

PAUL'S CONFLICTING STATEMENTS
ON FEMALE PUBLIC SPEAKING (1 COR. 11:5)
AND SILENCE (1 COR. 14:34-35)

A NEW SUGGESTION

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Summary

How could in 1 Corinthians women at the same time be permitted to prophesy (1 Cor. 11:5) and prohibited from asking questions (1 Cor. 14:34-35)? Read against their ancient cultural background the two texts reveal a common basic principle which lies behind both of them. According to Paul, female public speaking without male consent was unacceptable (1 Cor. 14:34-35) whereas female public speaking with male consent was tolerable if female chastity was preserved (1 Cor. 11:5).¹

**1. Review of Research: The Logical Coherence of
1 Corinthians 11:5 and 14:34-35**

In this paper I am going to deal with Paul's two well-known commands regarding female speaking and silence in church gatherings in 1 Corinthians:

Any woman who *prays* or *prophesies* with her head uncovered disgraces her head—it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved (1 Cor. 11:5).

As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted *to speak*, but should be subordinate,

¹ This article is the revised version of a paper which I presented as a faculty lecture during the Doctoral Colloquium at the Evangelical Theological Faculty Leuven (Belgium) in September 2012 and as a guest lecture at the Internationale Hochschule Liebenzell (Germany) in April 2013.

as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them *ask* their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to *speak* in church (1 Cor. 14:34-35).

The question I would like to answer in this paper is: How do the permission to prophesy (1 Cor. 11:5) and the prohibition against asking questions (1 Cor. 14:34-35) fit together? How could Paul on the one hand in chapter 11 allow women to pray and prophesy in a church gathering (if they covered their heads) and on the other hand in chapter 14 prohibit them from speaking or even asking questions in a public church meeting? Do these two statements contradict each other? Or can they be reconciled with each other? And if they can be reconciled, how?

In this context, several related questions will have to be treated as well: What kind of speaking is forbidden to women in the Pauline Corpus? Under what conditions were women allowed to speak? Under what circumstances did Paul expect them to remain silent? Were Paul's commands more severe or more liberal than the general cultural rules of his time or just the same?

In order to find sound answers to these questions, it will be necessary to investigate in detail what ancient Jewish and Graeco-Roman sources teach us about female silence and female speaking in ancient culture (3). Before we look at these ancient texts, let me just mention the most important interpretations of Paul's statements that have been suggested so far (2).

2. The Major Interpretations of 1 Corinthians 11:5 and 14:34-35

The explanations of the relationship between 1 Corinthians 11:5 and 14:34-35 are well-known. It is not necessary to explain them in detail:

2.1 The Two Passages Contradict Each Other

Three exegetical approaches assume that the two passages contradict each other and offer different explanations for this fact:

a. Paul's teaching on female speaking and silence was inconsistent. Paul contradicted himself.² Dieter Zeller regards it as possible that

² J. Koenig, *Charismata: Gods Gifts for God's People* (Westminster: Knox, 1978): 174.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16 belonged to an earlier letter and that when Paul wrote 14:34-35 he had come to a more radical position.³ But this solution only comes into consideration if all the other suggested explanations of the tension prove to be untenable.

b. The statement on female speaking in 1 Corinthians 11:5 is an original part of 1 Corinthians while the comment on female silence in 14:34-35 was added by a scribe whose view on gender roles was far more conservative than Paul's. Hans Conzelmann regards 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36 as an interpolation, possibly on the basis of 1 Timothy 2:11-12.⁴ Gordon Fee assumes that 'these verses stand in obvious contradiction to 11:2-16' and concludes that 'the words were first written as a gloss in the margin' of 1 Corinthians 14 and very early included into the main text of the letter.⁵ Wolfgang Schrage agrees and regards the contradiction with 1 Corinthians 11:5 as the decisive argument against the authenticity of 14:34-35.⁶ There is, however, not a single manuscript that does not contain these controversial verses.

c. In 1 Corinthians 11:5 Paul expressed his own view on the contribution of women in the Corinthian church gatherings whereas in 14:34-35 he quoted a Corinthian slogan which he did not share and rejected in 14:36.⁷ In contrast to the more plausible candidates for Corinthian slogans (see for instance 1 Cor. 7:1), however, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is neither proverbial nor concise and Paul does not really reject it.

2.2 The Two Passages Complement Each Other

A number of other exegetical approaches try to demonstrate that the two passages do not contradict each other but rather complement one another:

a. In 1 Corinthians 11:5 Paul allowed the female church members to pray and prophesy privately while in 14:34-35 he prohibited women

³ D. Zeller, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 2010): 447.

⁴ H. Conzelmann, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1969): 289-90.

⁵ G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987): 699-705.

⁶ W. Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1999): 3.481-85. Cf. K. Zamfir, *Men and Women in the Household of God: A Contextual Approach to Roles and Ministries in the Pastoral Epistles* (NTOA 103; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 2013): 342-44.

⁷ J. Murphy-O'Connor, 'Interpolations in 1 Corinthians', *CBQ* 48 (1986): 81-94, esp. 90-92.

from speaking and asking questions in a public church gathering. According to Adolf Schlatter, just as the daughters of Philip did not prophesy in public church gatherings (Acts 21:9) Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 11:5 on the assumption that God's spirit does not prompt women to utter their prophetic impressions in a male or mixed Christian gathering.⁸ Philipp Bachmann agrees that in 1 Corinthians 11:2-11 Paul was dealing with a prayer meeting in a private home whereas 14:34-36 concerns a public church gathering.⁹ But in antiquity, wives were only obliged to cover their heads in public, not in private settings.¹⁰

b. In 1 Corinthians 11:5 Paul allowed women to speak in church gatherings in an orderly fashion whereas in 14:34-35 he banned women from disturbing these gatherings with their banter.¹¹ According to Kenneth Bailey, Paul did not want to ban women from prophesying but requested them to be subordinated to the worship leader. Paul was actually saying: 'Women, please stop chatting so you can listen to the women (and men) who are trying to bring you a prophetic word but cannot do so when no one can hear them.'¹² But Plutarch in his treatise *On Listening to Lectures* teaches men who keep 'talking while others talk' that 'silence is a safe adornment for the young man' and reproaches the young men for 'whispering to another.'¹³

c. In 1 Corinthians 11:5 Paul allowed women to speak in church gatherings whereas in 14:34-35 he banned them from asking irrelevant and time-consuming questions. Craig Keener believes that the women in the congregation were less likely to be educated than the men and therefore could not ask 'proper questions' but were rather asking 'irrelevant questions'. Paul only 'does not want them to interrupt the

⁸ A. Schlatter, *Paulus, der Bote Jesu* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1956): 389-90. Schlatter's comments on 1 Cor. 11:5, however, are not in complete accordance with his just quoted explanation of 1 Cor. 14:26-33: On 11:5 Schlatter wrote that women contributed to the prophetic instruction 'when the church was gathered in order to pray and to receive a prophecy' (308).

⁹ Ph. Bachmann, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1921): 424-25.

¹⁰ See L. Llewellyn-Jones, *Aphrodite's Tortoise: The Veiled Woman of Ancient Greece* (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2003): 3-4, 11, 88-89, 175 and *passim*.

¹¹ J. K. Howard, 'Neither Male nor Female: An Examination of the Status of Women in the New Testament', *EvQ* 55 (1983): 31-42.

¹² K. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies on 1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 2011): 416.

