his Jewish teachers and explains them (“traditions,” v. 2).
 - iii. However, Paul concludes by saying it isn’t something they should fight over (v. 16).
 - c. “but every wife who prays or prophesies”
 - i. Paul assumes that women were praying and prophesying in the worship at Corinth.
 - ii. *EGALITARIAN*: Paul knows that women were praying and prophesying in the Corinthian assembly. He does not denounce it. He even tells them how they should do it! Therefore, it must have been an acceptable practice.
 - iii. *COMPLEMENTARIAN*: Women may participate in the assembly as long as “headship” is appropriately symbolized in the culture. Women may pray and prophesy while at the same time honoring their “head.”
3. 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-31
 - a. Introduction to Spiritual Gifts (v. 1-3)
 - b. List of Varieties of Gifts (v. 4-11)
 - c. Equality in the Body (v. 12-13)
 - d. Body Analogy (v. 14-20)
 - e. All Members Need Each Other (v. 21-26)
 - f. Members Will Hold Different Gifts (v. 26-31)

- g. *EGALITARIAN*: The Spirit distributes gifts “as He wills.” He does so without regard for social boundaries. Women and men have access to all the gifts of the Spirit and may use them equally in the body.
 - h. *COMPLEMENTARIAN*: The Spirit distributes gifts “as He wills.” The text specifically indicates that not every person gets every gift. Even where gifts are present, they must be used in accordance with God’s will and the doctrine of the Scriptures.
 - i. *Note that v. 13 omits “neither male nor female”
4. 1 CORINTHIANS 14:33b-35
- a. Deals with disorder in the worship assembly of church (14:26-40).
 - b. There is a concern for how the church will be perceived by outsiders (14:22-25).
 - c. Three groups are told to be silent in this chapter.
 - d. “keep silence” - Not a command for women to be totally silent in worship because that would ...
 - i. Prohibit singing, confessing, praying, etc.
 - ii. Ignore the specific situation of this text
 - iii. Ignore ch. 11:3-6
 - e. The women in question:
 - i. Either disrupting the judging of the prophets by asking questions,
 - ii. Or disrupting the assembly by being inappropriately to their husbands.
 - f. *COMPLEMENTARIAN*: The passage commands silence in specific situations. The command rooted in the “law,” which probably refers to God’s act of creation and the created order for men and women.
 - g. *EGALITARIAN*: Paul addresses some wives who seem to be disrupting the assembly with questions in a haughty manner. The overarching concern is that the assembly must be conducted in an edifying and orderly manner rather than with the total and permanent silence of any group of members.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you feel as though the Complementarian view adequately addressed the remark by Paul that women were praying and prophesying in the assembly?
2. Do you feel as though the Egalitarian view adequately addressed the command that women “be silent”?