

Women Pastors and the Distinction between Home and Church

It is being argued that, because in those times services were held in people's homes, the prohibition of women's speaking should be applied only to larger gatherings outside homes. This argument misses the point of the contrast in what St Paul wrote. For even when Christians worshipped in homes, it was quite clear when a group in the same building was "home" and when it was "church." The phrase "come together" is an important one. It has a technical sense, for assembling for a church service. It is used in 1 Corinthians 11:17-18 and 33-34 about the Lord's Supper. In 1 Corinthians 14:26 the same phrase applies to speaking in the church when it is assembled for worship.

Insufficient attention to the proper distinction between home and church has marked the debates in the LCA about the role of women for a long time. There were women who prophesied in biblical times (Deborah, Huldah, Anna, the daughters of Philip), and Priscilla was involved with Aquila in teaching Apollos. There were deaconesses in the early church. However, although the Scriptures refer to prophetesses and to teaching by women, they functioned in private situations, in other words, in "non-church" situations. One of the chief functions of deaconesses was to assist in the baptisms of adult women. What Priscilla did was not proclamation in a church assembly, but teaching in private. Priscilla and Aquila took Apollos away from the synagogue to give him further instruction (Ac 18:26). 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 says this plainly: "As in all the churches of the saints, let the women be silent in the churches, for it is not permitted to them to speak. Rather, let them be subordinate, as the Law also says. Moreover, if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church." This distinction between church and home should apply today to teaching of young men by women in Christian schools, because they operate as an extension of the home. Since the word "learn" is used in both v. 31 and v. 35, and it is parallel to the use of such words as "edify" throughout 1 Corinthians 14, it indicates that the place for women to learn, to be edified, by asking questions is the home, not the assembled congregation. Women may teach children in schools because they function there in the place of the parents, even though congregations establish the schools. Women may not teach men (1 Tm 2:11).

The Scriptures make a distinction between what may happen in the home and in Christian churches. Women may speak and ask their husbands questions at home. Of course, they may read devotions at home. They may teach their children at home, as well as the head of the household. The Scriptures forbid individual speaking by women in Christian worship in contexts where one speaks and the rest listen.