¹³ Plutarch, *De recta ratione audiendi* 4 and 13 (Babbitt, LCL).

Scripture exposition with irrelevant questions anymore'. 'Those who do not know the Bible very well should not set the pace for learning in the Christian congregation; they should instead receive private attention ...'¹⁴ Christopher Forbes thinks that for women to ask questions about matters they did not understand was 'grossly improper' as 'this might lead to extended discussions' and the time of the church gatherings was limited.¹⁵ Christian Wolff agrees that the text prohibits disruptive questions.¹⁶ Plutarch, however, admonishes young men 'to listen to the speaker in silence' and neither to 'lead the speaker to digress to other topics' nor to 'interject questions'. The young men must not 'trouble the lecturers with questions which they should have asked before' and refrain from 'repeatedly asking questions about the same things.'¹⁷

d. In 1 Corinthians 11:5 Paul allowed women to participate in prophesying while in 14:34-35 he said that they may not participate in the oral deliberation regarding the value of such prophecies. Don Carson thinks that only in that connection women were not allowed to speak: 'Paul understands from this creation order that woman is to be subjected to man—or at least that wife is to be subject to husband. In the context of the Corinthian weighing of prophecies, such submission could not be preserved if the wives participated'. When women weighed in on such prophecies they were in effect 'teaching' (which is also prohibited in 1 Timothy 2:12).¹⁸

Let me say right from the beginning that I regard the solutions in section 2:2 as more promising than the more radical but largely baseless suggestions in section 2:1. At the same time, I don't think that any of the models in section 2:2 does full justice to the wording of Paul's statements and to their cultural context. Therefore, I would like to look first at the ancient views on female speaking and silence (3) and secondly, in the light of this background material, at Paul's controversial statement in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 (4).

¹⁴ C. Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992): 80-88.

¹⁵ C. Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity and its Hellenistic Environment* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995): 273-77.

¹⁶ C. Wolff, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1982): 2.344, 346.

¹⁷ Plutarch, *De recta ratione audiendi* 10, 17 and 18 (Babbitt, LCL).

¹⁸ D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987): 129-32.

3. A Synopsis of the Ancient Views on Female Speaking and Their Logical Coherence

The ancients developed a creative and intriguing interpretation for an interesting detail in a statue of the goddess Aphrodite Ourania, the Heavenly Aphrodite.¹⁹

3.1 Introduction: Aphrodite's Tortoise

In his famous *Description of Greece*, a kind of ancient Baedeker guide, the Greek traveller and geographer Pausanias (from the 2nd Century AD) related that in Elis there was a temple dedicated to the Heavenly Aphrodite. In this temple stood a golden statue of the goddess that had been created by the famous ancient architect, painter, and sculptor Phidias in the 5th Century BC. Pausanias informed his readers that the goddess had 'one foot upon a tortoise' and admitted that he was unable to explain what this peculiar detail of the image meant.²⁰ Ancient copies of Phidias' golden Aphrodite Ourania have been preserved and can be viewed in the Collection of Classical Antiquities of the State Museums of Berlin (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin) as well as in the Louvre in Paris.

All this may be interesting but would be completely irrelevant to the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, if the Greek biographer and essayist Plutarch, a contemporary of Pausanias, had not provided us with an intriguing interpretation of Aphrodite's tortoise. According to Plutarch, the tortoise 'typified womankind keeping at home and keeping silence.'²¹ It is an open question if Plutarch's interpretation of Phidias' tortoise did justice to the artist's intention.²² Nevertheless, the meaning Plutarch ascribed to the tortoise can teach us a lot about the ancient understanding of the female role.

¹⁹ Cf. H. Froning, 'Überlegungen zur Aphrodite Urania des Phidias in Elis', *Athenische Mitteilungen* 120 (2005): 285-94; K. Schoch, *Die doppelte Aphrodite—alt und neu bei griechischen Kultbildern* (Göttingen: Universitätsverlag, 2009): 65-90.

²⁰ Pausanias 6.25.1.

²¹ Plutarch, *Coniugalia praecepta* 32 = *Moralia* 142d (Babbitt, LCL); cf. *De Iside et Osiride* 74 = *Moralia* 381e.

²² Cf. Froning, 'Überlegungen', 290-91; Schoch, *Die doppelte Aphrodite*, 67-69.

3.2 Methodology

At the same time, Plutarch's significant interpretation of Aphrodite's tortoise is only one piece of evidence and must not be rashly generalised. First of all, we have to be very careful not to presuppose that the ancient conviction that women should be silent and stay at home was universally accepted in Greek, Roman, Jewish, or Christian contexts. Secondly, we have to reckon with the possibility that in one and the same Pagan, Jewish or Christian context different people had different convictions regarding the silence of women. And thirdly, in the course of time, the cultural conventions regarding the female role in society may have undergone more or less radical changes.

For these reasons, it is indispensable to look at a sufficient number of the most relevant ancient source texts from different time periods, from different cultural settings, and from opposing positions within the same cultural setting. Below, I will present a synopsis of important source texts on female silence and speaking in the ancient world. Many relevant texts have already been adduced in the exegetical discussion of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, but others have often been ignored. It will be useful to analyse them in consideration of their original context (3:3-3:6). Based on this analysis, I will then try to detect the logic behind the many different and diverse ancient statements on the relationship between gender and public speaking and silence (3:7). The results of this research might then be helpful in the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 (in section 4).

3.3 General Statements on Female Silence

Plutarch's statement quoted above that women should keep silent was a very general one. In ancient literature, such general statements were quite common:

'For women silence is a grace.'²³

Political activity and 'public speaking are peculiar to men.'²⁴

Womankind is typified by 'keeping silence.'²⁵

The speech of a virtuous woman 'ought not to be for the public.'²⁶

²³ Sophocles, *Aiix* 293 (Storr, LCL).

²⁴ Phintys, *De mulierum modestia* = Stobaios 4.23.61 (2.589.8-9 Hense; tr. by I. M. Plant, *Women Writers of Ancient Greece and Rome: An Anthology* [Norman: University of Oklahoma, 204]: 85).

²⁵ Plutarch, *Coniugalia praecepta* 32 = *Moralia* 142d (Babbitt, LCL); cf. *De Iside et Osiride* 74 = *Moralia* 381e.

²⁶ Plutarch, *Coniugalia praecepta* 31 = *Moralia* 142c-d (Babbitt, LCL).

‘For a woman silence is adequate.’²⁷
 ‘A woman ought to keep silence.’²⁸
 ‘A silent wife is a gift from the Lord.’²⁹
 ‘A woman’s voice is indecent.’³⁰
 A woman ‘may not be talkative.’³¹

One question that arises from these texts is: Were these general statements meant to be absolute rules? And if not, what were the modifications of and possible exceptions to these general statements? In order to gain a nuanced understanding of the ancient rules for female speaking and silence, we have to begin with the basic ancient distinction between the private and the public sphere (3:4). From there we can move on to the multifaceted ancient rules for female speaking both in private (3:5) and in public (3:6) settings.

