

claim? Why must my position dictate my significance? The world may reason that way. But doesn't the gospel teach us that our glory, our worth, is measured by our personal conformity to Christ?⁵⁹ Or have we lost confidence in the gospel's perspective on reality? The absurdity of feminism lies in its irrational demand that a woman cannot be "a serious person" unless she occupies a position of headship.

Fortunately, this type of reasoning has already been put to the test in real life, so we can see its practical consequences. Look at the world. Is it any wonder that we see all around us a mass stampede for power, recognition, status, prestige, and so on? But the world's reasoning is invalid. Authority does not authenticate my person. Authority is not a privilege to be exploited to build up my ego. Authority is a responsibility to be borne for the benefit of others without regard for oneself. This alone is the Christian view.

Ironically, feminism shares the very premise upon which male domination is founded, namely, that my personal significance is measured according to my rung on the ladder, and my opportunity for personal fulfillment enlarges or contracts according to my role. By this line of reasoning, the goal of life degenerates into competition for power, and no one hungers and thirsts for true fulfillment in righteousness. No wonder both male domination and feminism are tearing people apart!

I appeal to my readers in the name of God, I appeal to you on the ground of Genesis 1-3, to reconsider rationally the basis of your personal significance. Your glory is found only in the image of God within you, as you resemble His holy character, whatever niche you may occupy in His larger scheme of things.

Women in the Life and Teachings of Jesus

James A. Borland

This chapter has two goals: (1) to show that Jesus placed a high value on women, and (2) to show that Jesus recognized role distinctions for men and women. Jesus' high regard for women is seen in how He recognized their intrinsic equality with men, in how He ministered to women, and in the dignity He accorded to women during his ministry. Jesus' recognition of role distinctions for men and women is demonstrated by His choosing only men to serve as His apostles with their primary tasks of preaching, teaching, and governing. Women, however, served in other important capacities, such as praying, providing financial assistance, ministering to physical needs, voicing their theological understanding, and witnessing to the resurrection.

Some may question whether Jesus' teaching and practice regarding the status of women harmonize with the rest of Biblical truth. Was His teaching radically different from Old Testament revelation? Are Jesus and Paul contradictory? Is a wife's submission to her husband a one-way street, or are there mutual aspects involved in the teaching about submission?¹

Different positions have been taken relative to these questions, ranging from that of radical feminists² to more traditional evangelical views. The evangelical community seeks to interpret the text as inspired and authoritative. Such is the case with a number of evangelical feminists who are discarding the more traditional viewpoints.³ For Hull, Bilezikian, and others, sex roles are essentially unimportant. They see no "subordination of women to men" in home, church, or society, but rather a "mutual submission and therefore equal opportunity for men and women to serve in both church and society."⁴ Equal opportunity to serve as an ordained elder, bishop, pastor, or teacher is one of their primary concerns.

One starting place for the evidence in the New Testament is to examine the position of women in the life and teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. The evidence in the four Gospels demonstrates that our Lord placed a high value on women, while He continued to recognize role distinctions for men and women.

I. Christ Placed a High Value on Women.

The place of women in the first-century Roman world and in Judaism has been

as: "and this principle must be operative in your church, as in all the congregations of the saints."

On the whole, it seems best to take verse 33b with what follows. But even if someone prefers the other option, little is changed in the interpretation of verses 34-36, since the phrase "in the churches" (in the plural) is found *in verse 34*.

"Silent in the Churches": On the Role of Women in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36¹

D. A. Carson

^{33b}As in all the congregations of the saints,³⁴women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says.³⁵If 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.

I. Introduction

The interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36 is by no means easy. The nub of the difficulty is that in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, Paul is quite prepared for women to pray and prophesy, albeit with certain restrictions; but here, a first reading of the text seems to make the silence he enjoins absolute. The solutions that have been advanced are, like devils in certain instances of demon possession, legion. I can do no more than list a few and mention one or two of my hesitations about them before turning to the interpretation I find most contextually and exegetically secure.

The demarcation of the passage to be studied deserves some comment, since the precise link between verse 33a and verse 33b, and therefore between verses 33b and verse 34, is disputed. Do we read, "For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the congregation of the saints"; or "As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches"? The latter is stylistically inelegant, for in Greek the words rendered "congregations" and "churches" by the *NIV* are the same word: i.e., "As in all the churches of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches." But what some see as stylistic inelegance, others see as powerful emphasis achieved by repetition. Moreover, if verse 33b is linked with what precedes, it is uncertain just what the line of thought is. In the sentence, "For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the congregations of the saints," what is being compared? God and the congregations of the saints? God's peaceful order with what is in all the congregations of the saints? The sentence can be salvaged only by understanding an additional phrase, such

II. The Text-Critical Question

A number of scholars have noted the complexities of the textual evidence supporting the authenticity of these verses and have dismissed verses 34-36, or some part of them, as a late gloss of no relevance in establishing Pauline theology.² Not a few of these writers exercise a similar source-critical skill with all the other passages in the Pauline corpus that seem to restrict women in any way. The authentic Paul, they argue, is the Paul of passages like 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and Galatians 3:27ff. I confess I am always surprised by the amount of energy and ingenuity expended to rescue Paul from himself and conform him to our image. In any case, the view that verses 34-36 contain a major gloss is so much a minority report, especially since all manuscripts include the passage, that until recently most discussions and refutations could afford to be cursory. In short, most were satisfied that, whatever the textual complexities, the evidence that these verses are original and in their original location (and not, as in some manuscripts, with verses 34-35 placed after 14:40), is substantial.³

With the publication of the recent and generally excellent commentary by Fee,⁴ however, the view that verses 34-35 constitute a non-Pauline interpolation has gained wider credence. Before turning to interpretations of the text as it stands, it has become important to think through the reasoning of those who omit it.

The relevant textual evidence is quickly stated. Verses 34-35 appear in all known manuscripts, either in their present location, or, in the case of all Western witnesses, after verse 40 (D F G 88* a b d f g Ambrosiaster Sedulius-Scotus). In addition, Codex Fuldenis (a Latin manuscript written between A.D. 541 and A.D. 546 by order of Bishop Victor of Capua) places the verses after verse 40, but also inserts them in the margin after verse 33. It appears that, despite the uniformity of the Western tradition, Victor, or those who worked at his bidding, became aware of the placement of the verses outside their own tradition and signalled their hesitation in this way.

Thus, although the overwhelming majority of manuscripts support the placing of verses 34-35 after verse 33, one must offer an explanation of the Western textual tradition. Fee's solution is that when the epistle came from Paul's hand the verses were not there, but were added later. His argument is essentially twofold. *First*, he appeals to transcriptional probability. In particular, he refers to Bengel's first principle, perhaps the most important single text-critical principle: the form of the text that best explains the origin of all other forms is most likely the original. As a matter of mere logical possibility, one must opt, Fee says, for one of the following: (1) Paul wrote the words after verse 33 and someone later deliberately transposed them to a position after verse 40; (2) Paul wrote the words after verse 40 and someone deliberately transposed them to a position after verse 33; (3) Paul did not write the words at all; rather, they were an early marginal gloss (that is, a later editor's addition written in the margin) subse-

by the majority of the manuscript evidence. The position after verse 33 (again, on a superficial reading) breaks up the flow of the argument. Verses 37-40 are still demonstrably talking about tongues, prophecy, spiritual gifts, authority in the church—the very topics that have dominated chapter 14. True, to put verses 34-35 after verse 40 is still to leave some awkwardness, but at least the awkwardness of breaking up what appears to be a cohesive unit of thought is alleviated. Thus, when verse 40 ends up by insisting that everything be done “in a fitting and orderly way,” it is easy to imagine some copyist thinking that what appear to be regulations governing the conduct of women in the assembly could be subsumed fairly easily under that principle. The role of women is then nicely tucked in between two major topics: spiritual gifts (chapters 12-14) and the resurrection (chapter 15). (ii) As for the stability of the textual tradition in the Eastern church, most textual critics acknowledge that the majority of the most “creative” glosses and emendations occurred early in the transmission of the text. Certainly in the West, by the time of Jerome there were protests about the sloppy quality of many copies and translations (as witness the well-known protest of “Pope” Damasus). All it would take to introduce the transposition was one copyist, presumably early enough to capture the Western tradition, making what he felt was an improvement. That the history of the Eastern textual tradition is remarkably stable is scarcely relevant, since most of that “history” is much later.

