

1 CORINTHIANS 14:34-36 DISRUPTIVE CORINTHIAN WIVES

In 1 Cor 14:34-35,¹ Paul admonishes certain wives in the Corinthian church to be silent in the assembly. It is not surprising that this has served as a principal text concerning women in the church since the first century. Though only two verses, they have had, and still have, great influence in Christian churches. However, in recent times, changing views of women in the western world have altered long-standing cultural norms with the result that this text has become a virtual battleground.

For instance, David Lipscomb,² when asked to explain 1 Cor 14:34-35, commented,

I cannot write it in simpler words, plainer, or put in a connection that would make it easier to be understood. "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted them to speak, but to be in subjection, as the law also says." . . . I do not know how to add a word that can make it clearer, more direct, or more forcible. One who can explain that away can explain away anything I can write.

However, as Sire³ correctly observes, "the simplest error of reading is the failure to consider the immediate context of the verse or passage in question." Lipscomb's simplistic

¹This section is an abbreviated summary of my "The Interpretation of 1 Cor 14:34-35," *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, 219-242.

²M. C. Kurfees, ed., *Questions Answered by Lipscomb and Sewell* (Nashville: McQuiddy, 1921): 729.

³James W. Sire, *Scripture Twisting* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1980): 52.

observation does not take into account the context of Paul's statement. Actually, careful exegesis of the text must be the determining factor. Exegesis is not "explaining away the text." Exegesis is simply following the normal rules of interpretation. Considerable clarification of these verses in their context is required if appropriate use is to be made of this admonition in current practice.

1. *1 Cor 14:34-35 in the Manuscript Tradition*

The place to begin is with the ancient biblical manuscripts. In most Greek manuscripts and the early translations into other languages, vv. 34-35 occur between v. 33 and v. 36. In a handful of Latin manuscripts, vv. 34-35 do occur following v. 40. For this reason, some argue that verses 34-35 are not original with Paul, but added into the text at a later period by another writer.⁴ Fee,⁵ for instance, argues that vv. 34-35 do not fit the flow of the argument and, as an absolute rule for "all churches," stands in conflict with 11:2-16. It was, he says, inserted into the text at the end of the first century by a later scribe.

Three observations are useful. 1) Never was v. 33b included with vv. 34-35 after v. 40.⁶ 2) Never was v. 36 included with vv. 34-35 after v. 40.⁷ 3) Vv. 34-35 occur after v. 40 only in limited circles in the Latin tradition.⁸ As 1 Cor had been in circulation for decades, it is difficult to explain why no copies exist of an original short text if the words were added. All it would take would be one lone

⁴Only vv. 34-35: H. Lietzmann, *An die Korinther I/II* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1931): 75; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Interpolations in 1 Corinthians," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48 (1986): 90-92; and with caution, C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: A. & C. Black, 1971): 330-332.

⁵Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* 699-702.

⁶Cf. John Reuf, *Paul's First Letter to Corinth* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977): 154-155.

⁷Cf. Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (trans. J. Leitch; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975: 246).

⁸See Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*, 149-152; 283-285.

scribe, making what was thought to be an improvement by moving vv. 34-35 to after v. 40, whose text was copied by a few scribes elsewhere. Therefore, there is no reason to view vv. 34-35 as a later interpolation, especially if the text can be demonstrated to make sense in its context.

It is likely that vv. 34-35 were thought unsuitable to a context dealing with "prophecy" (vv. 29-33, 37) and that vv. 33b and 36-37 naturally belonged together. Thus vv. 34-35 were transposed to after v. 40 by a few scribes, where it could conceivably make sense as an application of v. 40. Fee is correct in asserting that the flow of thought in the passage is important to the resolution of the problem. And the text does make sense if vv. 34-35 are removed from the context. However, manuscript evidence certainly favors leaving vv. 34-35 after v. 33 and taking it as an integral part of the letter.⁹ But if vv. 34-35 do occur after v. 33, how does the text fit the context? And how does that view cohere with 11:2-16, where women do pray and prophesy?