3.4 The Public and the Private Sphere

The ancients distinguished between a private and a public sphere of life. The private sphere was located in private houses. The public sphere embraced everything outside of these houses.

a. The Private as the Female Sphere

Based on this distinction, the ancients were convinced that women had their place in the household, that is, in the private sphere, whereas the public sphere was the men’s domain.³² This conviction formed the social background for Plutarch’s interpretation of Aphrodite’s tortoise which symbolised in his eyes the female virtue of staying at home.

b. The Presence of Married Women in the Public Sphere

Some ancient depictions of the private sphere as the female space could convey the impression that women were not permitted to leave their houses at all. However, as a synopsis of all the relevant texts

²⁷ Plautus, *Rudens* 1114 (De Melo, LCL).

²⁸ Heliodorus, *Aethiopica* 1.21.3 (my trans.).

²⁹ Sir. 26:14 (NRS).

³⁰ *b. Qid.* 70a (Soncino).

³¹ *Debarim Rabbah* 6.11 (L. H. Archer, *Her Price is Beyond Rubies: The Jewish Women in Graeco-Roman Palestine* [JSOT.SS 60; Sheffield: Academic, 1990]: 304).

³² Cf. H. J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 2003): 153-68: ‘A Wife’s Own World’; S. B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken, ⁹1984): 79-83; H.-U. Wiemer, ‘Die gute Ehefrau im Wandel der Zeiten—von Xenophon zu Plutarch’, *Hermes* 133 (2005): 424-46.

demonstrates, although women had their place in their houses they were definitely allowed to leave the private space, though only under certain conditions which were clearly defined.³³ Here are several of these conditions which are explicitly set out by ancient authors:

(1) Firstly, according to the Neo-Pythagoreans a virtuous wife would leave her house not for just any reason but rather, specifically ‘to make sacrifices to the founding god of the city.’³⁴

(2) Secondly, according to Philo a virtuous wife was allowed to leave her house when most people had gone home and she could avoid crowded streets and market places.³⁵ The Neo-Pythagoreans taught that a wife must not leave her house ‘when it is dark, nor in the evening ... but when the market is running and it is light.’³⁶ Just as it was improper when the streets were too crowded it was also inappropriate if they were nearly deserted. The Book of Job warned its readers that ‘the eye of the adulterer waits for the twilight, saying, “No eye will see me”; and he disguises his face.’³⁷

(3) Thirdly, if a virtuous wife left her private domain, she had to do so in the right company. It goes almost without saying that an ancient woman could leave her house together with her husband but also with a servant.³⁸

(4) Fourthly, a virtuous wife who entered the public sphere had to wear adequate clothing which did not leave too much naked skin uncovered.³⁹

³³ Cf. T. Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine: An Inquiry into Image and Status* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2006): 176-204: ‘Women in Public’; L. Llewellyn-Jones, ‘House and Veil in Ancient Greece’, *British School at Athens Studies* 15 (2007): 251-58; R. MacMullen, ‘Women in Public in the Roman Empire’, *Historia* 29 (1980): 208-18; J. F. Wegner, *Chatel or Person? The Status of Women in the Mishnah* (Oxford: University, 1988): 145-67: ‘Woman and the Public Domain’.

³⁴ Phintys, *De mulierum modestia* = Stobaios 4.23.61a (2.592.14-17 Hense; tr. by Plant, *Women Writers*, 85); on the Neo-Pythagoreans see S. B. Pomeroy, *Pythagorean Women: Their History and Writings* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2013). Cf. Demosthenes, *Contra Calliclem* 23; Philo, *De specialibus legibus* 3.169, 171.

³⁵ Philo, *De specialibus legibus* 3.171 (Colson, LCL).

³⁶ Phintys, *De mulierum modestia* = Stobaios 4.23.61a (2.592.17-593.2 Hense; tr. by Plant, *Women Writers*, 85-86).

³⁷ Job 24:15 (RSV).

³⁸ Plutarch, *Coniugalia praecepta* 9 = *Moralia* 139c; Cornelius Nepos, *De viris illustribus pr.*; Juvenal, *Saturae* 6.448-56; Theophrastus, *Characteres* 22.

³⁹ *b. Ber.* 24a; *b. Git.* 90a-b; Plutarch, *Coniugalia praecepta* 31 = *Moralia* 142c-d; Plutarch, *Solon* 21.4; Justin, *Epitoma historiarum Philippicarum Pompei Trogi* 20.4; cf. Llewellyn-Jones, *Aphrodite’s Tortoise*, passim.

(5) Fifthly, in contrast to men, when ancient wives entered the public sphere they were obliged to cover their heads.⁴⁰

(6) Finally and most importantly, virtuous wives were allowed to leave their houses, but only with their husband's knowledge and permission.⁴¹

All the above mentioned conditions had the same purpose, namely to protect the wife's chastity.⁴² The danger which the public appearance of someone's wife could mean for her and for her husband is illustrated by the case of a certain Euphiletos. He was accused of killing Eratosthenes who had committed adultery with Euphiletos' wife. In his defence speech, written by the famous logographer Lysias (5th/4th Century BC), Euphiletos reported that the adulterous relationship began at his mother-in-law's funeral: 'For it was in attending her funeral that my wife was seen by this man, who in time corrupted her.'⁴³

Closely related to the protection of the wife's chastity was the expectation that a wife should obey her husband.⁴⁴ The husbands could determine how much liberty their wives had to enter the public sphere. But could a wife also play an active role in the public sphere?

c. The Female Activity in the Public Sphere

Even when ancient women met all the preconditions for female public appearance it was the men who conducted business in the public sphere whereas the women had their duties in the private domain. The Greek tragedian Aeschylus cited Eteocles, king of Thebes, saying: 'It is for the man to take care of business outside the house; let no woman make decrees in those matters. Keep inside and do no harm!'⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia* 6.3.10; 'Abot R. Nat. B 42; Philo, *De specialibus legibus* 3.56; *m. Ket.* 7:6.

⁴¹ Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazusae* 791-92; Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia* 6.3.12; *b. Git.* 90a-b.

⁴² Euripides, *Heracleidae* 476-78; *Troades* 645-49; Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazusae* 797-99; Livy 34.1.5; Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia* 3.8.6; *Digesta* 3.1.1.5.

⁴³ Lysias 1.8 (Lamb, LCL).

⁴⁴ See G. Dellings, 'Eheleben', *RAC* 4 (1959): 691-707; cf. 1 Cor. 14:34; Eph. 5:24; Col. 3:18; 1 Tim. 2:12-13; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1, 6 etc.

⁴⁵ Aeschylus, *Septem contra Thebas* 200-202 (Weir Smith, LCL); cf. Herodotus 2.35.2; Ps-Aristotle, *Oeconomica* 3.1.

This general rule applied particularly to military service and war.⁴⁶ In Homer's *Iliad*, Hector prompts his wife Andromache to return to her female tasks in the house: 'But war shall be for men.'⁴⁷ Further, women were not allowed to assume a public office. The Roman jurist Ulpian (3rd century AD) said: 'Women are removed from all civil or public functions and therefore are neither able to be judges nor to undertake a magistracy nor to bring a prosecution nor to intervene on behalf of another nor to be procurators.'⁴⁸

According to Plutarch, Aphrodite's tortoise represented two female virtues: staying at home *and* keeping silent. So far I have analysed ancient statements on the first of these two virtues. But what do we know about the speaking of women in the ancient world and how do Paul's commands that women should be silent relate to the customs and conventions of the surrounding Jewish and Graeco-Roman culture? Since, as we have seen, the ancients distinguished so emphatically between the public and the private sphere, it will be necessary to proceed in two steps. First, I will take a look at female silence and female speaking in a *private* context (3:5). Secondly, I will ask what ancient source texts reveal about the speaking of women in a *public* setting (3:6).