If we set aside Fee’s view of the transcriptional probabilities, we must still evaluate his *second* text-critical appeal, namely, intrinsic probability. Fee makes three points:

(1) He strongly argues that one can make the best sense of the structure of Paul’s argument “without these intruding sentences,”⁸ i.e., by omitting these two verses. Of course, appeals to “intrinsic probability” are amongst the weakest, against the principle of *lectio difficilior potior* (“the more difficult reading is preferable,” a principle that, strangely, Fee does not mention): all things being equal, the most difficult reading has the greatest claim to authenticity, since it can be demonstrated that scribes tended to smooth out perceived rough spots, not invent difficulties. Clearly, on intrinsic grounds inclusion of verses 34-35 after verse 33 is the *lectio difficilior*, the “harder reading.” Methodologically, the only time the *lectio difficilior* should be overthrown by appealing to “intrinsic probability” occurs when the external evidence is strongly against the *lectio difficilior*. Despite Fee’s treatment of the transcriptional probabilities, this is simply not the case.

But what Fee unwittingly accomplishes is to set out one important criterion for an acceptable interpretation of the passage: it must make sense of the *flow* of the passage, or it should be dismissed as unlikely. In other words, while it may be freely admitted that the passage makes sense if verses 34-35 are excised, both the transcriptional probabilities and the principle of *lectio difficilior* argue that these two verses are original; and if so, then the most credible interpretation is the one that shows how a thoughtful reading of the last half of the chapter makes ample sense of the flow of Paul’s thought, *with verses 34-35 included after verse 33*.

(2) Fee sees “even greater difficulty” in “the fact that these verses stand in obvious contradiction to 11:2-16, where it is assumed without reproach that women pray and prophesy in the assembly.”⁹ All sides in the debate understand that this is the nub of the problem. Even so, it may be doubted whether this makes the shorter text “intrinsically” more “probable.” It may instead be further fod-

quently inserted into the text at two different places.⁵ Fee judges that good historical reasons are available to support the third option, but none for either of the first two. The gloss itself, quite apart from the location of its insertion, may well have been created toward the end of the first century to achieve a reconciliation between 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14 or to thwart a rising feminist movement (the existence of which some find attested in 1 Timothy 2). This means, of course, that verse 33b must be read with verse 33a (cf. discussion above) and that verse 36 follows immediately (as the letter came from Paul).

If Fee’s reconstruction of events is correct, the gloss must have been extraordinarily early to have managed to find its way into *every* manuscript. This becomes rather unlikely under the assumption that the gloss was inserted at the end of the first century, by which time this epistle had been circulating for four decades. It is hard to believe that none of the earliest copies had any influence on the second- and third-century textual traditions to which we have access. Most commentators are rightly reluctant, therefore, to postulate an original omission where no manuscript that has come down to us attests the omission. Moreover, most glosses of substantial size, like this one, seek to explain the text, or clarify the text, or elucidate the text (e.g. John 5:4; Acts 8:37; 1 John 5:7b-8); they do not introduce major problems of flow into the text. The difficulty is so great in this case that we are asked to believe in a glossator who is Biblically informed enough to worry about harmonization with 1 Timothy 2 but who is so thick he cannot see that he is introducing a clash between 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Corinthians 11. In short, unless there are overwhelming reasons for rejecting both of the other two options, this third choice should be dismissed as both weak and speculative. Bengel’s first principle is convincing; Fee’s application of it is not.

It is not widely argued that Paul originally wrote the disputed words after verse 40. That leaves us with the first option, namely, that Paul wrote verses 34-35 after verse 33, but that someone later deliberately transposed them to follow verse 40. This is the majority view. Fee rejects it on the ground that no historical reason has been advanced to justify such transposition. In particular, he says, “(a) displacements of this kind do not occur elsewhere in the New Testament; and (b) no *adequate* [emphasis his] reason can be found for such a displacement were these words originally in the text after verse 33.”⁶

Neither objection is weighty. On the first point, Fee himself concedes, in a footnote,⁷ that the adulterous woman pericope (John 7:53-8:11 in English Bibles) is a remarkable exception: it found its way into no fewer than five locations in our manuscripts. As for his argument that “no *adequate* reason can be found for such a transposition,” I am doubtful that Fee will find the reason I shall advance “adequate,” but adequacy is in part in the eye of the beholder. Customarily it is suggested that some scribe transposed it to a position after verse 40 because that produces less strain in the flow of the passage than its location after verse 33. Fee does not find this suggestion “adequate” because (1) the position after verse 40 is scarcely an improvement, and if there is no improvement there is no motive for transposition; and (2) judging by the stability of the textual tradition in the Eastern church, it was not common for copyists to mess around with the order of Paul’s epistles. Again, however, a different reading of the evidence is possible. (i) Although a location for verses 34-35 after verse 40 is not without difficulties, it does have, on a superficial reading, one marked advantage over that attested

der for the *lectio difficilior*. And again, Fee's concern points the way to another criterion of an adequate interpretation: it must explain how the two passages, 11:2-16 and 14:33b-36, can stand consistently in the same letter, *each within its own context*.

Fee forcefully rejects this approach, because he insists on taking "They are not allowed to speak" as an absolute statement that *cannot* be reconciled with 11:2-16. At the merely formal level, of course, he is right: the statement is absolute. But qualifications to a statement can be present even when they are not part of the syntactical unit in question. The qualifications *may* be part of the larger context or the flow of the argument: in other words, there may be discourse considerations. Consider, for example, 1 John 3:9: "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God." We may agree that the meaning of "God's seed" could be taken a couple of different ways, and that the NIV rendering, just cited, exaggerates the force of the present tense verbs, but after all our caveats are in, this is an extraordinarily strong statement. Even so, responsible exegesis must not only fit it into the flow of 1 John 3 but also take note of 1 John 1:6, 8, 10, where all pretensions to sinless perfection are specifically denied.

So also here: the prohibition in 1 Corinthians 14:34 is strong, but, as we shall see, the context argues it is not as strong as Fee thinks. Moreover the sanction granted to women to pray and prophesy (in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16) has one or two more curbs on it than Fee thinks. In the last analysis, Fee's judgments based on "intrinsic probability" are in part the result of his insistence on an absolute disjunction between two texts where more sympathetic exegesis sees a way forward. The disjunction he draws is not demanded by the text; it is self-generated.

(3) Finally, Fee joins other scholars who have noted that there are some usages in these two verses that are not typically Pauline—though it must be said that he prejudices this issue by saying, rather more strongly, that they "seem quite foreign to Paul."¹⁰ Of course, many passages that all concede are Pauline contain one or more *hapax legomena* (expressions that occur only once, whether once in the Pauline corpus, or once in the New Testament). In light of this, we ought to be very careful about relegating any passage to the level of redactional addition where part of the argument turns on odd usage. This is not to say that such arguments are never valid: I myself have argued against the authenticity of John 7:53-8:11, in part by appealing to usage. But even there, where the usage arguments are considerably stronger than here (in part because the text is much longer), the usage arguments would not be judged very powerful were it not for the very strong manuscript evidence favoring omission—evidence entirely lacking in this instance.

In any case, the atypical usages in this passage are not all of a piece. Several of the ones commonly listed (but not, thankfully, by Fee) occur in Ephesians, Colossians, or the Pastorals, but so convinced are some scholars that these epistles are deuterio-Pauline that they conclude 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 must be deuterio-Pauline as well. I refer to such items as the verbs to *permit* (*epitrepō*), which occurs in 1 Timothy 2:12, also dealing with women, and to *subordinate* [*oneself*] (*hypotassō*), which is found in Ephesians and Colossians. Although "churches [NIV 'congregations'] of the saints" is not found elsewhere in Paul, neither is it part of the disputed text: it occurs at the end of verse 33—which of course does not bother Conzelmann, since he, without any text-critical warrant, assigns

all of verses 33b-36 to a later redactor.¹¹ Fee carefully distances himself from this kind of speculation and suggests that 1:2 offers adequate reason for this form of expression.¹² This rather goes to show that reasons can usually be found to explain unique usages. But when it comes to verses 34-35, Fee magnifies several alleged peculiarities. In particular, he thinks that the use of "the Law" in verse 34 is un-Pauline.¹³ I shall comment on that expression below.