2. *A Corinthian Quotation that Paul Refutes?*

Others argue that vv. 34-35 represent a quotation from the letter which Paul is answering (see 7:1) and that it does not express Paul's view, but the thinking of the *men* whom Paul chides in v. 36.¹⁰ This view argues that, due to competition for ministries, arrogant males had devised a plan to eliminate women from competition.¹¹ The argument suggests 1) that the Greek word ἢ (translated "or") at the beginning of v. 36 should instead be translated "What!" and 2) the shift from the third-person pronoun ("they," females in vv. 34-35) to the second-person, the masculine pronoun

⁹See Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (corr. ed.; New York: United Bible Society, 1975): 565.

¹⁰See Katherine Bushnell, *God's Word to Women* (Oakland, CA: K. Bushnell, 1930): para. 189-215; Neal Flanagan and Edwina Snyder, "Did Paul Put Down Women in First Corinthians 14:34-36?" *Foundations* 24 (1981): 216-220.

¹¹Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985): 146-147.

monous (you only),¹² means that, following this supposed "citation" of the Corinthian males, Paul responds, "What! Did the word of God originate with you *men* only?" However there is nothing awkward about the generic masculine *monous* (you only) in v. 36 referring to the entire congregation.¹³ Further, the little Greek word η (or), a disjunctive particle, does not necessarily contradict and dismiss a preceding clause, but often introduces a direct question or statement actually in support of that clause.¹⁴ Liefeld¹⁵ observes correctly that "what Paul negates by his use of the adversative Greek particle η (or) is *not* the *command* in verses 34-35 but the assumed *disobedience* of it." Bilezikian is simply wrong. Vv. 34-35 are not a Corinthian quotation Paul refutes, but Paul's own statement. Vv. 36-40 are the conclusion of Paul's argument to the entire congregation, not only in terms of the immediate context of 14:26-35, but of the entire section on "orderliness in worship" beginning in 11:2.

3. 1 Cor 14:34-35 in its Context

A. The Larger Context.

Paul's remarks about wives in vv. 34-35 are part of the larger context of chaps 11-14. Following his plea in chapters 1-4 for a strong christological basis for resolving conflict among the Corinthian Christians, Paul addresses

¹²David Odell-Scott, "Let the Women Speak in Church. An Egalitarian Interpretation of 1 Cor 14:33b-36," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 13 (1983): 90-93; Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles*, 286-288.

¹³See Charles Talbert, "Paul's Understanding of the Holy Spirit: The Evidence of 1 Corinthians 12-14," in *Perspectives on the New Testament* (ed. C. Talbert; Macon, GA: Mercer, 1985): 106.

¹⁴D. A. Carson, "'Silent in the Churches': On the Role of Women in 1 Cor 14:33b-36." *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, 149-151, denounces Bilezikian's, *Beyond Sex Roles*, 286-288, forced misunderstanding of η .

¹⁵Walter Liefeld, "Women, Submission, and Ministry in 1 Corinthians," *Women, Authority and the Bible*, 149.

interpersonal problems and marital propriety in chaps 5-7 and the implications of eating food offered to idols in chaps 8:1-11:1. 1 Cor 11:2-14:40, then, addresses matters of corporate worship. Chapter 11 treats women's "covering" for worship (vv. 2-16) and abuses at the Lord's Supper (vv. 17-34). Chapters 12-14 are devoted to abuses of "spiritual manifestations," especially "tongues" and "prophecy."

Continuing his argument that tongues are minimally useful and certainly not the ultimate expression of Christian spirituality, Paul stresses prophecy as more desirable in chapter 14. In 14:16, Paul points out that if a stranger¹⁶ enters the place where Christian worship is being conducted and hears a "spiritual" prayer (i.e. in a tongue), he will not understand what is happening. The prayer may have been a good one, he says in v. 17, but the stranger will have no clear insight into the Christian experience. So in v. 19, Paul appeals not to the experiential, but to the cognitive.