3.5 Female Speaking and Silence in Private Settings

a. Private Female Speaking to Women and to Male Relations

It is rather obvious, that the available source texts do not contain any principal objections against the private speaking of women with other related or unrelated women in a private setting. The most probable reason for this is that in such conversations neither female chastity nor male leadership were put at risk or called into question.

⁴⁶ Cf. A. A. Barrett, 'Aulus Caecina Severus and the Military Woman', *Historia* 54 (2005): 301-14; C. T. Begg, 'Athaliah's Coup and Overthrow According to Josephus', *Antonianum* 71 (1996): 191-210; C. T. Begg, 'The Exploits of Deborah and Jael According to Josephus', *Laurentianum* 48 (2007): 3-28; D. Vainstub, 'Some Points of Contact Between the Biblical Deborah War Traditions and Some Greek Mythologies', *VT* 61 (2011): 324-34.

⁴⁷ Homer, *Iliad* 6.486-493 (Murray, LCL); cf. Homer, *Odyssea* 21.350-54; Phintys, *De mulierum modestia* = Stobaios 4.23.61; Tacitus, *Annales* 3.33; Philo, *De vita Mosis* 2.236; Philo, *De specialibus legibus* 3.172.

⁴⁸ *Digesta* 50.17.2 (Evans Grubbs, *Women*, 69); cf. Phintys, *De mulierum modestia* = Stobaios 4.23.61; *Digesta* 5.1.12.2; *Digesta* 16.1.1 (Paulus); Plutarch, *Mulierum virtutes* 19 = *Moralia* 257e; Philo, *De specialibus legibus* 3.170; *Sifre Deut.* § 157.

For most of the ancients, the private conversation of a woman with a male relation was also completely unproblematic. However, even in a private setting, women were required (in accordance with the concept of male leadership) to be silent in the presence of their speaking (or shouting) husbands.⁴⁹ They had to stop talking when asked to do so by their husbands.⁵⁰ And they had to let their husbands speak first.⁵¹ In all these cases of female learning and teaching, unchaste behaviour was excluded because only relatives were involved.

b. Private Female Speaking to Unrelated Men

In contrast to the situations mentioned so far, female speaking to unrelated men was regarded as more problematic, in both public and private settings. Nevertheless, even in this regard different positions were possible and vigorously defended.

A dialogue between two rabbis from the Third Century AD can shed some light on the diversity of opinions. When Rab Judah visited Rab Nachman bar Yaakov he did not want to let Nachman's young daughter come and serve him a drink nor did he want to greet his wife. As a justification, Judah quoted Samuel (ben Nachman?) who had taught that 'a woman's voice is indecent.'⁵²

(1) Some ancient texts speak of *women who learned from male teachers* in a private setting:

(a) The New Testament pericope about the visit of Jesus and his disciples to the house of Mary and Martha describes such a situation. According to the Gospel of Luke, Mary 'sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying.'⁵³

(b) A similar situation was described by Jerome who, according to one of his epistles, was visited in his home in Rome by his female disciple Marcella:

She never came to see me that she did not ask me some question concerning them (i.e. the scriptures), nor would she at once acquiesce in my explanations but on the contrary would dispute them; not, however,

⁴⁹ Euripides, *Troades* 653-54; Plutarch, *Coniugalia praecepta* 37 = *Moralia* 143c; Sophocles, *Ajax* 284-94.

⁵⁰ Semonides of Amorgos frg. 7, l. 13-21.

⁵¹ Menander, *Hypobolimaios* frg. 484 Kock.

⁵² *b. Qid.* 70a.

⁵³ Luke 10:38 (NRS).

for argument's sake but to learn the answers to those objections which might, as she saw, be made to my statements.⁵⁴

(2) There are also some ancient reports of *female scholars teaching male visitors* in their private houses:

(a) According to 1 Samuel, Saul and two of his servants visited the witch of Endor who was a medium in her private home in order to inquire of her.⁵⁵ The Second Book of Kings relates that a group of priests went to the house of the prophetess Huldah in Jerusalem to consult her.⁵⁶

(b) In his *Lives of the Philosophers*, Eunapius mentioned the Neoplatonic female philosopher Sosipatra of Ephesus (first half of the 4th Century). She was married to the Neoplatonic philosopher Eustathius of Cappadocia and made 'by her surpassing wisdom her own husband seem inferior and insignificant.'⁵⁷ After her husband's early death, Sosipatra lived on her own estate in Pergamum and asked the Neoplatonic philosopher Aedesius to educate her sons. In Pergamum, she also developed a successful teaching activity herself, similar to the one carried out by Aedesius:

In her own home Sosipatra held a chair of philosophy that rivalled his, and after attending the lectures of Aedesius, the students would go to hear hers; and though there was none that did not greatly appreciate and admire the accurate learning of Aedesius, they positively adored and revered the woman's inspiring teaching.⁵⁸

Sosipatra did not shy away from teaching unrelated men but did so after her husband's death and in her own house, that is, in a private setting.

(c) A similar report about the private teaching of a male pupil by a woman can be found in the Book of Acts. Luke relates that when the Jewish-Christian preacher Apollos came from Alexandria to Ephesus and started teaching in the synagogue, 'Priscilla and Aquila heard him, took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately.'⁵⁹ As her husband Aquila participated, this private instruction did not compromise Priscilla's good reputation as a faithful wife. Further, the common teaching of Aquila and Priscilla implies that

⁵⁴ Jerome, *Epistulae* 127.7 (NPNF² 6:255).

⁵⁵ 1 Sam. 28:7-25.

⁵⁶ 2 Kgs 22:14-20.

⁵⁷ Eunapius, *Vitae sophistarum* 466 (Wright, LCL).

⁵⁸ Eunapius, *Vitae sophistarum* 469 (Wright, LCL).

⁵⁹ Acts 18:26 (NRS).

Priscilla's teaching activity had her husband's full approval. If the order of their names hints at a more prominent role of Priscilla in the theological instruction of Apollos, even this must have received Aquila's consent.

(d) According to Jerome, in Rome his extraordinarily gifted female pupil Marcella instructed unrelated men, presumably also in a private setting:

... after my departure from Rome, in case of a dispute arising as to the testimony of scripture on any subject, recourse was had to her to settle it. And so wise was she and so well did she understand what philosophers call τὸ πρέπον, that is, the becoming, in what she did, that when she answered questions she gave her own opinion not as her own but as from me or someone else, thus admitting that what she taught she had herself learned from others. For she knew that the apostle had said: 'I suffer not a woman to teach', and she would not seem to inflict a wrong upon the male sex many of whom (including sometimes priests) questioned her concerning obscure and doubtful points.⁶⁰

Marcella expressed her acknowledgment of male leadership not only by limiting herself to answering male questions whenever she was asked; in addition, she avoided any claim to be herself a creative and independent theological thinker, apparently because this qualification was according to the cultural norms of her time reserved to male theologians.

So far, I have presented and analysed relevant texts on female speaking and silence in a *private* setting (3:5). When we turn to female speaking in a *public* setting (3:6), we have to note that the ancient demand on women to be silent was much stricter in this regard.

Plutarch was convinced that

not only the arm of the virtuous woman, but her speech as well, ought not to be for the public, and she ought to be modest and guarded about saying anything in the hearing of outsiders, since it is an exposure of herself; for in her talk can be seen her feelings, character, and disposition.⁶¹

Nevertheless, even in the public sphere female speaking was not always considered inappropriate.