In brief, neither Fee's appeal to transcriptional probability nor his appeal to intrinsic probability is very convincing. With all respect to a brother whose textual prowess is far greater than my own, his arguments in this case sound a bit like the application of a first-class mind to the defense of a remarkably weak position.

III. Unsatisfying Interpretations

If we grant that verses 34-35 are authentic and were included after verse 33 when the epistle left Paul's hand, it is all the more important to weigh the various interpretations that have been offered. The following list is not exhaustive. It is broadly comprehensive, and not in any particular order.

(1) Some continue to see the demand for silence as an absolute rule. This is done in one of two ways. *First*, several seek to escape the tension between 11:2-16 and 14:33b-36 by arguing that only the latter passage has reference to the public assembly; the former deals only with the home or with small group gatherings.¹⁴ In that case, nothing in 1 Corinthians prevents the interpreter's taking the prohibition of chapter 14 absolutely, so far as the church assembly is concerned.

This interpretation does not seem very likely, for: (a) Paul thinks of prophecy primarily as revelation from God delivered through believers *in the context of the church*, where the prophecy may be evaluated (14:23-29). (b) Distinctions between "smaller house groups" and "church" may not have been all that intelligible to the first Christians, who commonly met in private homes. When the "church" in a city was large enough (as certainly in Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, and possibly Corinth) to overflow the largest private accommodation, it must have been rather difficult, once opposition was established, to find a public venue large enough to accommodate *all* the believers of that city; i.e., the house groups in such instances *constituted* the assembly of the church. (c) The language of 11:16 ("If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.") seems to suggest a *church* concern, not merely the concern of private or small-group piety. The "we"/"church of God" parallel either means that Paul has never allowed the practice, and the churches have followed his lead; or that Paul and the church in Ephesus (from which he is writing) constitute the "we" that have not followed the practice, and again the other churches have adopted the same stance. Either way, when Paul adopts the same tone elsewhere (see especially 14:33b, 36), he is talking about conduct *in an assembly*. (d) The immediately succeeding verses (11:17-34) are certainly devoted to an ordinance designed for the assembly. (e) If someone points out that 11:2-16, unlike 14:33b-36, does not include the phrase "in the church," it must also be observed that 11:2-16 does not *restrict* the venue to the private home or small group. (f) Whether the restriction in 11:2-16 requires some kind of hat or a dis-

tinctive coiffure, it becomes faintly ridiculous in proportion to the degree of privacy envisaged. If the restriction pertains to every venue *except* the church assembly, does this mean the Christian wife must postpone her private prayer until she has hurried to her chambers and donned her headpiece? The restriction is coherent only in a public setting. (g) Above all, the universality of the promise of Joel, cited at Pentecost, that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on men and women such that both would prophesy as constituent members of the community of the new covenant, seems somehow less than transparent if the women may display their inheritance only outside the gathered messianic community.

The second way in which some understand the prohibition in 14:33b-36 as an absolute rule, thereby requiring creative measures in the exegesis of 11:2-16, is by taking the permission granted in the latter passage to be mere concession: women may indeed pray and prophesy (under the restriction of the head covering, whatever that is); but this is conceded with extreme reluctance to those who cannot manage to submit to the rule of chapter 14.¹⁵ But the praying and prophesying exercised by women in chapter 11 is not cast as a concession. Moreover, the church enjoyed the heritage of Pentecost and the fulfillment of the Joel prophecy, as we have seen, which promised that both men *and women* would have the Spirit poured out on them and that in consequence they would prophesy (Acts 2:16).

(2) Some are willing to leave a contradiction, and say no more.¹⁶ But apart from any bearing this might have on the doctrine of Scripture, it is hard to believe that Paul could contradict himself as boldly as some think he has within the space of a few pages.

(3) Equally unlikely is the view of Kähler, to the effect that the subordination Paul had in mind is not of women to men, but of women to the order of worship he is establishing.¹⁷ But we must ponder why women are singled out. Do not men also have to submit to the ecclesiastical structures Paul is setting forth? Moreover, the verb for "submit" or "subordinate" normally involves subordination of a person or persons to a person or persons, not to an order, procedure, or institution.

(4) To her credit, Fiorenza suggests¹⁸ that the reasoning behind many such judgments is based on theological bias; so she is prepared to let Paul be Paul. Whatever the restriction, she thinks it is placed on wives only. After all, 1 Corinthians 7 displays Paul's "ascetic preference for the unmarried state";¹⁹ thus it is "apparent that Paul here is 'taking over' bourgeois moral concepts which denote not absolute but conventional values."²⁰ Fiorenza finds Paul's attitude surprising since we know of missionary *complexes* in the New Testament. Paul derives his stance from "the Jewish Hellenistic propaganda tradition" that "places the demand for subordination of wives in the context of the Law."²¹ Verse 36 betrays the fact that Paul expects strong response from the church against these restrictions; for indeed, Paul himself recognizes that his argument "sounds preposterous" and "goes against the accepted practice of the missionary churches in the Hellenistic urban centers. He therefore claims for his regulations the authority of the Lord (verse 37)."²²

Here we have Paul not only strapped into a bourgeois mentality but also guilty of the worst sort of religious jingoism: knowing what he says is preposterous and preparing for the backlash by appealing to the Lord's authority! I confess I cannot help entertaining the suspicion that Fiorenza's exegesis tells us more of her than it does of Paul.

(5) Another cluster of interpretations argues that the problems behind Paul's demand for silence are local, probably doctrinal or cultural.²³ These positions are defended with varying degrees of sophistication. The argument that some of the women were too noisy²⁴ cannot be taken very seriously, for we must ask why Paul then bans *all* women from talking. And were there *no* noisy men? Nor is it plausible that the women are silenced because they were uneducated; for again, we must ask why Paul doesn't silence uneducated *people*, not just women. And since Paul's rule operates in *all* the churches (verses 33b-34), it would be necessary to hold that *all* first-century Christian women were uneducated—which is palpable nonsense.²⁵

A more sophisticated version of this approach argues that women were exploiting their emancipation, refusing the ruling of verse 29, and falling into various heresies. The "Law" to which Paul appeals in verse 34 is his own prior ruling, alluded to again in verse 37. Moreover, verse 36 makes it clear that the crucial issue at stake was the Word of God: "The Corinthians were claiming to have originated the divine message, with their women giving the lead."²⁶ The doctrinal error may have been related to 15:12—a claim to have already been raised; and this claim "may well have carried with it—on the part of the women—a tacit denial of their married state on the ground that as 'risen ones' they no longer owed marital allegiance."²⁷

But none of this is convincing, and some of it is misleading. There is *no* evidence that Paul ever uses the word *law* to refer to his own ruling. There is, as we shall see, a much more natural interpretation of that word. Surely the thrust of verse 36 is the charge that the Corinthians were trying to stand apart from the other churches (cf. 14:33b). In other words, verse 36 does not *define* the problem but *describes* the attitude that supports it. And what evidence is there here that the women "gave the lead"? Moreover, the attempt to link this situation with a similar one in 1 Timothy arouses all the same kinds of objections about the exegesis of 1 Timothy.

There is a more foundational objection: These approaches are unbearably sexist. They presuppose that there was a major heresy in which one of the following was true: (a) *only* women were duped, yet Paul arbitrarily silences *all* the women, regardless of whether they were heretics or not; (b) both some men and some women were duped, but Paul silences only the latter, thus proving to be a chauvinist; or (c) Paul was entirely right in his ruling, because *all* the women and *only* women in *all* of the Pauline churches were duped—which perhaps I may be excused for finding hard to believe. Has that ever happened in the history of the church? The truth of the matter is that this passage raises no question of heresy, but if it did, some explanation would still have to be given for the fact that Paul's response silences women, not heretics.