In v. 21, Paul paraphrases Isa 28:11-12, not treating its historical meaning¹⁷ but setting out the idea of "not listening to tongues." Paul then notes in v. 22 that tongues are a sign not to the believers, but to the unbelievers, and just the reverse that prophecy is not for the unbelievers, but for the believers. Now, this might seem to contradict what has just been said in vv. 16-20 and what will be said in vv. 23-25. In fact, this leads Phillips to conclude that "we have here either a slip of the pen on the part of Paul, or, more probably, a copyist's error."¹⁸ However, v. 22 makes good sense if it is not understood as the proper way to use tongues and prophecy, but *unfortunately how the Corinthians have come to use them!*¹⁹ V. 22 is not an agenda to follow, but a

¹⁶The "stranger" here is not a Christian who does not speak in tongues, but (in view of 14:23-25) a non-Christian.

¹⁷John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (New York: Abingdon, 1953): 84, notes "If they will not hear the lesson spelled out in plain Hebrew, then God will be forced to teach it to them in Assyrian!"

¹⁸J. B. Phillips' translation, note on 1 Cor 14:22.

¹⁹See Charles Isbell, "Glossolalia and Propheteialalia: A Study of 1 Corinthians 14," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 10 (1975): 18; and

statement of surprise on Paul's part that this is what they are actually doing. If this is true, then vv. 23-25 set out the proper use of prophecy on the stranger (which is cognitive) rather than tongues (not cognitive, v. 14). The Corinthians are simply using the wrong things on the wrong people.

B. *The Immediate Context.*

Similarly, while many view the list of things done in worship in v. 26 as setting out a proper agenda for Christian worship, v. 26 is rather to be viewed as indicating Paul's frustration with what the Corinthians are actually doing in worship. The Greek sentence opens with a question, "How stands the case, brothers?"²⁰ In this context of misuse and abuse of tongues and prophecy in the assembly, Paul says that each²¹ has a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. While these should be for edification,²² the following discussion specifies how these Corinthian Christians are not conducting worship for edification. Although proper for Christian worship, the matters in v. 26 are being abused by the Corinthians. Pandemonium is the problem and v. 26, "All things must be for edification!" is the point of the overall context in chapter 14 and the "guiding rule" for the three following topics (tongues, prophecy, wives), *each of which involves verbal misconduct.*

Bruce C. Johanson, "Tongues, a Sign for Unbelievers?" *New Testament Studies* 25 (1979): 180-203.

²⁰G. G. Findlay, *St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Expositors Greek NT; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1917): 911.

²¹Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles*, 146, erroneously concludes that Paul wants each member to come prepared to make some presentation for the edification of the group. However, Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 1985): 194, correctly observes that we need not press "each" to mean that every member was expected to participate. Jean Héring, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians* (trans. A. Heathcote & P. Allcock; London: Epworth, 1962): 154, notes that "there is hardly any need to stress the point that all 'inspired' movements have encountered similar difficulties."

²²Reuf, *Paul's First Letter to Corinth*, 153.

Regarding tongues,²³ "only one may speak at a time!" Several speaking in tongues at the same time would create confusion. No more than two or three at the most should speak in any one assembly. If there is no interpreter, those speaking in tongues should be silent in the assembly. The Greek *sigato* here means, "Be silent!" Otherwise there is disorder and lack of cognition. There is no excuse for appealing to some "irresistible impulse" to speak in a tongue as basis for continuing to speak. So, it is with this problem of disorderliness in worship that Paul is concerned in his demand for the "tongue-speakers" to *defer* to the assembly, respecting decorum and edification.

