

An Exegetical Study of
1Corinthians 14:34-35

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Presented to Professor
Victor Furnish
by Mark Porterfield

In the past few years I have been increasingly aware of how persons and organizations exclude or patronize women. I have become aware that women are often not allowed an equal status with men in many areas. The idea of equality between the sexes is a rather new one in light of the history of humankind, yet today the subject seems to be on the cutting edge of societal upheaval. Particularly in America, many women are no longer willing to receive less pay for equal jobs. Women are breaking out of their traditional "mother" roles and becoming more career oriented. Women want and deserve to be considered fully human and not less than fully human because of their gender.

As we might imagine, much controversy goes along with this type of change. Part of the controversy is along the lines of questioning whether women's "new" lifestyles are what they "should" be. The "should" leads into the realm of morality and thus religion. Christians often look to scripture for guidance in difficult situations. Of the scripture sought, the New Testament is often most significant because of its uniquely Christian character. Among the New Testament writings Paul's are the most significant (pro and anti women) and, at times, the most controversial.

It is noted by many that Paul "... was a man who accepted women as equal partners in preaching, teaching, and prophesying, and this acceptance of women was congruent with all aspects of his religious-theological enterprise."¹ The above notwithstanding, Paul has also been one of the most controversial biblical figures because of certain verses attributed to his writings.

Of the undisputed Pauline writings², the most controversial passage is likely 1 Corinthians 14:34-35;

The women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law 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. (RSV)

The above verses do not allow women equal status with men. The writer (Paul or otherwise) is concerned that women, and particularly married women, remain silent. They are to subordinate (u|potasse+sqwsan) themselves, though it is not clear whom (their husbands) or what (the church) is to receive their subordination. Evidently women in this church wanted "to learn" (literally) and choose a forum outside the house, most likely the church. The reason for such a directive for women is a cultural taboo against women speaking in church, for it is "shameful".

It is difficult to reconcile vv. 34-35 with other statements by Paul that show his acceptance and egalitarian attitude toward women. In this paper I will assume Paul's egalitarian attitude and acceptance of women without argument, only pointing out texts that demonstrate the same. 1 Cor. 1:11, 7, 11:2-16; Gal. 3:28; Rom. 16:1-5, 7

The purpose of this paper is to attempt to reconcile vv. 34-35 with Paul's otherwise egalitarian and accepting attitude toward women. If vv. 34-35 were written by Paul, how can he be considered egalitarian and accepting of women? If vv. 34-35 were not written by Paul, what is the evidence and why and how did these verses get here? Let me begin to answer these questions by putting vv. 34-35 in their proper context.

In 1 Corinthians Paul writes to the church at Corinth addressing some problems he has heard about (1:11ff.) and responding to questions they wrote him about. (7:1ff.) 14:34-35 falls within the latter part of this letter where Paul is responding to questions the Corinthians have asked. Chapter

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¹Odell-Scott p.90

²Paul's undisputed letters I take to be Phillipians, Philemon, Galatians, I&II Corinthians, Romans, and I Thessalonians. The Pastoral Epistles and Ephesians, Collosians I consider non Pauline

14 is in the midst of this 'question answering' section, yet also in a smaller section of 11:2-14:40 dealing with spiritual gifts and worship.

Chapter 11 deals with some particulars in the worship service, while chapter 12 begins a treatment of manifestations of the Spirit with a concern for speaking in tongues. This treatment of Spirit matters and tongues comes to a close at the end of chapter 14.

The Corinthians likely had an over-realized eschatology believing that their present existence was a resurrected one. (4:8) They believed the mark of spirit filled person was ecstatic utterance, which usually meant speaking in tongues. One might expect that if speaking in tongues was the ultimate mark of the Spirit (like no other), then it would be honored more than anything, yet also used to divide the sheep and the goats, so to speak. In chapter 12 Paul explains that speaking in tongues is one of many gifts; it does not hold a primary place and is not to be desired above other gifts. In chapter 13 Paul explains that the test of the Spirit is in love and not in tongues. Love is in all things of the Spirit. Love is the common denominator for all gifts.