(6) Yet another cluster of interpretations attempts to resolve the difficulty by ascribing verses 34-35, or some parts of them, to the position of the Corinthians, perhaps even to a quote from their letter.²⁸ There are many variations to this cluster, but the central purpose of these approaches is to assign the parts that do not seem to cohere with Paul's thought as enunciated elsewhere to the Corinthian position. Paul is setting out to refute. If the law (verse 34) means the Old Testament, one must find some place where women are told to be silent, and (we are told) there isn't one. Therefore *law* must refer to something else. One common view is that it represents *Torah*, which in the first instance means "teach-

ing," but was commonly used to cover both Scripture and associated Jewish traditions. So the law, here, refers to Jewish tradition that the Corinthians have unwisely adopted. Verses 34-35 summarize that position. Paul's horrified response is given in verse 36, and the fact that the word "only" (*monos*) is masculine may suggest that Paul is saying, in effect, "Did the word of God originate with *you men only*?" Moreover, it has been argued that the first word of verse 36 must not be taken here as a comparative particle ("Or") but as a disjunctive particle, expressing shock and overturning what immediately precedes ("What! Did the word of God originate with you men only?").²⁹

Again, however, the arguments are not as convincing as they first seem. We may conveniently divide a response into four parts:

(a) That the word for "only" is masculine is irrelevant: people considered generically are regularly found in the masculine gender in Greek.³⁰ It is more natural to read verse 36 as addressed to the church, not just to the men in the church. (b) It is very doubtful that verses 34-35 constitute a quotation, perhaps from the Corinthians' letter. During the last decade and a half, one notable trend in Corinthian studies has been to postulate that Paul is quoting the Corinthians in more and more places—usually in places where the commentator does not like what Paul is saying! That Paul does quote from the Corinthians' letter no one disputes. But the instances that are almost universally recognized as quotations (e.g., 6:12; 7:1b; 8:1b) enjoy certain common characteristics: (i) they are short (e.g., "Everything is permissible for me," 6:12); (ii) they are usually followed by sustained qualification (e.g., in 6:12 Paul goes on to add "but not everything is beneficial . . . but I will not be mastered by anything"—and then, following one more brief quotation from their letter, he devotes several verses to the principle he is expounding); (iii) Paul's response is unambiguous, even sharp. The first two criteria utterly fail if we assume verses 34-35 are a quotation from the letter sent by the Corinthians.³¹

(c) Moreover, although Paul uses the word *law* in several ways, he *never* uses it to refer to Jewish tradition, and the full expression found here, "the law says," occurs only twice elsewhere in Paul (Romans 3:19; 1 Corinthians 9:8), both with reference to the Mosaic law, and the former, judging by the wealth of quotations that immediately precede it, to the Scriptures, to what we would refer to as the Old Testament (cf. verse 21). Fee argues that the usage of "the law" here is probably not Pauline, since no passage is explicitly cited, and it is Paul's practice to provide a text.³² But the number of passages where this thesis can be tested is small. More importantly, I shall argue below that the reason Paul does not cite a text is that he has already referred to the text he has in mind, specifically when he was earlier dealing with the roles of women. When Fee adds, "Nowhere else does he appeal to the Law in this absolute way as binding on Christian behavior,"³³ he seems to be confusing two issues. It is true that Paul does not make simple appeals to the *Mosaic covenant*, "the law" in that sense, as a basis for Christian conduct. When he appears to do so, there are usually mitigating factors: e.g., in Romans 13:8-10, Christian love is the *fulfillment* of the law, where "fulfillment" must be understood in a salvation-historical sense. But Paul can appeal to *Scripture*, "the law" in that sense, as a basis for Christian conduct, and where he does so, the appeal, as here, is usually correlative (as in 1 Corinthians 9:8 and 14:21). In short, neither the suggestion that "the law says" here refers to

extra-biblical oral tradition, nor the view that it is here used in an un-Pauline way, can be reasonably substantiated.

(d) Although it is true that the first word in verse 36 is probably a disjunctive particle, nevertheless the proffered explanation does not follow. Odell-Scott and Manus understand verses 33b-35 as the proposition against which the disjunctive "What!" responds. In other words, Paul allegedly cites the Corinthian view that women must be silent, and then replies with some exasperation, "What! Did the word of God originate with you?" He thereby *dismisses* the content of verses 34-35. Bilezikian wants to render the word by "Nonsense!"³⁴ Kaiser specifically appeals to Thayer's *Lexicon*, which lists 1 Corinthians 14:36 as an instance of the principle that this disjunctive particle may appear (in Kaiser's citation of Thayer) "before a sentence contrary to the one preceding [it]. . . ." ³⁵ However, Kaiser has not quoted enough of Thayer's context to convey his meaning accurately. To quote in full, Thayer says that the disjunctive may appear "before a sentence contrary to the one just preceding, to indicate that if one be denied or refuted the other must stand: Mt. xx.15 (i.e., *or*, if thou wilt not grant this, *is thine eye* etc.)." In other words, Thayer does not say that the disjunctive particle in question is here used to *contradict* the preceding clause, and thus *dismiss* it, but that it is used to introduce a "sentence contrary to the one just preceding," *not* in order to dismiss the preceding, but in order "to indicate that if one be denied or refuted the other must stand." To put the matter another way, he is saying that the construction is a form of logical argument that is used to *reinforce* the preceding clause, as Thayer's example from Matthew 20:15 shows. There, the first part finds the landowner saying to the grumbling workers, "Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money?" As Jesus proceeds, He certainly does *not* want to overturn the principle articulated by this rhetorical question; *of course* the landowner has that right. But since the workers have not accepted this principle, Jesus introduces a "sentence contrary to [this one]" to force the workers to see the preposterous nature of their criticism. To use the language of Thayer (who is quoting the King James Version in italics and inserting ordinary lettering to show the true force of the disjunctive particle), and filling in the words hidden behind his "etc.": "*or*, if thou wilt not grant this, *is thine eye evil, because I am good?*" In the *NIV*, using the same change of typefaces to make the point, we obtain "*Or*, if you are not willing to admit the truth I am affirming, *are you envious because I am generous?*" In other words, if the workers "deny or refute" the first clause (which both the landowner and Jesus affirm), then at least they had better face up to the second (to use Thayer's expression, "to indicate that if [the first] one be denied or refuted the other must stand").

Thayer then goes on to list several other exemplary passages: Romans 3:29; 1 Corinthians 9:6; 10:22; 11:14 (he points out that there is a textual variant there); 14:36 (the passage at hand). Consider Romans 3:29. In the preceding verse, Paul insists, "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law." The next word, at the beginning of verse 29, is the disjunctive particle in question: "*Or* [is] God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God. . . ." Certainly neither Paul nor Thayer (and presumably not Kaiser) wants to overturn what Paul wrote in verse 28. Rather, using a rhetorical device, Paul goes on to say, in effect, "If you want to deny or refute this truth, then at least face up to this: monotheism itself demands that God is not the God of Jews only, but of all."

Corinthians 11:13), he refers to the particle ϵ even though no Greek edition known to me includes that particle.³⁸

All scholars make mistakes, I no less than others. But the sheer vehemence that has surrounded the treatment of this particle in recent years attests that we are facing more than an occasional lapse of exegetical judgment. We are facing an ideology that is so certain of itself that in the hands of some, at least, the text is not allowed to speak for itself.³⁹ The brute fact is this: *in every instance in the New Testament where the disjunctive particle in question is used in a construction analogous to the passage at hand, its effect is to reinforce the truth of the clause or verse that precedes it.* Paul's point in 14:36 is that some Corinthians want to "deny or refute" what Paul has been saying in verses 34-35. So he continues, "Or [if you find it so hard to grant this, then consider:] did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?" This is part and parcel of Paul's frequent insistence in this letter that the Corinthian church return to the common practice and perspective of the other churches (1:2; 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:33) and to wholehearted submission to apostolic authority (14:37-38).⁴⁰

(7) There is in addition a variety of interpretations that cut more or less independent swathes. For instance, Ellis⁴¹ sees the restriction applied to wives only, in the light of the distinctions in roles he thinks Paul does expect to be maintained in the Christian home. Perhaps these women were even questioning their own husbands' prophecies, provoking some very embarrassing situations. But in much of the ancient world, marriage meant an *improvement* to women in freedom and social status. Even if these verses deal primarily with the *married* woman, I suspect both Paul and his readers would assume the *a fortiori* argument: if married women are enjoined to be silent, then how much more the single ones? Besides, does Ellis really think that Christian women enjoyed full freedom and perfect egalitarianism in function in the church as long as they were single, and then from the day of their marriage onward became silent for fear of offending the husbands to whom they were to submit? These considerations effectively dismiss those interpretations that admit that Paul insists on certain role distinctions between the sexes but limit such distinctions to the home, denying that they have any bearing on the church.