In v. 29, Paul limits prophecy²⁴ to two or three at the most in any one assembly, one at a time, while others discern. If another wants to prophesy, the first prophet must "Be Silent!" (*sigato* as in v. 28). "The spirits of prophets are subject to prophets" (v. 32) is an axiom, i.e., a prophet can choose not to speak. Unlike tongue-speaking, prophecy is viewed by Paul as a cognitive matter. However, as with speaking in tongues, Paul rebukes the verbal chaos generated by too many people prophesying at once. Pandemonium is intolerable. Orderliness, with an emphasis upon edification, is vital (v. 26). That is why Paul says that one prophet must *defer* to the next. There is no reason to give in to "irresistible impulse" to prophesy. Self-control is urged. Paul says that this is the case "in all the churches."

Now the statement, "as in all the churches of the saints," is taken with vv. 34-35 in many modern editions and translations, but it appears with v. 33a in many others. It is difficult to understand the objection²⁵ that "as in all the churches of the saints," does not make good sense if taken with v. 33. The problem in chapters 12-14 is verbal

²³See Siegfried Schatzmann, *A Pauline Theology of Charismata* (Peabody, MA: Hendricksen, 1989): 42-43.

²⁴See David Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).

²⁵Among others, Carson, "Silent in the Churches," *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 140-41.

misconduct by tongue-speakers and prophets. It is widely held that vv. 26-32, appealing for the cessation of the verbal misconduct of these two groups, ends appropriately with 33a, "God is not the author of confusion but of peace." This thought is directly related to "all things must be done for edification" v. 26. In light of this, an appeal is made in v. 33b for those involved to conduct themselves with customary Christian mutual deference.²⁶ V. 33 should read, "For God is not a God of disorder, but of peace, as in all the congregations of the saints," as in King James Version and Phillips' translation.

C. vv. 34-35

However, a third item involved in the admonition to orderliness and edification from v. 26 begins in v. 34 simply admonishing *gunaikes* (wives/women?) to "silence" in the assembly. We must remember that females are not the only ones on whom this silence is imposed, but that *sigato* was also used for disruptive tongue-speakers and prophets in vv. 27-33.

Now just what sort of "speaking" these females were doing is variously understood. While some suggest speaking of any sort in worship,²⁷ chattering,²⁸ "sacred cries" common to women in pagan worship,²⁹ or teaching

²⁶With Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 329; F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971): 136; and William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians* (2nd ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956): 149. This concluding appeal to common practice is similar to 11:16, where "if anyone is disposed to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor do the churches of God" closes the section of 11:2-16.

²⁷F. W. Grosheide, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953): 343.

²⁸James Moffatt, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938): 232.

²⁹Richard and Catherine Kroeger, *Women Elders . . . Saints or Sinners?* (New York: Council on Women and the Church of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., 1981): 13.

men,³⁰ most view "speaking" to be limited by the context. Thus, some see speaking in tongues being prohibited,³¹ while others think women judging the prophecies mentioned in vv. 29-33³² is meant. As we shall see, the context warrants neither.

Now synagogues did not forbid women to speak in public in principle, but did so in practice. In the Greco-Roman world at this time, women speaking in public was done, but frowned upon. Plutarch, *Conjugal Precepts* 31, says, "Not only the arm but the voice of a modest woman ought to be kept from the public, and she should feel shame at being heard, as at being stripped." In the next paragraph, Plutarch continues, "She should speak either to, or through, her husband." In accord with ancient custom, then, is Paul stating a general rule of silence for all women in worship?

It is taken for granted by Paul in 1 Cor 11 that women prayed and prophesied in the early church, thus presenting an apparent contradiction with the prohibition in 14:34-35. Some are willing to accept a contradiction.³³ Others think that 1 Cor 11 and 14 belong to two separate Pauline letters.³⁴ Neither of these two views is commendable. Still others argue that 11:2-16 involves only praying or prophesying at home or in small groups of females, thus leaving 14:34-35 an absolute rule for public assemblies.³⁵

³⁰Neuer, *Man & Woman in Christian Perspective*, 117, based upon 1 Tim 2:11-14!