In chapter 14 Paul claims that that which is done in the Church must be done for the **oi' kodomh\ n** of the whole people. Uninterpreted tongues, which were no doubt occurring in the worship service, are of no use in upbuilding the church (v. 4) and therefore not to be a part of worship. Prophecy, on the other hand builds the church up and is to be sought after.

In v. 26 Paul begins an appeal for order within the worship service building upon the need for prophecy over tongues. It is in this immediate context of 'order in the worship service' that we find vv. 34-35. When the church is gathered everything must be done for upbuilding. (cf. 14:5,12,). Many different gifts may be brought, yet all are for **oi' kodomh\ n**. (v. 26) **If someone speaks in a tongue, let it be only two or at most three, and one must interpret, If there is no one to interpret** (vv. 27-28a) then tongues is not allowed. When a prophet speaks the others are to scrutinize what is said. If someone has a revelation come to them and needs to speak then the other speaker must sit down and allow the person to speak. (vv. 30-31) The order Paul seeks is very evident here. No one must speak over another, and things must be done in turn i.e. one at a time. (**kai« aÓna» me÷roß**)

Why is order important? Because it is necessary for upbuilding, learning and encouragement.(v. 31) Paul says (vv. 32-33) that the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets, i.e. those who have spiritual gifts are in control of them if they are of God. **For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.** (v. 33a) This peace, control and order is not something for the Corinthians only but for all of Paul's churches. **as in all the churches of the saints.** (v. 33b)

MAJOR DIFFICULTIES WITH VERSES 34-35

There is a long list of difficulties with vv. 34-35, yet three stand out as major. The first involves a seeming contradiction, the second involves an interruption in the flow of the paragraph, and the third involves difficulties with the text.

One of the most basic difficulties is that vv. 34-35 seem to contradict 11:5 where Paul assumes that women pray and prophesy in church. This seeming contradiction calls vv. 34-35 into question. It is difficult to understand why Paul would deny women (so absolutely) the right to speak in church when he had done the opposite in 11:5. Some try to reconcile the different texts,³ but in general it appears that Paul either contradicts himself or did not write these verses.

The second major difficulty involves the flow of the argument from vv. 26-40. Vv. 34-35 change the subject from tongues and prophecy to women and their place in worship. Tongues and

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³I will pick up these attempts later in this work.

prophecy are the subject in vv. 26-33 and return as the subject in vv. 36-40.⁴ The attempt to reconcile this change by claiming that the ordering of women fits with the ordering of the worship service as a whole, fails because the change is too abrupt to be believable. It would be believable if it ordered women not to prophesy or speak in tongues, but it does not.

The third major difficulty involves the manuscript evidence. The manuscripts available for this text are divided as to its placement within the paragraph. The Western texts place vv. 34-35 after v. 40.⁵ The Eastern texts show them after v. 33. Fee, using the principle that "the form of the text is more likely the original which best explains the emergence of all the others" gives three possible explanations of v. 34-35: 1) they were written by Paul after v. 33 and then transposed after v. 40; 2) the reverse; or 3) they were a gloss stuck in later,⁶ by someone other than Paul.

If Paul wrote vv. 34-35 and placed them after v. 33 it would make sense that a scribe might notice they interrupt the flow of the paragraph and put them after v. 40. Fee notes that such a displacement is without precedent and that it would be unlikely for anyone to have questioned the verses because those in the early church saw them as logical.⁷ Fee's first point is well taken, but I am not convinced that all (or most) of the early church leaders found the placement of vv. 34-35 to be logical. Certainly the mood fit the cultural times; yet the abrupt shift in the paragraph is plain. Not wanting to press the argument I defer to Fee.

If Paul wrote these vv. 34-35 after v. 40, it would make little sense for a scribe to place them after v. 33. I can see no reason why a scribe would insert these two verses into a paragraph that flows well without them. To have them at the end of the chapter would accomplish a scribe's desire to have them read without hurting the flow of the previous argument. It is highly questionable why Paul would place these verses after v. 40.