All of these interpretations share another quite decisive weakness. They do not adequately explain why these words should be found here, in this context, dealing with prophecy and tongues. After all, Paul has not yet abandoned the subject (as is clear from verses 37-40). If we accept the text as it stands, we must ask why Paul seems to interrupt the flow of his thought to add this little unrelated section into his chapter.

IV. An Interpretation Constrained by the Context

Another interpretation has been set out by various writers and meets the objections put to it. The view has been ably defended elsewhere;⁴² I can merely sketch it here. Paul has just been requiring that the church in Corinth carefully weigh the prophecies presented to it. Women, of course, may participate in such prophesying; that was established in chapter 11. Paul's point here, however, is that they may *not* participate in the oral weighing of such prophecies. That is not permitted in any of the churches. In that connection, they are not allowed to speak—

Exactly the same sort of reasoning occurs in the other passages Thayer quotes. He then adds, as *part of the same article in his lexicon*, two extrapolations of this usage of the disjunctive particle: (a) ϵ *agnoiéte*, "or don't you know," citing Romans 6:3; 7:1 [cf. 6:14]; (b) ϵ *ouk oidáte*, "or don't you know," citing Romans 11:2; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 16, 19. In each case the flow of the argument demands that the words that succeed the expression *are used to enforce, rather emphatically, what some among the readers are in danger of trying to deny or refute: the clause that precedes it.* In short, Kaiser has not understood Thayer's point.

Worse yet is Bilezikian's discussion of some of the relevant passages in Paul. For example, he writes: "In [1 Corinthians] 6:1-2, Paul challenges the Corinthians for their propensity to go into litigations against each other before pagan courts, rather than to submit their contentions to fellow believers. He counters this situation with (nonsense!) do you not know that the saints will judge the world?"³⁶ Again, however, it is important to listen to the text itself. In verse 1, Paul writes, "if any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints?" The verb *dare* in this rhetorical question proves beyond contradiction that in this context the assumed answer is "No!" In other words, *the question itself* is a rhetorical device for forbidding such litigation. Verse 2 then begins with the disjunctive particle: "Or [do] you not know that the saints will judge the world?" Thus, using exactly the same reasoning that Thayer employs, we conclude that verse 2 *reinforces* the truth of verse 1, the truth that Christians should *not* enter into the litigation in question. Bilezikian has simply not understood what is being affirmed under the force of the rhetorical question.

There is even less excuse for this failure in understanding when he turns to 1 Corinthians 6:15-16, for Paul himself inserts, after the rhetorical question but before the disjunctive particle, the words *mē genoíto*: "Never" (NIV), "God forbid" (KJV). Once again, verse 16 emphatically reinforces the truth of verse 15, if the rhetorical question is read in any sort of responsible way.

Bilezikian does not even have a rhetorical question to fall back on when he treats 1 Corinthians 6:8-9. To quote him again: "In 6:9, having exposed the misbehavior of brethren who wrong and defraud each other, [Paul] counters with (nonsense!) do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?"³⁷ Again, let Paul speak. In verses 7-8, as part of his denunciation of the same Corinthian practices, he writes: "Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers." Paul does not now want to turn around and say that they have not been acting this way: clearly, they have been, and the burden of his remark is that they should not be. Equally clearly, however, some Corinthians are slow to accept his denunciation. They would prefer to "deny or refute" (Thayer's terms) Paul's contention. So Paul goes on: "Or [do] you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?" In other words, if you want to buck at what I am writing in verses 7-8, at least you had better swallow what I say now in verse 9—and of course the effect is to reinforce, emphatically so, the burden of verses 7-8.

In every passage he treats on this matter, Bilezikian demonstrates, quite remarkably, that he does not understand what he has cited. In one instance (1

"as the law says." Apparently in sympathy with the view that makes this appeal to "law" a feature of the *Corinthian* position, Evans suggests that to take this as Paul's appeal to law sounds "strangely unlike" him.⁴³ That is a rather strange assessment, since Paul in this chapter has already appealed once to "the law" (cf. 14:28), by which he means the Old Testament Scriptures. By this clause, Paul is probably not referring to Genesis 3:16, as many suggest,⁴⁴ but to the creation order in Genesis 2:20b-24,⁴⁵ for it is to that Scripture that Paul explicitly turns on two other occasions when he discusses female roles (1 Corinthians 11:8, 9; 2 Timothy 2:13). The passage from Genesis 2 does not enjoin silence, of course, but it does suggest that because man was made first and woman was made for man, some kind of pattern has been laid down regarding the roles the two play. Paul understands from this creation order that woman is to be subject 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: the first husband who uttered a prophecy would precipitate the problem.

More broadly, a strong case can be made for the view that Paul refused to permit any woman to enjoy a church-recognized teaching authority over men (1 Timothy 2:11ff.),⁴⁶ and the careful weighing of prophecies falls under that magisterial function. This does not mean that women should not learn: let them ask their husbands about various aspects of these prophecies, once they return home. Why should the Corinthians buck not only the practice of all the churches (verse 33b) but also the Scriptures themselves (verse 36)? Are they so enamored with the revelations that they have received that they dare to pit them against the authentic deposit found in Scripture and in the apostolic tradition? And if they feel they are merely interpreting that tradition under the promptings of the Spirit, are they not troubled to see that all the churches have translated the same texts, and the same Gospel, into quite different ecclesiastical practices? Are you the only people the word of God has reached (cf. verse 36b)?⁴⁷

Several final observations on this interpretation may prove helpful. *First*, this interpretation fits the flow of chapter 14. Although the focus in the second part of the chapter is still on tongues and prophecy, it is still more closely related to the order the church must maintain in the enjoyment of those grace gifts. Verses 33b-36 fall happily under the description. The immediately preceding verses deal with the evaluation of prophets; these verses (verses 33b-36) further refine that discussion. The general topic of 1 Corinthians 12-14 has not been abandoned, as the closing verses of chapter 14 demonstrate. There is no other interpretation of these disputed verses that so neatly fits the flow of the argument.

Second, this interpretation makes sense not only of the flow but also of the structure of the passage. Chapter 14 is dominated by a discussion of the relative places of tongues and prophecy. Most of the chapter does not here concern us. Verses 26 and following, however, clearly deal with practical guidelines for the ordering of these two gifts in the assembly. Verse 26 is fairly general. Verses 27-28 deal with practical constraints on tongues speakers. In verse 29, Paul turns to prophecy and writes, "Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said." The two parts of this verse are then separately expanded upon: the first part ("Two or three prophets should speak") is treated in verses 30-33a, where constraints are imposed on the *uttering* of prophecies; the second part ("and the others should weigh carefully what is said") is treated in verses 33b-36, where constraints are imposed on the *evaluation* of prophecies.⁴⁸

Third, the major objection that has been set against it is that it seems inconsistent for Paul to permit women to prophesy and then to forbid them to weigh prophecies. But the objection carries little weight *provided* that such prophecy does not have the same authority status that the great writing prophets of the Old Testament enjoyed (whether or not such authority was immediately recognized). Elsewhere I have argued at length that "prophecy" in the New Testament is an extraordinarily broad category, extending all the way from the product of the pagan Muse (Titus 1:12) to Old Testament canonical prophecy. In common church life, it was recognized to be Spirit-prompted utterance, but with no guarantee of divine authority in every detail, and therefore not only in need of evaluation (1 Corinthians 14:29) but necessarily inferior in authority to the deposit of truth represented by the Apostle Paul (14:37-38).⁴⁹ In certain respects, then, it is perfectly proper for Paul to elevate teaching above prophecy, especially if the teaching is considered part of the non-negotiable apostolic deposit that serves in part as one of the touchstones enabling the congregation to weigh the prophecies that are granted to the church, and especially if the prophecies themselves, unlike the apostolic deposit, are subject to ecclesiastical appraisal. It does not mean, of course, that the utterances of any particular teacher need not be verified; I am not saying that prophecy must be evaluated, but teaching need not be. The New Testament includes too many passages that encourage the church to take responsibility for evaluating teachers and teaching (1 Timothy 1:3; 6:3-5; Titus 1:9-14; Hebrews 13:9; 2 Peter 2:1, etc.). But it *does* mean that prophecy cannot escape such evaluation, and it presupposes that there is a deposit of apostolic teaching, a given content, that is non-negotiable and that can serve as the criterion both of further teaching and of prophecy.