⁶⁰ Jerome, *Epistulae* 127.7 (NPNF² 6:254-55).

⁶¹ Plutarch, *Coniugalia praecepta* 31 = *Moralia* 142c-d (Babbitt, LCL).

3.6 *Female Speaking and Silence in Public Settings*

In the ancient world, the conviction that market places and law courts, that is the public sphere, was a male domain and that women had their place in the household, that is in the private sphere, was prevalent. Greek, Roman, and Jewish authors agreed on this (see above 3:4). This common core belief formed the background of everything the different ancient writers had to say about female speaking in a public setting.

Least problematic from an ancient perspective was the public speaking of women with other women. Not only in a private but also in a public setting, women were allowed to have conversations with other women.⁶² Just as in the private also in the public sphere, communication between women endangered neither female chastity nor male leadership.

a. Public Female Speaking to Unrelated Men: The Rule

But in general, women were not allowed to have public conversations with other (women's) men. Around the year 195 BC, the Roman tribunes discussed the abrogation of the Oppian Law. Two of them proposed to abrogate that law while others wanted to keep it. Livy related that, when abrogation of the law was publicly discussed,

the matrons could not be kept at home by advice or modesty or their husbands' orders, but blocked all the streets and approaches to the Forum, begging the men as they came down to the Forum that, in the prosperous condition of the state, when the private fortunes of all men were daily increasing, they should allow the women too to have their former distinctions restored. The crowd of women grew larger day by day; for they were now coming in from the towns and rural districts. Soon they dared even to approach and appeal to the consuls, the praetors, and the other officials.⁶³

This behaviour of the matrons was extraordinary in at least two respects: The women did not hesitate to talk to strange men in the streets and they publicly appealed to members of the male government. As Livy's report of these events reveals, this unusual female conduct raised the question as to its modesty and its conformity with male leadership in the families.

(1) A woman was not allowed to make a public speech, for different reasons: The first reason was female chastity. In her treatise on female chastity, the Pythagorean philosopher Phintys made a sophisticated

⁶² See for instance Appian, *Bellum Civile* 4.32.

⁶³ Livy 34.1.5-7 (Sage, LCL).

distinction between activities that are peculiar to men, those that are peculiar to women, and those that are common to both. Not surprisingly, as a female philosopher Phintys was not against female philosophising but said about the woman ‘that it is not appropriate for her to ride horses nor to speak in public’. Rather, not only generalship and political activity (3:4.c) but also ‘public speaking’ is ‘peculiar to men.’⁶⁴ This distinction between male and female gender roles was part of the Pythagorean understanding of female chastity.

The same opinion was held by Plutarch who approvingly quoted Pythagoras’ wife Theano with the words that the speech of the virtuous woman was not for the public (3:5.b).

(2) A second reason was the prevailing notion of male leadership. When during the Civil War the richest women of Rome were compelled to make a financial contribution to the war their complaint was repulsed by female relatives of the triumvirs. Therefore, they decided to let Hortensia speak on their behalf in public to the triumvirs and bring forward their arguments. Appian relates that

While Hortensia thus spoke the triumvirs were angry that women should dare to hold a public meeting when the men were silent; that they should demand from magistrates the reasons for their acts ... They ordered the lictors to drive them away from the tribunal, which they proceeded to do...⁶⁵

In this case, the triumvir’s main objection was not unchaste behaviour but the women’s lack of respect for male leadership.

The prevalent ancient conviction that women must not speak publicly was complemented by the closely related regulation that they should make their contributions to a public debate through their male relatives. Plutarch stated that

a woman ought to do her talking either to her husband or through her husband, and she should not feel aggrieved if, like the flute-player, she makes a more impressive sound through a tongue not her own.⁶⁶

Regarding the possibility of female contributions to the male domain, the rabbis referred to a regulation in the Mosaic law: ‘The father of the young woman shall say to the elders ...’⁶⁷ From this verse the rabbis

⁶⁴ Phintys, *De mulierum modestia* = Stobaios 4.23.61 (see above 3.3).

⁶⁵ Appian, *Bellum Civile* 4.34 (White, LCL); cf. Plant, *Women Writers*, 104-105.

⁶⁶ Plutarch, *Coniugalia praecepta* 32 = *Moralia* 142d (Babbitt, LCL).

⁶⁷ Deut. 22:16 (NRS).

concluded that a woman should introduce her point of view into a public debate via her father.⁶⁸

(3) For these two reasons, several ancient thinkers were *against any public female speaking* whatsoever:

(a) The main supporter of the above mentioned restrictive Oppian Law was the Roman consul Cato the Elder who in a public speech defended its necessity and criticised the public appearance of the Roman matrons severely. He denounced the fact that ‘they publicly address other women’s husbands’⁶⁹ and said:

What sort of practice is this, of running into the streets and blocking the roads and speaking to other women’s husbands? Could you not have made the same requests, each of your own husband, at home? Or are you more attractive outside and to other women’s husbands than to your own? And yet, not even at home, if modesty would keep matrons within the limits of their proper rights, did it become you to concern yourselves with the question of what laws should be adopted in this place or repealed.⁷⁰

According to Cato, the matrons should on the one hand have addressed their concerns in a private setting to their husbands. The implication seems to be that it was their husbands who had to introduce their wife’s concerns into the public debate. On the other hand, Cato’s preference was that women would not engage themselves at all in legislative and therefore public issues but would rather confine themselves to their household duties. This attitude has much in common with the advice of Ps-Aristotle, that a virtuous woman should ‘give no heed to public affairs.’⁷¹

(b) The Greek and Latin fathers limited themselves to underscoring the general rule that women have to be silent and to interpreting this rule as an absolute. Tertullian insisted that ‘it is not permitted to a woman to speak in the church; but neither (is it permitted her) to teach, nor to baptize, nor to offer, nor to claim to herself a lot in any manly function, not to say (in any) sacerdotal office.’⁷² At the same time, Tertullian regarded the active participation of women in church gatherings as a characteristic of heretical behaviour: ‘The very women of these heretics, how wanton they are! For they are bold enough to

⁶⁸ *Sifre to Deuteronomy* § 235.

⁶⁹ Cato in Livy 34.4.18 (Sage, LCL).

⁷⁰ Cato in Livy 34.2.9-10 (Sage, LCL).

⁷¹ Ps-Aristotle, *Oeconomicus* 3.1 (Armstrong, LCL).

⁷² Tertullian, *De virginibus velandis* 9 (ANF 4:33).

teach, to dispute, to enact exorcisms, to undertake cures—it may be even to baptize.⁷³

(c) Gregory of Nazianzus in a funeral oration on the one hand admired his mother for her ability to teach his father in regard to piety in a private setting and admired his father for accepting her female instruction. On the other hand, however, Gregory told with much approval about his mother’s conduct that ‘in the holy assemblies, or places, her voice was never to be heard except in the necessary responses of the service’⁷⁴ and that ‘she revered the sanctuary by her silence.’⁷⁵

(d) As a biblical justification for such a strict female behaviour, Origen argued—against the Montanist female prophets Priscilla and Maximilla and their disciples—that the Old Testament women Deborah and Huldah only spoke to individuals and never addressed the assembly of the people as the male prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah did. Likewise, the New Testament prophetesses Anna and the daughters of Philip ‘did not speak in the churches.’⁷⁶

(e) John Chrysostom deduced from 1 Corinthians 14:35, 1 Timothy 2:12 and related New Testament passages: ‘Let her (i.e. the woman) not speak at all in the church’. As a further clarification he added: ‘To such a degree should women be silent, that they are not allowed to speak not only about worldly matters, but not even about spiritual things, in the church. This is order, this is modesty, this will adorn her more than any garments.’⁷⁷

b. Public Female Speaking to Unrelated Men: The Exceptions

This, however, is not yet the whole picture. As a close analysis of the most important source texts on public speaking of women reveals, neither in Graeco-Roman culture nor in ancient Judaism was it completely unacceptable.