The third possibility, supported by several commentators,⁸ is that vv. 34-35 are an interpolation. The fact that vv. 34-35 are present in all known manuscripts means any interpolation must have been very early. Lending credence to this argument is the fact that vv. 34-35 are also in close agreement with 1 Timothy 2:5-11, a deutero-Pauline letter.

It is quite possible that in the years after Paul's death there was a need to deal with a world where the parousia was experienced as delayed. This caused someone to write several letters in Paul's name hoping to carry Paul's thought through the next generation. These letters (Pastoral Epistles, Ephesians, Colossians, II Thes.) would naturally reflect the customs and culture of the times. Unfortunately they are also at times in contradiction with the accepted Pauline letters⁹ and specifically in regards to women and their role in the church. It is likely that a very early scribe added vv. 34-35 into 1 Cor 14 so it would reflect the customs and cultures of the times represented in 1 Tim. 2:5-11.

Although the third option, that vv. 34-35 are an interpolation, explains best (in my opinion and in others') how these verses happen to occur here there always remains the possibility that one of the above scenarios could be true. The fact that vv. 34-35 occur in all known manuscripts keeps the textual evidence from being decisive. I will now turn to some other difficulties I consider minor yet significant. They are minor in the sense that if the above three were not problems, they would

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⁴This is also debated about v. 36 and v.33b but I will address it later.

⁵Barrett p.330

⁶Fee p. 699

⁷Fee p. 700

⁸Fee, Conzelmann, Barrett, Murphy-O'Connor, Furnish

⁹Furnish The Moral Teaching of Paul 83-114

not cause much of a stir. They are significant in light of the above three, because they add fuel to the 'interpolation' fire.

MINOR YET SIGNIFICANT DIFFICULTIES

It is uncharacteristic of Paul to use "the law" (**oJ no/moß**) in the manner it is used in v. 34. It is not like Paul to urge persons to act in a certain manner because "the law" says to do so. Paul's message is more characteristically freedom from the law. Likewise the law has not been a topic in 1 Corinthians. (We might expect to see the law discussed in Romans and Galatians¹⁰ but not here.) In 1 Corinthians when Paul mentions the law, he cites the passage as in 9:8 and 14:21.¹¹ The text is not given in v. 34 and it is difficult to find what text is referenced. Many claim the text is Gen. 3:16; however while the mood of Gen 3:16 is similar, Fee does not believe the reference is valid.¹²

Another difficulty with vv. 34-35 is in the word **lalei√n** "to speak". In chapter 14 it (the root word **lalew**) is used 23 times. Only in vv. 34-35 is it not used in conjunction with inspired speech.¹³ Fee points out that the two occurrences of **lalei√n** in vv.34-35 are the only absolute uses of the verb. In vv. 28 and 30 **lalew** is used in conjunction with tongues and prophesy to express control but not absolutely as with the speech of women in vv. 34-35.¹⁴

Another difficulty with vv. 34-35 involves the paragraphing of vv. 26-40. "The critical editions of the major translations"¹⁵ all take v. 33b along with v. 34. In doing this there is a difficult repetition¹⁶ of the **e`n tai√ß e`kklhsi÷aiß**. As Murphy-O'Connor states, "The problem can be avoided by attaching v. 33b to what precedes. The reminder that other churches are peaceful is perfectly in place as the conclusion to what Paul has been saying regarding the necessity for order in the Corinthian assembly (vv.26-33)"¹⁷ Fee and Barrett agree and place v.33b with v. 33a.

V. 36 is also a point of minor difficulty. While Conzelmann considers it a part of the interpolation, Murphy-O'Connor, Barrett, and Fee do not.¹⁸ Odell-Scott understands v. 36 to be intergral to vv. 34-35, yet he does not view them as an interpolation. At this point I will turn to three hypotheses that attempt to solve the problems of vv. 34-35 without assuming that they are an interpolation.

PAULINE AUTHORSHIP EXPLANATIONS

Odell-Scott offers a tempting interpretation of vv. 33b-36. He claims that the text has been misunderstood partly because of a grammatical oversight. V. 36 is a double rhetorical question with each phrase beginning with the particle **h·**. The force of the particle **h** in such instances is often to contradict what it immediately follows. Thus, Odell-Scott claims that v. 36 acts to "emphatically refute" the claim in vv. 34-35 that women are to be silent and submissive.