Fourth, this is not all that the Bible has to say about relationships between men and women in Christ. I have said nothing, for instance, about the command for men to love their wives even as Christ loved the church—an exquisitely high standard characterized by unqualified self-giving. Nor have I listed the many things Paul expects Christian women to do. Above all, I have not devoted space to the fact that in a Greek *ekklēsia*, i.e., a public meeting, women were not allowed to speak at all.⁵⁰ By contrast, women in the Christian *ekklēsia*, borne along by the Spirit, were *encouraged* to do so. In that sense, Paul was not trapped by the social customs of Corinth: the gospel, in his view, truly freed women from certain cultural restrictions. But that does not mean that *all* distinctions in roles are thereby abolished. I would be prepared to argue, on broader New Testament grounds, that the distinctive roles that remain are in Paul's view part and parcel of living in this created order, in the tension between the "already" and the "not yet"—in the period between the bestowal of the eschatological Spirit and the consummation of all things, when there is neither marriage nor giving in marriage.

And *fifth*, if this interpretation is correct, and there are some role distinctions between men and women to be observed, it is essential to recognize that this teaching is for our good, not for our enslavement. That is a theme I would dearly love to enlarge upon; but I shall pass it by.

can make sense of all its parts and at the same time fits well into the larger perspective of the letter. Paul's intent therefore is not to put women in their place, as it were, but to maintain a cultural tradition that has the effect of serving as a gender distinctive, even while "in the Lord" neither is independent of the other (1 Cor 11:11).

LEARNING IN THE ASSEMBLIES

1 Corinthians 14:34-35

Craig S. Keener

Very few churches today take 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 to mean all that it could possibly mean. Indeed, any church that permits women to participate in congregational singing recognizes that Paul was not demanding what a face-value reading of his words seems to imply: complete silence as a sign of women's subordination. Thus almost *everyone* has a problem with pressing this text literally, and interpreters must explain the divergence between what it states and what they believe it means. But beyond this near consensus, church traditions and interpreters diverge: just how silent must women be?

Various Interpretations

Interpretations vary considerably. Some scholars, for example, argue that Paul cites a Corinthian position here which he then refutes, as he sometimes did earlier in the letter (e.g., 1 Cor 6:12-14). First Corinthians 14:36 does not, however, read easily like a refutation of preceding verses.¹ Others propose that, following synagogue practice, husbands and wives met in different parts of the church, so that women who asked questions could not avoid disrupting the worship. This proposal fails on two counts. First, synagogues were probably not segregated in this period.² Second, although the Corinthian church started in a synagogue (Acts 18:4) it now met in homes (Acts 18:7)—which would hardly

¹ I cite documentation for all these positions in Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993), pp. 74-80; for the sake of space I omit most documentation here.

² Shmuel Safrai, "The Synagogue," in *The Jewish People in the First Century*, 2 vols., ed. Shmuel Safrai and M. Stern (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974-76), p. 939; Bernadette J. Brooker, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982), pp. 103-38.

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afford the space for such gender segregation!

Some scholars question whether Paul even wrote the passage, noting both textual evidence and its contrast with its context and Paul's usual teaching.³ There is no question that it sounds intrusive. For example, the opening "or" of I Corinthians 14:36, in light of Paul's usage elsewhere in I Corinthians, most naturally follows "as in all the churches of the saints" in I Corinthians 14:33 (which itself naturally reads as concluding what precedes it, as in the similar appeal of I Cor 11:16).⁴ The early Western textual tradition has I Corinthians 14:34 and 35 in a different location, which may mean that early scribes were still debating the best place in Paul's writings to insert them. These scholars point out that such relocation in ancient texts usually suggests an interpolation and that this is the only passage in Paul's writings where scribes changed the sequence of his argument. The earliest evidence, including from the church fathers, treats 14:34-35 as a unit distinct from the context.

But though the passage certainly does interrupt the context, none of the ancient manuscripts lack these verses. That the verses do not seem to fit the context could explain why scribes struggled with where to locate them. Brief digressions were common both in Paul and other ancient writers.⁵ It is thus possible that Paul himself inserted this brief digression into a context involving order in church meetings to address a problem with some Corinthian women's behavior, of which he had been informed.

Still, trying to fit the passage into the immediate context is not simple, as the variety of context-based interpretations suggests. Some suppose that Paul is silencing women's practice of spiritual gifts such as prophecy or prayer in tongues. While this proposal does pay attention to the context (which regulates public use of the gifts), it is difficult to square with Paul's acceptance of women's praying and prophesying in church earlier in the same letter (I Cor 11:5).

Some readers interpret this passage as prohibiting women's teaching the Bible

³Argued by F. F. Bruce, Wayne Meeks and others; but the most persuasive exponent of this position is Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 699-705; most fully, Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), pp. 272-81. In a series of articles P. Barton Payne has also argued the likelihood that some earlier manuscripts omitted these verses, though this evidence remains disputed.

⁴Translations of I Corinthians are my own.

⁵Cf. D. A. Carson, "Silent in the Churches: On the Role of Women in I Corinthians 14:33b-36," in *RBMW*, p. 142. For digressions, see e.g., Josephus *Against Apion* 1.57; *Life of Flavius Josephus* 336-67; *Livy History of Rome* 9.17.1-9.19.17; Cicero *Finitibus* 2.32.104; *De Oratore* 43.148; *Ad Atticus* 7.2; Arrian *Indica* 6.1; Sallust *Bellum Catilinae* 5.9-13.5.

publicly, based on their understanding of I Timothy 2:11-12. Unfortunately, the Corinthians could not simply flip in their Bibles to I Timothy (which had not been written yet) to figure out what Paul meant, and unlike prophecy and tongues, teaching is not even mentioned directly in the present context! Of course, if Paul enjoins complete silence on women, that silence would necessarily preclude teaching, but it would also preclude public prophecy and prayer (contradicting Paul's earlier remarks) as well as modern congregational singing.

One proposal that is no more persuasive, yet has gained a wide hearing, is that Paul simply prohibits women from *judging* prophecy (I Cor 14:29).⁶ Most of the supporters of this proposal are nonegalitarians, though even if the proposal were correct, one is hard-pressed to see why restricting women from judging prophecies in Corinth would thereby restrict women from teaching (yet not prophesying or praying) then or today. Judging prophecy is a task assigned to all who prophesy (I Cor 14:29), perhaps (given the use of the cognate term) part of the gift of discerning spirits (I Cor 12:10); and again, women can prophesy (I Cor 11:5). The only kind of speech specifically mentioned here (asking questions) seems little related to evaluating prophecies' accuracy.⁷ Perhaps the greatest weakness of the position is that there is nothing in the text that specifically leads us to suppose that "judging prophecies" is the particular sort of speech in view; if the previous proposal about limiting women's involvement in spiritual gifts fails because it contradicts I Corinthians 11:4-5, at least it was a specific *emphasis* in the preceding context (and not simply one activity among many others in the context, like evaluating prophecies in I Cor 14:29).⁸ What in I Corinthians 14:34-35 specifies "judging" prophecies? And where does the text suggest that "judging prophecies" reveals a higher degree of authority than prophesying God's message itself? That many nonegalitarians support this reading (rather than a more explicit argument against teaching) shows how difficult it is to target Bible teaching or pastoral ministry without eliminating prophecy or prayer, and ultimately suggests that this is a difficult text for all modern interpreters, including nonegalitarians.

⁶E.g., Carson, "Silent," p. 152; James B. Hurley, "Did Paul Require Veils or the Silence of Women? A Consideration of I Cor. 11:2-16 and I Cor. 14:33b-36," *WTJ* 35 (1973): 217; also some egalitarians (Walter L. Liefeld, "Women, Submission and Ministry in I Corinthians," in *Women, Authority and the Bible*, ed. Alvera Mickelsen [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986], p. 150).

⁷Although people asked questions of oracles (*Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 1148-49, 1477; Maximus of Tyre *Orations* 8.3) or "inquired of the Lord" (e.g., I Sam 9:9), this was not a method of evaluating prophecy.