³¹Frederick D. Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970): 301.

³²Margaret Thrall, *The First and Second Letters of Paul to the Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1965): 102; and Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*, 193.

³³J. W. MacGorman, *The Gifts of the Spirit: An Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Nashville: Broadman, 1974): 113.

³⁴W. Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971): 90-96.

³⁵Philip Bachmann, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther* (3rd ed.; Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1921): 345-62; and Adolf Schlatter, *Paulus der Bote Jesu* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1969): 390.

However, this view overlooks the unmistakable connection of vv. 2 and 17 with vv. 17-34, which obviously treats worship, as does the whole of 11:17-14:40. In 11:2-16, Paul addresses both men and women and nowhere suggests that his concern is with informal gatherings or private practice. If vv. 34-35 are intended as a universal rule for all women in all churches, it is difficult to understand the purpose of such a universal rule in the present context treating disorder in the Corinthian worship and in direct contradiction with 1 Cor 11:2-16.³⁶

The admonition in 14:34-35 must be seen as directed to a particular problem in Corinth and *the only information provided by the text is that the women involved should ask questions of their husbands at home if they wish to learn* (v. 35). It is difficult to see the general verb *lalein* (to speak) as limited here specifically to either "tongues" or prophecy," since the context makes clear that these particular women are involved in some form of seriously disruptive speech.³⁷

- The present infinitive *lalein* (to be speaking), which occurs twice in vv. 34-35, provides the crucial insight into the "speaking" which so annoys Paul. The verb *laleo* (I speak) always takes its precise meaning from the context. In v. 28, it refers to "silent meditation." In vv. 23 and 27, it refers to "speaking in tongues." In v. 19 it refers to "cognitive prayer." But in vv. 34-35, there is no clear contextual indication of what is meant, but there is a significant grammatical indication. In Greek, when one wishes to use an imperative (Do this!), subjunctive (You should do this), or infinitive (to do this), one uses the past

³⁶C. C. Ryrie, *The Place of Women in the Church* (New York: Macmillan, 1958): 76, suggests that 14:33-35 presents the general rule and 11:2-16 is a Corinthian exception, but fails to explain why Paul does not condemn a woman praying or prophesying as long as she is properly veiled. The praying and prophesying of women in 11:2-16 is not presented as a concession.

³⁷See Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 332; William Baird, *The Corinthian Church—A Biblical Approach to Urban Culture* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1964): 127.

tense of the verb to do that, but with no reference to past action. This curious use of the past tense is just the Greek way to say that. However, when one wishes to denote continuing action in an imperative (Continue doing this!), subjunctive (You should continue doing this), or infinitive (continuing to do this), one uses a present form of the verb. This use of the present tense specifies ongoingness. In grammatical terms, the aorist (past) infinitive refers to the action without indicating anything about its continuance or repetition; the present infinitive, on the other hand, specifically refers to the action as continuing or being repeated in some way.³⁸ Grammarians recognize this fact.³⁹ Here, the two present infinitives make it clear that it is the "ongoingness" of the "speaking" that is in focus. Apparently they were doing more than merely "chatting,"⁴⁰ for Paul's admonition in v. 35 concerns their interest in *learning*. Paul does not prohibit the normal pursuit of learning by women in the assembly, including asking appropriate questions. Rather, *lalein* should be taken here to mean that they were "piping up," giving in to "irresistible impulses" to ask question after question, creating chaos in the assembly by interfering with communication.⁴¹ In this respect, these women are creating the same sort of disruption in the assembly as that by the tongue-speakers and prophets.

Is this disruptive speech, though, by wives or women in general? To whom are these women to submit themselves? Arguing that all females are to be subject to males, *Lenski*⁴²

³⁸F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament* (trans. & ed. R. Funk; Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961): 174.