(1) Many ancients believed that *women were allowed to speak for themselves in a public setting on one clearly defined condition: if their*

⁷³ Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* 41.5 (ANF 3:263).

⁷⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 18.9 (NPNF² 7:257).

⁷⁵ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 18.10 (NPNF² 7:257).

⁷⁶ Origen, *In epistolam I ad Corinthios* frg. 74 (P. C. Miller, ed., *Women in Early Christianity: Translations from Greek Texts* [Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2005]: 36).

⁷⁷ John Chrysostomus, *In epistolam I ad Timotheum* 9 on 1 Tim. 2:11-15 (NPNF¹ 13:435).

contributions were invited or at least accepted by the men who were involved in a conversation or a gathering:

(a) A very illuminating scene can be found in Heliodorus of Emesa's novel *Aethiopica* about Theagenes and Chariclea (3rd Century AD). After Thyamis, the chief of a band of robbers, has captured the beautiful virgin Chariclea, he decides to marry her but nevertheless regards it as appropriate to ask the girl about her mind. Chariclea's answer is very instructive:

It would be more suitable for my brother Theagenes to speak; for I think that for a woman silence is adequate and that among men a man should answer. But since you have allowed me to speak as well and have given me this first sign of kindness that you seek to obtain the right things by persuasion rather than by force and since especially all that has been said concerns me, I am constrained to transgress my and other virgins' rules and to answer the proposal of marriage of the one who is in control, and this even in the presence of so many men.⁷⁸

In this scene, Thyamis uses his male leadership role to allow a woman to speak in public. Accordingly, Chariclea feels free to answer, in the presence of many unrelated men, an unrelated man's question because she has explicitly been given the permission to speak.

(b) This telling event is reminiscent of the invitation extended by the leading men of Cyrene that Aretaphila should join the government of her country.⁷⁹ Aretaphila's refusal of this invitation must not obscure the fact that the male leadership of Cyrene felt justified to invite a woman to take part in the governance of the country. In these men's eyes it would have been completely acceptable if Aretaphila had taken on a role in the government because she would have done so upon male invitation.

(c) A comparable rationale appears to have led Plato and others to accept Aspasia, a female teacher of rhetoric in Athens, as their instructor. The Platonic Socrates says that Aspasia 'is by no means weak in the art of rhetoric; on the contrary, she has turned out many fine orators, and amongst them one who surpassed all other Greeks, Pericles, the son of Xanthippus.'⁸⁰ Plutarch added that Aspasia, 'as some say, was held in high favour by Pericles because of her rare political wisdom. Socrates sometimes came to see her with his disciples, and his intimate friends brought their wives to her to hear her

⁷⁸ Heliodorus, *Aethiopica* 1.21.3-22.1 (ed. Rattenbury/Lumb/Maillon; my trans.).

⁷⁹ Plutarch, *Mulierum virtutes* 19 = *Moralia* 257e.

⁸⁰ Plato, *Menexenus* 235e (Bury, LCL).

discourse.⁸¹ Socrates and other men expressed their approval of Aspasia's teaching activity by attending her lectures.

(d) In the *Symposium*, the Platonic Socrates praises 'the discourse upon Love which I heard one day from a Mantinean woman named Diotima' and related that 'I also had my lesson from her in love-matters.'⁸²

(e) The Roman matrons who publicly approached the triumvirs have already been mentioned (see above 3:6.a). While Cato the Elder regarded their public appearance as contrary to traditional Roman values and as danger to social peace, Lucius Valerius, the tribune of the people, supported and defended the female right to speak in public (see below).

(f) Valerius Maximus was rather sympathetic to Hortensia and commented on her public speech with the remark that 'Q. Hortensius then lived again in his female progeny and inspired his daughter's words. If his male descendants had chosen to follow her example, the great heritage of Hortensian eloquence would not have been cut short with a single speech by a woman.'⁸³ Quintilian added that 'the oration delivered before the triumvirs by Hortensia, the daughter of Quintus Hortensius, is still read and not merely as a compliment to her sex.'⁸⁴ These men regarded Hortensia's public speech as an exception—but as a legitimate one.

(g) Valerius Maximus also reported that Maesia of Sentinum (1st Century BC) when she was tried on a criminal charge pleaded her own case before the praetor Lucius Titus 'and a great concourse of people'. Valerius added that 'because she bore a man's spirit under the form of a woman, they called her Androgyne.'⁸⁵

(h) Valerius' description of Carfania (1st Century BC) was much harsher:

She was ever ready for a lawsuit and always spoke on her own behalf before the Praetor, not because she could not find advocates but because she had impudence to spare. So by constantly plaguing the tribunal with barkings to which the Forum was unaccustomed she became a notorious example of female litigiousness, so much so that women of shameless habit are taunted with the name Carfania by way of reproach. She

⁸¹ Plutarch, *Pericles* 24.3-4 (Perrin, LCL).

⁸² Plato, *Symposium* 201d (Lamb, LCL).

⁸³ Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia* 8.3.3 (Shackleton Bailey, LCL).

⁸⁴ Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 1.1.6 (Butler, LCL).

⁸⁵ Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia* 8.3.1 (Shackleton Bailey, LCL).

prolonged her life to the Consulship of C. Caesar (second time) and P. Servilius: in the case of such a monster the date of extinction rather than of origin is to be recorded.⁸⁶

After Carfania, the freedom of women to appear in court was restricted. Henceforth, they were not allowed to plead for others but just for themselves.

(i) Ancient Judaism was also aware of the possibility for men to authorise women to speak in public. 2 Kings mentions the prophetess Huldah who resided in Jerusalem and was consulted by men who were sent to her by King Josiah in order to receive a word of the Lord⁸⁷. In a rabbinic debate the following question was raised: ‘But if Jeremiah was there, how could she prophesy?’ The Babylonian Talmud reproduced the answer given by Rab and his school (3rd century AD): ‘It was said in the school of Rab in the name of Rab: Huldah was a near relative of Jeremiah, and he did not object to her doing so.’⁸⁸

The subsequent question was: ‘But how could Josiah himself pass over Jeremiah and send to her?’ This question was answered by the rabbis in two different ways: ‘The members of the school of R. Shila replied: Because women are tender-hearted. R. Johanan said: Jeremiah was not there, as he had gone to bring back the ten tribes.’⁸⁹ In our context, Rab’s answer is particularly enlightening, since it is a Jewish version of the ancient idea that leading men may authorise subordinate women to speak in the public domain.