⁸D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1984), p. 115, offers one of the classic warnings against the danger of interpretive overspecification.

What Situation Was Paul Addressing?

When Paul named various people in the church in Corinth, he did not have to explain to his readers who these people were (e.g., I Cor 1:11, 14, 16; 16:17). The Corinthian Christians already knew them. Likewise, he could refer to practices like food offered to idols and women wearing head coverings with no concern that twenty-first-century readers might struggle to reconstruct the situation. After all, the verse that tells us that Paul was writing to the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:2) is just as inspired as more popular parts of the letter, and the letter genre itself invites us to consider his readers' situation.

Some readers today reject any interpretation of a passage that requires us to take the particular situation into account. Such readers are never consistent, however: few, for example, provide offerings for the Jerusalem church every Sunday (1 Cor 16:1-4). Likewise, many do not require head coverings or holy kisses (1 Cor 11:2-16; 16:20), recognizing that these practices meant something different to first-century readers from what they would mean to us today.⁹ We cannot simply cite the present passage and claim that it applies to all situations without begging the question. In any case, the first task of the reader of Scripture is the exegetical one: understanding the text on its own terms in its own context. Only after we have understood it contextually can we apply it appropriately.

Paul can hardly mean that all women in all churches must be completely silent all the time; that would contradict Paul's earlier words in the same letter (1 Cor 11:5), not to mention his valuing of women laborers in the gospel (Rom 16:1-7; 12). As mentioned above, it would also contradict the practice of the majority of even the most conservative churches today. Since those who allow women to participate in congregational singing do not apply this text any more literally than egalitarians do, all could benefit from further discussion of the background. Tongues speakers (1 Cor 14:30) also were to remain silent, but only under particular circumstances. What clues does Paul offer us in the text itself concerning the reasons for the silence? The context addresses not simply spiritual gifts but order and propriety in house church meetings (1 Cor 14:27-33).

Two things are absolutely central to a proper understanding of this passage. First,

⁹For the cultural practices involved here, see Craig S. Keener, "Head Coverings," "Kissing," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. C. A. Evans and S. E. Porter, pp. 442-47, 628-29 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000). For further examples of the need for cultural sensitivity in interpreting these passages, see Craig S. Keener, "Women in Ministry," in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. James R. Beck and Craig L. Blomberg (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001), pp. 46-49, 55-57.

and most important, our verses themselves specify only one particular kind of speech that we can be certain Paul addresses here. Unless Paul changes the subject from women's submissive silence (1 Cor 14:34) to asking questions privately (1 Cor 14:35) and back again to silence (1 Cor 14:35), asking questions is at least a primary example of the sort of speech he seeks to forbid. In fact, Paul explicitly bases his injunction to ask questions privately on his demand for silence (1 Cor 14:35, "for"). Second, and related to the first, Paul explicitly ties the women's speech in this case to shame. And since honor and shame are areas in which cultures differ considerably, it is worth our while to determine the source of "shame" in this particular instance.

Why would women have been tempted to ask questions during the service? And what problems would these interruptions have posed? Here it is helpful to note that questions were standard fare in all ancient lecture settings—except when asked by those insufficiently learned, who were expected to keep quiet, at least so long as they remained novices. There is good reason to suppose that most of the women in the Corinthian church—even those raised in the synagogue—were insufficiently learned. Further, their gender itself would have rendered their outspokenness offensive to conservative Roman and Greek men, probably even in the familial setting of a Corinthian house church.

Women's Silence and Questions in Public Settings

Reading our passage on its own terms, I had always found most plausible the view that women were interrupting the service with questions.¹⁰ But I never could imagine what circumstances provoked these public questions until I read Plutarch's essay *On Lectures*. Then I realized that listeners regularly interrupted lectures with questions, whether to learn more about the subject or to compete intellectually with an inadequately prepared lecturer. I quickly realized that questions were common in Jewish settings as well and were a regular part of ancient Mediterranean lecture settings in general.¹¹ House churches were undoubtedly less formal than larger settings but apparently included, when possible, a teaching element that would prob-

¹⁰Also, e.g., Don Williams, *The Apostle Paul and Women in the Church* (Glendale, Calif.: Gospel Light, 1977), p. 70; Kevin Giles, *Created Woman: A Fresh Study of the Biblical Teaching* (Canberra, Australia: Acorn, 1985), p. 56.

¹¹See, e.g., Plutarch *Lectures* 11, *Moralia* 43B; Aulus Gellius *Attic Nights* 1.26.2; 8.10; 12.5.4; 16.6.1-12; 18.13.7-8; 20.10.1-6; Seneca *Epistles to Lucilius* 108.3; *Josephus Sanhedrin* 7:10; *Avot de Rabbi Nathan* 6A; Martin Goodman, *State and Society in Roman Galilee* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983), p. 79; also intellectual conversation, e.g., Polybius *Histories* 31.2.3-9; Plutarch *Table-Talk* 2.1.2, *Moralia* 630BC.

ably follow many practices familiar from similarly sized learning gatherings in the culture (cf. I Cor 12:28-29; 14:6, 26; Rom 12:7).

But why would Paul have restricted questions coming specifically from women? The questions could be an example of a broader kind of speech in the assembly prohibited to women; but then why does Paul permit the women to pray and prophesy in 11:5? Two possibilities make good sense.

The first is that ancient Mediterranean protocol would disapprove of an otherwise honorable woman addressing unrelated men.¹² Thus, for example, in one novel a noble woman protests that it is proper only for a man to speak when men are present, explaining that she speaks only under duress.¹³ Speech to “their own husbands” here may thus contrast with speaking to other men—a practice Greek men permitted for “inspired” speech but rejected as shameful for casual conversation. This sort of situation could easily arise in the ambiguous boundaries between private and public spheres experienced in a house church.¹⁴

In current Western society it is nearly impossible for anyone who engages in any activity in public—working, attending university, shopping—to avoid some casual cross-gender conversation, but this was not the case in the first century. Although many men considered women prone to gossip, social convention particularly respected women who were socially retiring and did not talk much with men outside their household.¹⁵ Many men questioned women’s judgment.¹⁶ Women who con-

¹²E.g., Valerius Maximus *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 3.8.6; cf. 8.3.2. This principle is often acknowledged here; e.g., Christopher Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity and Its Hellenistic Environment* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997), pp. 274, 277; cf. James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 589, 592.

¹³Heliodoros *Ethiopia* 1.21-22, especially 1.22 (probably third century A.D.).

¹⁴See especially Terence Paige, “The Social Matrix of Women’s Speech at Corinth: The Context and Meaning of the Command to Silence in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36,” *BBR* 12 (2002): 217-42, published during the editing of this essay. Although we cite some of the same ancient texts, his work shows no awareness of my earlier work (nor was I aware of his article when I completed the final draft of this essay or cited these texts), suggesting that ancient literature led us to very similar conclusions independently.

¹⁵See Plutarch *Bride* 31-32, *Moralia* 142CD; Heliodoros *Ethiopia* 1.21. Later rabbis felt Jewish men should avoid unnecessary conversation with women (*Mishnah Avot* 1.5; *Tosefta Shabbat* 1:14; *Babylonian Talmud Berakhot* 43b, bar.; *Eruvin* 53b), and the strictest felt that a wife who spoke with a man in the street could be divorced with no marriage settlement (*Mishnah Ketubot* 7:6). Some felt that such verbal interaction could ultimately lead to sin (Ecclesiasticus 9:9; 42:12; *Zestament of Reuben* 6:1-2). Traditional Middle Eastern societies still view social intercourse as nearly the moral equivalent of sexual infidelity (Carol Delaney, “Seeds of Honor, Fields of Shame,” in *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean*, ed. D. D. Gilmore [Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association, 1987], p. 43).

¹⁶See Cicero *Pro Murena* 12.27; Philo *Qui Omnis Probis Liber Sit* 117; *Hypothetica* 11.14-17; Josephus

versed with men laid themselves open to gossipers’ complaints about their morality.¹⁷ Traditional Romans regarded wives’ speaking publicly with others’ husbands as horrible behavior, reflecting possible flirtatious designs and subverting the moral order of the state.¹⁸ By contrast, meekness and shyness in women were considered honorable.¹⁹ First-century Romans, including many in Corinth, had generally become more tolerant, but enough traditional sentiments remained to create tension in the house-church setting, especially with various cultures present. (Corinth was officially Roman in this period, but Paul’s writing in Greek and presupposing Jewish customs suggests a mixed church.)