Odell-Scott bolsters his case by clarifying the audience to whom v. 36 is speaking. It is usually assumed by those who consider vv. 33b-36 a sexist Pauline statement that v. 36 addresses

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¹⁰73 occurrences in Romans, 32 occurrences in Galatians as compared to 8 occurrences in 1 Corinthians

¹¹Although Paul takes a good bit of liberty in citing O.T. scriptures, it is usually clear what text he is mentioning.

¹²Fee p. 707 see also note 33

¹³Barrett p. 332

¹⁴Fee p. 702

¹⁵Murphy-O'Connor Interpolation p. 90

¹⁶ibid

¹⁷ibid

¹⁸I am not sure about Furnish. In his book *The Moral Teaching of Paul* p. 90 he seems to say yes, yet in a class outline he shows v. 36 separate from vv. 34-35.

the women, asking them if they thought the word of God originated with them or if they (the women) were the only ones it has reached. Odell-Scott points out that although the pronouns **uJmwDn** and **uJmaDß** in v. 36 are ambiguous with respect to gender **mo/nouß**, the masculine-plural adjective modifying **uJmaDß**, makes it necessary that the pronouns are indeed masculine. Thus, he claims v. 36 is a corrective directed toward the men of the community about their attitude, expressed in vv. 34-35, toward the women in the worship service.

Flanagan and Snyder follow much of the same argument of Odell-Scott yet they see vv. 34-35 as a quotation to which Paul is responding in v. 36. They site several other places in 1 Corinthians where Paul has quoted Corinthian slogans, and claim the possibility exists that this could be a similar quotation.

The difficulty with the hypotheses of Odell-Scott and Flanagan and Snyder is that neither addresses the possibility that v. 36 reflects back to v. 33, which it would immediately follow if vv. 34-35 are an interpolation. The refutation in the double rhetorical would fit well¹⁹ coming after v. 33, calling into question the Corinthians over-realized eschatology specifically in relation to their spirituality.

Murphy-O'Connor²⁰ also points out that "Paul never dismisses a Corinthian slogan with the brutal passion evident in v. 36." When he does confront a Corinthian slogan he does so in a "calm" and "logical" manner. He goes on to say that, "Passionate rhetorical questions, on the contrary, appear when Paul is confronted with a situation that he has heard about, but which, apparently, posed no problems for the Corinthians." He site 1:13, 5:2 and 11:22 as places where this strong rhetorical is used. He site seven texts in 1 Corinthians in which the reply is calm and logical, most of which correspond with those mentioned by Flanagan and Snyder as quotations.²¹

A third hypothesis that assumes Pauline authorship is by Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza. She contends that vv. 34-35 refer to wives only and not all women in the community. She draws on 1 Cor 7 where Paul makes distinctions between married and unmarried women and between those married to Christian and non-Christian spouses. She claims the prohibition in vv. 34-35 is directed only to the wives with Christian spouses.

The wives of Christian spouses would have the opportunity, one not available to other women, to ask their husbands questions at a later time. Fiorenza believes that Paul's overriding concern is for the worship service in Corinth not to be seen as "...one of the orgiastic, secret, oriental cults that undermined public order and decency."²² Somehow, Fiorenza believes that if the wives of Christian spouses were silent, public order and decency would occur.

Fiorenza's hypothesis is also tempting, but I am not convinced that if the wives of Christian spouses were silent that an orderly and decent service would follow. It would prevent a confrontation between husband and wife and the possibility that the wife may come out a 'winner' over her husband (a cultural taboo), but I am not convinced that it would keep persons from thinking it an orgiastic endeavor. If the silence of women would have made a difference, then I believe it would need to be all women, not just wives of Christian spouses.

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¹⁹Fee p. 710

²⁰Murphy-O'Connor "Interpolations" p. 92

²¹A last bothersome point is that Odell-Scott assumes in his work that Paul's opponents are Judaizers. This does not make a great difference if any in his argument yet the idea that Paul's opponents in Corinth are Judaizers is so questionable as to make me leary of this persons scholarship. He does not make an argument for the opponents being Judaizers, and neither shall I, but I believe he would be hard pressed to back up such an assumption.