(k) The case of the prophetess Deborah, Lappidoth’s wife, may have been assessed similarly. The fact that ‘the Israelites came up to her for judgment’⁹⁰ implies that those men who consulted Deborah by doing so approved of her prophetic role. Further, in the context of the ancient understanding of gender roles it would have been quite unusual had Deborah exercised her prophetic calling without the consent of her husband Lappidoth. The ancient reports were not only concerned with male leadership but also with Deborah’s female chastity. The answer of Rabbi Simeon ben Abishalom to the question as to why Deborah sat under a palm tree was: ‘(To avoid) privacy.’⁹¹ A woman was not

⁸⁶ Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia* 8.3.2 (Shackleton Bailey, LCL).

⁸⁷ 2 Kgs 22:12-20; cf. 2 Chr. 24:20-27.

⁸⁸ *b. Meg.* 14b (Soncino).

⁸⁹ *b. Meg.* 14b (Soncino).

⁹⁰ Judg. 4:4-5 (NRS).

⁹¹ *b. Meg.* 14a (Soncino).

allowed to be alone with an unrelated man. But, according to the Mishnah, ‘a woman may remain alone with two men.’⁹² The answer of Rabbi Simeon appears to have implied that under a palm tree a private meeting of Deborah with only one man was excluded.

(1) In a similar way her contemporaries assessed the role of Beruriah, the wife of Rabbi Meir. The rabbinic reports about her life presuppose that she was involved in halakhic discussions. The Tosefta relates that one of her judgments was confirmed by a famous Rabbi: ‘When (these) things were reported before R. Judah, he said, “Beautifully did Beruriah rule.”’⁹³

In another case, Rabbi Judah ben Baba (first half of the 2nd Century) confirmed Beruriah’s judgment. She and her brother Rabbi Simeon ben Teradion, whose father was Rabbi Haninah ben Teradion, gave different answers to the halakhic problem: ‘And when these things were reported before R. Judah ben Baba he said, “Better did his daughter rule than his son.”’⁹⁴ Probably, ‘the gender of the transmitters made it necessary to specify that a higher authority sanctioned them.’⁹⁵ That the activity of a female scribe was not approved by everyone can be concluded from the concealment of Beruriah’s identity in the Mishnah. Her ruling was taken over into the Mishnah but ascribed to Rabbi Joshua while Beruriah’s name was left out.⁹⁶

To the church fathers, although they lived in the same cultural setting as their pagan and Jewish contemporaries, the seemingly obvious notion that the male leaders of a local church could authorise female church members to speak in a church gathering appears to have been completely unreasonable.

(2) When we turn again to the Graeco-Roman texts on male authorisation of women to speak in public we encounter two established cases of male consent. Particularly in the Roman world, it was widely agreed that *women were allowed to speak in public to (unknown) men if their personal affairs were concerned*:

⁹² *m. Qid.* 4:12 (H. Danby, *The Mishnah* [Oxford: University Press, 1933]: 329).

⁹³ *t. BM* 1:6 (*The Tosefta. Sixth Edition. Tohorot*, ed. J. Neusner [New York: KTVA Publishing House, 1977]: 30).

⁹⁴ *t. BQ* 4:17 (Neusner, *Tohorot*, 15).

⁹⁵ T. Ilan, “‘Beruriah Has Spoken Well’” (*t. Kelim Bava Metzia* 1:6): The Historical Beruriah and Her Transformation in the Rabbinic Corpora’ in *Integrating Women into Second Temple History* (TSAJ 76; Tübingen: Mohr, 1999): 175-94, esp. 177.

⁹⁶ Ilan, ‘Beruriah’, 180.

(a) When in 195 BC women engaged in the public debate about the Oppian Law, the tribune Lucius Valerius disputed Cato's radical criticism of the Roman matron's public engagement: 'What new things, pray, have the matrons done in coming into the streets in crowds in a case that concerned them?'⁹⁷ And again: 'What no one wonders that all, men and women alike, have done in matters that concern them, do we wonder that the women have done in a case peculiarly their own?'⁹⁸

(b) In this respect, the topic of the matron's request was comparable to the content of other female speeches. According to Valerius Maximus, in the First Century BC Maesia of Sentinum 'pleaded her own case as defendant' and Carfania 'always spoke on her own behalf before the Praetor.'⁹⁹

(c) The right of women to speak for themselves in court was even fixed in Roman law: 'A woman is not prohibited from undertaking the work of a legal representative in regard to her own affair.'¹⁰⁰

(d) This right was also called upon in more informal situations. When in Heliodorus's novel *Aethiopica* Thyamis asks Chariclea if she wants to marry him, she replies that she feels entitled to answer in front of many unknown men for two reasons. Firstly, Thyamis has with his public question invited her to give a public answer (see above). But secondly, Chariclea's personal fate is concerned: 'since all that has been said concerns me.'¹⁰¹

(3) Beyond that, in Rome *women were allowed to speak in public to unrelated men if the general good was concerned*:

(a) In his defence of the Roman matron's public appearing, Lucius Valerius developed this aspect against Cato the Elder at great length with examples from Roman history:

Have they (i.e. the Roman women) never before this moment appeared in public? Let me unroll your (i.e. Cato's) own 'Origines' against you. Hear how often they have done it and always, indeed, for the general good. Even in the beginning, while Romulus was king, when the Capitoline had been taken by the Sabines and pitched battle was raging in the centre of the Forum, was not the fighting stopped by the rush of the matrons between the two battle-lines? What of this? When, after the

⁹⁷ Livy 34.5.7 (Sage, LCL).

⁹⁸ Livy 34.5.12 (Sage, LCL).

⁹⁹ Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia* 8.3.1-2 (Shackleton Bailey, LCL).

¹⁰⁰ *Sententiae Pauli* 1.2.2 (J. A. Evans Grubbs, *Women and the Law in the Roman Empire: A Sourcebook on Marriage, Divorce and Widowhood* [Abingdon: Routledge, 2002]: 65).

¹⁰¹ Heliodorus, *Aethiopica* 1.22.1 (my trans.).

expulsion of the kings, the Volscian legions led by Marcius Coriolanus had encamped at the fifth milestone, did not the matrons turn away from us the army which would have destroyed our city?...¹⁰²

(b) In the Second Century AD, the female right to speak in public when the general good was concerned was even fixed in Roman law. According to the Roman jurist Aemilius Papinianus (AD 142–212), ‘in criminal inquiries of treason even women are heard. In fact, a woman, Julia, uncovered the conspiracy of Sergius Catilina and provided the consul Marcus Tullius (Cicero) with evidence.’¹⁰³ A similar regulation was made by the Roman emperors Septimus Severus (AD 193–211) and Antonius Caracalla (AD 198–217) who ‘said in a rescript that a woman bringing information pertaining to the grain dole is to be heard by the prefect of the grain dole for the public good.’¹⁰⁴

3.7 The Logical Coherence of the Ancient Statements about Female Speaking

As we have seen, in the ancient world Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Christians shared the conviction that the private domain was within the woman’s purview whereas the public arena was the man’s sphere of influence. This basic conviction was the majority view in all ancient cultures and at all times, even if the strictness with which it was applied in daily life varied.

When the ancients had to decide if a woman was allowed to speak publicly or had to keep silence in a given situation they availed themselves of many different criteria: What is the traditional female role model? Is the female nature inclined to this kind of speaking? Aren’t women less intelligent than men? Will the women abandon their household tasks? Etc.