³⁹A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934): 890.

⁴⁰Cf. J. Howard, "Neither Male nor Female: An Examination of the Status of Women in the New Testament," *EvQ* 55 (1983): 31-42.

⁴¹With Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 135.

⁴²R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg, 1946): 615-16; and W. H. Mare, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976): 276.

says that since the OT Law subjects woman to man by the creation both before and after the fall, Paul means that "what is recorded concerning woman in Genesis is not a temporary arrangement but a permanent one that endures as such for the Christian church." On the other hand, most view *gunaikes* in this context to refer not to all women, but to certain Corinthian wives.⁴³ This latter view is preferred, since in the text the demand for silence is tied directly to the request for the *particular wives involved to direct their questions to their husbands outside the assembly.*

What, then, is meant by "silence"? Of course, those erroneously reading "women" rather than "wives" argue total "silence."⁴⁴ However, Liefeld argues correctly that since the verb *sigao* is used in vv. 28 and 30 with regard to tongue-speakers and prophets, its meaning in v. 34 is not a universal silence, but one dictated by circumstances.⁴⁵ As with the tongue-speakers and prophets, where self-control and *deference* is the emphasis, so in vv. 34-35 an appeal is made to Corinthian wives to "pipe down" and, in accord with v. 26, let everything be done for edification.

But what about Paul's appeal to "the law"? The view that "law" refers to Paul's own ruling in v. 29,⁴⁶ broken by these wives "taking the lead," is unacceptable because "law" is capable of a better understanding in this context. Further, nothing supports the idea that these wives were "taking the

⁴³See William Orr and James Walther, *1 Corinthians* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday), 312; and J. Massingbyrd Ford, "Biblical Material Relevant to the Ordination of Women," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 10 (1973): 681.

⁴⁴Neuer, *Man & Woman in Christian Perspective*, 117; LaGard Smith, *Men of Strength for Women of God* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1989): 250-53; David Lipscomb, *First Corinthians* (ed. J. Shepherd; Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1935): 216.

⁴⁵Liefeld, "Women, Submission, and Ministry in 1 Cor.," *Women, Authority and the Bible*, 150.

⁴⁶Ralph Martin, *The Spirit and the Congregation: Studies in 1 Corinthians 12-15* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984): 87.

lead." Some view the entire OT as the focus of the appeal,⁴⁷ but many tend to see a particular text in view, such as Gen 3:16⁴⁸ or Gen 2:21-24.⁴⁹ Yet if appeal is made to the OT, it is curious that no such text is quoted and that no argumentation is presented.⁵⁰ On the other hand, some take "the law" here to refer to "female silence," either in Rabbinic tradition of women's silence in worship⁵¹ or Greco-Roman disdain of women speaking publicly.⁵² However, taking "the law" here to refer to women's silence is grammatically incorrect, for "as the law says" is related not to *lalein* (speaking), but to "*being in submission*"! The text does not say that women are "not to speak as the Law says" but "to be in submission as the Law says."

So, what is meant by "submission, as the law says"? Note that Paul does not say "be in submission to *your own husbands*," but "submit yourselves." The reason for the admonition to silence is caused by disorder in family relations. Women are not being commanded to "submit" to their husbands in this text, but to orderliness in public worship, to silence and respect when another is speaking.⁵³

The verb *hupotasso* (submit) "does not immediately carry with it the thought of obedience."⁵⁴ When it occurs in the NT in the active voice (the person referred to is doing the

⁴⁷C. Hodge, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953): 305.

⁴⁸See Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 330; Lipscomb, *First Corinthians*, 216.

⁴⁹See Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 136; and Knight, *Role Relationship of Men and Women*, 25.

⁵⁰In fact, this is one of Fee's, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 707, arguments for the inauthenticity of the passage. See 9:8 and 14:21.