²²Fiorenza p. 232

Murphy-O'Connor²³ points out that married women would be accorded the greatest freedom of any women in the society. He claims that a single woman (who would always be someone's daughter) would never be allowed greater freedoms than a married woman (her mother). In light of this it appears that it would be more acceptable for the wives to pray and prophesy than for the single, widowed woman, and wives of non-Christian spouses.

Fiorenza fails to deal with the repetition of $\epsilon\acute{\nu}\nu\tau\alpha\iota\sqrt{\beta}\epsilon\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\iota\acute{\alpha}\iota\beta$, the non-Pauline nature of the law statement in v. 34, the non characteristic use of **lalein**, and the masculine audience of v. 36. Odell-Scott and Flanagan and Snyder also fail to deal with the first three respectively. The inherent difficulties of Odell-Scott, Flanagan and Snyder, and Fiorenza combined with their failure to deal with what I consider minor yet significant difficulties, prevents their hypotheses from being convincing for me.

CONCLUSION

I conclude that the best explanation for vv. 34-35 is that they are an interpolation. I believe the cause of their addition to the text most likely stemmed from a fear that the parousia was not quickly coming combined with a desire for Paul's earlier (true) writings to be in agreement with writings attributed to him. The interpolation hypothesis explains the three major difficulties and the minor, yet significant, ones. There is, of course, always room for doubt, questioning, new evidence, and some will come to different conclusions with the same evidence presented here.

This has been an interesting and educational endeavor. I look forward to future studies such as this even after I leave the cloisters of Perkins. When I publish my critical edition of the New Testament (ha!) I think my translation of 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 will read something like this:

What then brothers and sisters. When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the upbuilding (of the church). If anyone speaks in a tongue let it be two, or at most three, in turn and (some)one must interpret. If there is no interpreter, (then) the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak and let the others scrutinize what is said. And if a revelation comes to (some)one who is sitting (down,) (then) the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.¹

Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? If anyone thinks he is a prophet or a person of the Spirit, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored.

Therefore my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

Footnote 1) The following words appear in all manuscripts at this point or at the end of the paragraph, yet it is doubtful they were written by Paul. "The women (must) remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church."

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²³Murphy-O'Connor "Interpolations" p. 91

END NOTES

1. Odell-Scott p.90
2. Paul's undisputed letters I take to be Phillipians, Philemon, Galatians, I&II Corinthians, Romans, and I Thessalonians. The Pastoral Epistles and Ephesians, Collosians I consider non Pauline.
3. I will pick up these attempts later in this work.
4. This is also debated about v. 36 and v.33b but I will address it later.
5. Barrett p.330
6. Fee p. 699
7. Fee p. 700
8. Fee, Conzelmann, Barrett, Murphy-O'Connor, Furnish
9. Furnish The Moral Teaching of Paul 83-114
10. 73 occurances in Romans, 32 occurances in Galatians as compared to 8 occurances in 1Corinthians
11. Although Paul takes a good bit of liberty in siteing O.T. scriptures, it is usually clear what text he is mentioning.
12. Fee p. 707 see also note 33
13. Barrett p. 332
14. Fee p. 702
15. Murphy-O'Connor Interpolation p. 90
16. ibid
17. ibid
18. I am not sure about Furnish. In his book the Moral Teaching of Paul p. 90 he seems to say yes, yet in a class outline he shows . 36 separate from vv. 34-35.
19. Fee p. 710
20. Murphy-O'Connor "Interpolations" p. 92
21. A last bothersome point is that Odell-Scott assumes in his work that Paul's opponents are Judaizers. This does not make a great difference if any in his argument yet the idea that Paul's opponents in Corinth are Judaizers is so questionable as to make me leary of this persons scholarship. He does not make an argument for the opponents being Judaizers, and neither shall I, but I believe he would be hard pressed to back up such an assumption.
22. Fiorenza p. 232
23. Murhpy-O'Connor "Interpolations" p. 91

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