Two criteria, however, stand out in a great number of texts. First, is female speaking in keeping with male leadership? Secondly, is female speaking compatible with female modesty or chastity? According to the ancient understanding of the female role, women could only be permitted to speak in public if both preconditions were met. Neither the maintenance of female chastity alone nor the maintenance of male leadership alone was sufficient. Each of them was a necessary condition but only together they formed a sufficient condition:

¹⁰² Livy 34.5.7-11 (Sage, LCL).

¹⁰³ *Digesta* 48.4.8 (Evans Grubbs, *Women*, 69).

¹⁰⁴ *Digesta* 48.2.13 (Evans Grubbs, *Women*, 69).

Question: May a woman speak publicly to unrelated men?

Criterion 1: Is male leadership preserved?	no	no	yes	yes
Criterion 2: Is female chastity preserved?	no	yes	no	yes
Answer:	no	no	no	yes

As we have seen, some ancient opinion leaders were convinced that whenever women spoke in public either their chastity or male leadership or both were violated. Therefore, for them public speaking was always out of the question. Among the proponents of this absolute position were, on the Graeco-Roman side, Cato the Elder, and, on the Jewish side, some of the more conservative rabbis.

Other philosophers, politicians, and Jewish theologians left room for public female speaking because they were convinced that neither female chastity nor male leadership was infringed under all conditions. This view was shared for instance by Cato’s opponent Lucius Valerius and by those rabbis who regarded the public roles played by Deborah, Huldah, and Beruriah as legitimate.

4. Implications for the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:5 and 14:34-35

In this final section I am going to deal with the kind of female speaking in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 (4:1). Subsequently, I will present a new suggestion on how to solve the apparent tension between the two passages (4:2).

4.1. The Kind of Female Speaking

What kind of female speaking does Paul prohibit in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35—every kind of speaking (b) or just certain kinds (a)?

a. Not Just Female Weighing of Prophetic Utterances

One of the most prominent solutions to the tension between 1 Corinthians 11:5 and 14:34-35 assumes that in the first passage Paul accepted public female prophesying and in the second section he banned women from the public weighing of prophecies (see above 2:2.d). Thus, in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 Paul does not reject public speaking of women in general but only a very specific kind of female public speaking.

However, as Craig Blomberg, one of the proponents of this interpretation, frankly admits, ‘the drawback of this approach is that it must infer a meaning for “speaking” which Paul never spells out.’¹⁰⁵ According to the immediate context, the ‘speaking’ in 1 Corinthians 14:35 clearly refers primarily to the questions asked by Christian wives in church gatherings and at home.¹⁰⁶ When just a few sentences earlier Paul instructed his readers that the utterances of the Christian prophets have to be ‘weighed’ by the congregation he used the very specific and unmistakable word διακρίνειν (14:29). Another available verb was δοκιμάζειν (1 Thess. 5:21; 1 John 4:1).

In addition, the cultural context of the statements that ‘women should be silent in the churches’ and ‘are not permitted to speak’ strongly pleads against a too specific interpretation. As we have seen, both Jewish and Graeco-Roman ancient literature provides many similarly unconfined statements on female silence with a general meaning (see above 3:3). None of those unconditional extra-biblical statements precluded just a very specific kind of female speaking. The oft-quoted and widely accepted rule dealt with the general silence of women in public settings.

b. Every Kind of Public Female Speaking

For these reasons, interpreters assume that the statements ‘women should be silent’, ‘they are not permitted to speak’, and ‘it is shameful for a woman to speak in church’ refer to any speaking in general, including public female praying and prophesying and even asking questions.¹⁰⁷ The most natural interpretation of the phrase ‘let them ask their husbands at home’ does not restrict it to (critical) questions about the meaning or authenticity of a prophetic utterance but rather relates it to analogous statements that women should in general not talk to unrelated men in public but rather ask their own husbands at home:

¹⁰⁵ C. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994): 281.

¹⁰⁶ P. T. Massey, ‘Gender Versus Martial Concerns: Does 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Address the Issues of Male/Female or Husband/Wife?’, *TynBul* 64 (2013): 239-56, esp. 252-55.

¹⁰⁷ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 706; Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 3.486-88.

1 Cor. 14:35:

If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home

Talmud:¹⁰⁸

If men came to learn, the women came to hear.

Cato:¹⁰⁹

What sort of practice is this, of running into the streets and blocking the roads and speaking to other women's husbands? Could you not have made the same requests, each of your own husband, at home?

Ancient readers of 1 Corinthians would most easily have recognised this general prohibition in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. *Paul did not prohibit specific kinds of female speaking but all kinds of public female speaking.*

4.2 The Common Basic Principle Behind 1 Corinthians 11:5 and 14:34-35

In sharp contrast to 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, in an earlier passage of the same letter (1 Cor. 11:5) Paul accepted the public speaking of women if they wear a head covering, the common symbol of male headship and female modesty. The notion that women were allowed to speak publicly with male consent was also well known in ancient Judaism and Graeco-Roman culture.

In order to understand both statements as complementary it is important to realise that in both of them female speaking is related to male leadership and female submission. But in each of the two cases the relationship between female silence and male leadership is different. The two passages can be read as answers to two different questions.

a. No Female Public Speaking without Male Consent

One question will have been: 'What do female church members have to do if their husbands or/and the male church leaders do not permit them to speak in public church gatherings?' In his answer to this question Paul unmistakably confirmed the notion of male leadership and female submission and prohibited female speaking without male consent: 'Women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church' (1 Cor. 14:34-35).

¹⁰⁸ *b. Hag.* 3a (Soncino).

¹⁰⁹ Cato in Livy 34.2.9-10 (Sage, LCL).

b. No Female Public Speaking without Female Chastity

The other question probably was: ‘What does the apostle Paul think of female church members who speak publicly without the symbol of male headship and female chastity?’ In his answer to this question Paul presupposed that the women’s husbands and the church leaders approved of their public speaking. In this case, Paul did not prohibit female public speaking but admonished the Christian women not only to protect their female chastity but also to behave accordingly: ‘Any woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered disgraces her head—it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved’ (1 Cor. 11:5).

c. One Theological Principle in Two Different Settings

In other words, in chapter 14 Paul dealt with a hierarchical conflict while in chapter 11 he dealt with female dress code. *The one basic principle behind both answers was that female public speaking without male consent is unacceptable whereas female public speaking with male consent is unobjectionable.*

Why, then, did Paul, in one and the same letter, give two different answers to two similar questions? This may have been due to the structure of early Christian churches. The Corinthian church appears to have consisted of different groups or even house churches (1 Cor. 16:19), just like the Roman church (Rom. 16:3-5; 16:15) and the church in Colossae (Col. 4:15; Phlm. 1-2).¹¹⁰ The different Corinthian house churches may have had different views on the freedom that should be granted to female Christians in church gatherings. In this case, Paul dealt in chapter 14 with a conflict in a more conservative group or house church whereas in chapter 11 he dealt with a problem in a more progressive group.

This paper does not leave enough room for the application of Paul’s basic principle to our modern culture. But it should certainly be taken into account that in the modern Western world the speaking of women in all kinds of public settings (parliaments, universities, or churches) meets much more regularly with male approval and is perceived as unchaste much less frequently than in Paul’s days.

¹¹⁰ Cf. P. Trebilco, ‘Studying “Fractionation” in Earliest Christianity in Rome and Ephesus’ in *Reflections on the Early Christian History of Religion*, ed. C. Breytenbach and J. Frey (Ancient Judaism and Ancient Christianity 81; Leiden: Brill, 2013): 293-333, esp. 318-20.