⁵¹Jewett, *Man as Male and Female*, 114. Note Josephus, *Against Apion* 24.

⁵²Liefeld, "Women, Submission and Ministry in 1 Cor.," *Women, Authority & the Bible*, 149.

⁵³Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 102-03.

⁵⁴Gerhard Dellling, "hupotasso," TDNT 8.41-42.

action), it always has God or Christ as subject and the meaning is forceful subjugation with resistance (e.g., 15:27-28). Never in the NT does this verb suggest one human being forcefully subjugating another for any reason. The middle (to do something for one's self) and passive (something is done to one) forms of the verb are identical.⁵⁵ Only the context can determine whether the meaning is middle or passive.⁵⁶ The middle form of this verb denotes "readiness to renounce one's own will for the sake of others, i.e., *agape* [love], and to give precedence to others."⁵⁷ It always involves willing submission, as in 1 Cor 16:16, "submit yourselves to one another." In 14:32, voluntary submission is obviously meant regarding a prophet willingly controlling the prophetic spirit. The entire context of chapters 11-14 evidences Paul's strong appeal for voluntary submission in the Corinthian congregation. This is specifically the point in 14:26-40. "Submit yourselves" in v. 34 should be taken to refer to the same sort of *deferential* behavior to the congregation demanded of the clamorous tongue-speakers and prophets, here rebuked for emphasizing personal freedom at the expense of Christian mutuality.

The two questions in v. 36,⁵⁸ then, are a direct confrontation, not with Corinthian wives, but with the congregation as a whole: "Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?" Fee⁵⁹ is wrong in suggesting that v. 36 makes no sense following v. 35. Vv. 34-35 are similar to the previous regulations of

⁵⁵The middle form of this verb is described in A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934): 807, 809. J. H. Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (4th ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901): 645, lists 14:34 as an example of the middle.

⁵⁶E.g., 1 Pet 2:13, "submit yourselves [middle] to every human authority" in KJV NIV NEB NASB is preferable to "be subject" [passive] in RSV.

⁵⁷Delling, TDNT 8.45.

⁵⁸NIV curiously omits the conjunction ἡ that relates v. 36 to vv. 34-35.

⁵⁹Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 710.

tongue-speakers and prophets in that three vital elements occur in each: 1) a third person imperative instruction, 2) an explanatory sentence, and 3) an example in conditional form telling what to do in a given case.⁶⁰ Words recur: "speak" vv. 27, 28, 29, 34, 35; "submission" vv. 32, 34; "learn" vv. 31, 35; and "be silent" vv. 28, 30, 34. From v. 36, it appears that the disruptive behavior Paul disdains in vv. 34-35 is related closely to v. 33: 1) God is not a God of disorder, and 2) this is true in all the churches of the saints. Vv. 34-35, then, add yet another significant dimension to regulation of verbal misconduct to those of tongue-speaking and prophecy. The Corinthians have no right to verbal misconduct either by tongue-speakers or prophets, *or* by certain questioning wives.

Vv. 37-40 are the conclusion, not only to this subsection of 26-36, but the entire unit of chapters 11-14, all of which treats matters pertinent to Corinthian public worship. Here, Paul sums up that various spiritual manifestations are to be encouraged, but it is mandatory that orderliness be maintained in the proceedings and that an environment conducive to learning be maintained. So, vv. 37-38 appeal to all involved in disruptive speaking to recognize Paul's directive as "from the Lord," i.e., authoritative. Then in v. 39, Paul summarizes his extended discussion from chap. 12, emphasizing the priority of the former. There is no mention of the silence of women. We may infer from this that the mention of women in vv. 27-36 was not major to his discussion, but he attended to it significantly since it involved a similarly serious disruption of decorum. V. 40, then, summarizes not vv. 26-33,⁶¹ but the entirety of the unit beginning in 11:2 which treats conduct in Corinthian worship. Everything should be done decently (12:33f) and orderly (33a). This certainly accords with Paul's theme in 1 Cor that unity and respect for others is greater than any uncontrolled expression of personal rights.

⁶⁰Gerhard Dautzenburg, *Urchristliche Prophetie: Ihre Erforschung, ihre Voraussetzung im Judentum und ihre Struktur im ersten Korintherbrief* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1975): 254-55.

⁶¹Cf. Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 713.

4. Conclusion

There is no reason to believe that vv. 34-35 are a Corinthian quotation Paul refutes in v. 36. There is no convincing evidence that the admonition in vv. 34-35 is an interpolation from a later period. There is no evidence that Paul contradicts what he had taught earlier in 11:2-16, that 11 represents a reluctant concession, or that he changed his mind between chapter 11 and 14. Two different matters are involved: the praying and prophesying by the women in chap. 11 in the assembly differs markedly from some wives continually "piping up" in the assembly in chap. 14. The insubordination which these wives had in common with that of the tongue-speakers and prophets caused Paul to include this firm directive at this point in the text.

Since 1 Cor 14:34-35 cannot be excluded on text-critical grounds, one must conclude that, "14:33b-36 are in their right place and quite authentic."⁶² Paul is dealing with a particular problem in Corinth. The problem is not one of disdain for creation order or family order, but one of church order. Far from being intolerant, Paul neither teaches nor suggests in this text anything regarding hierarchalism or female subjection. Smith⁶³ wrongly concludes, "The real issue is the extent to which a woman may *participate* in the work and worship of the church." He simply has not understood what is being dealt with in the context. The real issue is not the *extent* to which a woman may participate in the work and worship of the church, but the *manner*. Paul's corrective does not ban women from speaking in worship,⁶⁴

⁶²Héring, *First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, 155. See also now Curt Niccum, "The Voice of the Manuscripts on the Silence of Women: The External Evidence for 1 Cor 14:34-5," *New Testament Studies* 43 (1997): 242-255.

⁶³Smith, *Men of Strength for Women of God*, 250, appropriately subtitles his discussion of 14:34-35, "Grasping at Straws."

⁶⁴Grosheide, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 343, has missed the point of the text in arguing that "everybody will agree that it is unbecoming for a woman to speak in a public meeting of the church."

but stops the disruptive verbal misconduct of certain wives who are giving free rein to "irresistible impulses" to "pipe up" at will with questions in the assembly by redirecting these questions to another setting where they can have access to information without causing verbal chaos.

This text remains authoritative regarding the point it was intended to make originally. Referring, as it does, to a very specific problem of unacceptably disruptive questions by these women, 1 Cor 14:34-35 teaches that these particular wives, like the uncontrolled tongue-speakers and prophets at Corinth, must *defer* to the assembly by voluntarily yielding to orderliness.⁶⁵ Specifically, if a woman (or man) speaks in a disruptive manner while someone else is speaking, this text authorizes the congregation to call that person out of order and to ask her (him) to be quiet. The general principle that is to be applied to contemporary church life is that decorum is mandatory for all in the public assembly without regard to gender.

As a footnote to this study, I might add that the text says nothing about women singing, praying, making announcements, reading Scripture, witnessing, reporting, asking questions, teaching, performing drama in a Christian assembly—whether standing or sitting, whether in front or not—as long as they do so in an orderly and non-disruptive manner. Even a decidedly literal interpretation of this verse need not forbid women from serving as ushers, serving communion, taking up the offering, passing out bulletins and orders of worship, or any such capacity of service. "Sit down and shut up!" is not a biblical mandate for Christian women. 1 Cor 14:34-36 may be considered a biblical mandate against disruptive behavior in any form in any Christian assembly.

Neither in this nor in any other biblical text is there a prohibition against women speaking in public, *on the ground that it is public*.

⁶⁵Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 137, "Much of the teaching in this chapter is relevant only to such exceptional circumstances as prevailed in the church of Corinth."