Because women’s public speech was sometimes shameful in Corinth, one cannot simply assume that Paul’s claim that it is “shameful” for a woman to speak in the assembly (I Cor 14:35) is meant to be transcultural, any more than his earlier injunction to cover their heads (related to shame in I Cor 11:5-6) or his later one to greet with a holy kiss.²⁰ When applied to gender relations, “shameful” often involved a woman’s reputation in sexual matters.²¹ Conservative Greek culture, for example, regarded a wife’s talking with a young man as “shameful” (the same Greek term).²² While Paul challenges some social conventions of his day, he supports oth-

Antiquities of the Jews 1.49; 4.2.19; Craig S. Keener, “Marriage,” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. C. A. Evans and S. E. Porter (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 688.

¹⁷Theophrastus *Characters* 28.3—also if they (rather than a husband or porter) answer the door (this suggests they have a paramour; see Tibullus 1.2.7, 15-24, 41, 55-56).

¹⁸*Livy History of Rome* 34.2.9; 34.4.18. A more progressive speaker argues that this behavior is acceptable under some circumstances (34.5.7-10).

¹⁹E.g., Sophocles *Ajax* 293; Demosthenes *Against Meidias* 79; Valerius Maximus *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 7.1.1; Ecclesiasticus 22.5; 26.14; see further Keener, “Marriage,” pp. 687-90.

²⁰Liefeld (“Submission,” pp. 140-42) finds here the idea of glory and disgrace, as in 11:7, related to decorum or “order” (cf. 12:23; 11:34; 14:40); he rightly notes that unnecessary social criticism could hinder the spread of Christianity. Speaking was “shameful” when inappropriate (e.g., in the case of a shameful speaker; Aeschines *Timarchus* 28-29).

²¹The designation *shameful* often applied to sexual immorality (e.g., Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* 1.78.5; Diodorus Siculus *Library of History* 5.55.6-7; 10.31.1; 12.15.2; 12.21.2; 32.10.9; 33.15.2; Christians would agree here), which was the opposite of appropriate womanly meekness (Arrian *India* 17.3), or to women being in male company (Diodorus Siculus *Library of History* 4.4.1; on women’s relative seclusion in earlier traditional Greek society, see further Keener, “Head Coverings,” p. 443). But some observed that not all cultures shared the same sense of shame on such matters (Arrian *India* 17.3; Diodorus Siculus *Library of History* 5.32.7). See further Paige, “Matrix,” pp. 223-24 (also noting that Paul never applies such a designation to abuse of gifts, evaluating prophecy or other traditional proposals).

²²E.g., Euripides *Elettra* 343-44 (though there are two men). Liefeld, “Submission,” p. 142, points out that Plutarch and Livy viewed it as disgraceful for women to “express themselves visually or vocally in public.”

ers (including gender-related conventions like head coverings). Presumably he often does this for strategic reasons (especially where different passages in his writings offer different approaches, as they clearly do on women's roles; see e.g., Rom 16:1-2; I Cor 11:5; Phil 4:2-3).²³ A wife's behavior reflected on her husband's status, and certainly neither spouse should risk shaming the other (cf. I Cor 11:3-9; Prov 12:4; 31:23, 28).

Paul also has reason to be concerned for the church's reputation in the larger society (I Cor 6:6; 14:23), a concern that, incidentally, becomes all the more prominent in his later writings, often specifically concerning household relationships (I Tim 3:7; 5:14; 6:1; Tit 2:5, 10).²⁴ It seems likely that in I Corinthians 14:34-35 he supports the cultural expectation of honorable matrons' verbal self-restraint. Exceptions could be made, as they were even in pagan religion, for divinely inspired utterances, and perhaps Paul regarded freedom to pray in house church meetings as a nonnegotiable right of all believers (I Cor 11:4-5; cf. Judg 4:4).²⁵ But the general cultural expectation was dominant, and Paul is usually reticent to divide Christians over cultural or personal issues (cf. Rom 14:15; I Cor 8:9; 13; 9:12).

Ancient culture reflects this general expectation of women's restraint far more pervasively than the suggestion to which I now turn. Indeed, even on its own this general expectation in antiquity could explain Paul's prohibition. Nevertheless, the specific circumstances probably implied in the text suggest an additional problem (for which I argued in *Paul, Women and Wives*). The second possibility, therefore, is that some kinds of questions were considered inappropriate, particularly questions that revealed that the questioner had failed to master the topic sufficiently.²⁶ I sometimes compare this to students whose questions reveal that

²³For Paul's strategic approach, see e.g., Craig S. Keener, "Paul: Subversive Conservative," *Christian History* 14, no. 3 (1995): 35-37.

²⁴See Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*, pp. 139-48; Alan Padgett, "The Pauline Rationale for Submission: Biblical Feminism and the *Hina* Clauses of Titus 2:1-10," *EvQ* 59 (1987): 39-52.

²⁵Pagan Greco-Roman society also respected the speech of prophethesses. Most abundant are references to the inspiration of the mythical Sibyl (e.g., Ovid *Metamorphoses* 14.129-53; Virgil *Aeneid* 6.77-102; Juvenal *Satirae* 3.3; Heraclitus *Epistulae* 8; throughout *Sibylline Oracles*, and also in her historic successors in Diodorus Siculus *Bibliotheca historica* 4.66.6) and the historic Delphic priestess (e.g., Longinus *Sibylline* 13.2; Callimachus *Hymn* 4.89-90; Valerius Maximus *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 1.8.10; Cicero *Divinatione* 1.36.79; Plutarch *Oracles at Delphi* 21, *Moralia* 404E; *Dialogue on Love* 16, *Moralia* 759B; Dio Chrysostom *Personal Appearance* 12; Pausanias *Description of Greece* 2.2.7).

²⁶See e.g., Plutarch *Lectures* 18, *Moralia* 48AB; Diogenes Laertius *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 7.1.19.

they have not done the assigned reading before class.

This suggestion, however, raises an issue: why would women be less likely to ask learned questions than men would? One could argue that this unlearned behavior reflects a trans-cultural, genetic limitation in women's ability to interpret Scripture. I have been a Bible professor of enough students of both genders over the years, however, to state unequivocally that such a claim is by empirical standards demonstrably false.²⁷

More reasonably, women on average were less educated than men, an assertion that no one genuinely conversant with ancient literature would doubt. To be sure, one can collect examples of many educated women in antiquity (normally from wealthier families), but on average women were far less likely to be educated than men.²⁸ More to the point, even among the Jews and God-fearers who constituted the initial nucleus of the Corinthian congregation (Acts 18:4-5), women would have less opportunities than men for training in Scripture. Although they would learn alongside men in the synagogues, they lacked the special training that some of the men would have. More critically here, whereas most Jewish boys were taught to recite Torah growing up, the same was not true for Jewish girls.²⁹ Teachers and primary questioners in the house churches probably were mostly men who had been part of the synagogue.³⁰

That Paul appeals to the law as confirming his case raises the question of what statement in biblical law he may have in mind (I Cor 14:34). Paul cites the law as teaching that women or wives should submit themselves (presumably to their husbands) and possibly also that it enjoins their silence. Josephus seems to have understood the law in the same way, though as part of his apologetic appeal to the

Plutarch's essay is the best source for the conduct of lectures in this period. Distracting others from a lecture by one's conversation was also considered rude (Plutarch *Lectures* 13, *Moralia* 45D). Concerning silence for novices, see e.g., the extreme example of the Pythagoreans in Seneca *Epistles to Lucilius* 52:10; Aulus Gellius *Attic Nights* 1.9.3-4; Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 1.1.

²⁷Scientific studies would also undermine this claim; see Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, *Gender and Grace: Love, Work and Parenting in a Changing World* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1990), pp. 75-105; also note the averages in Gregg Johnson, "The Biological Basis for Gender-Specific Behavior," in *RBMW*, p. 290.

²⁸See e.g., Forbes, *Prophesy*, p. 277; James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999), pp. 249, 255-56.

²⁹See e.g., Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*, pp. 83-84; for women and the law in general, cf., e.g., Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 4.219; *Mishnah Avot* 5:21; *Haggagah* 1:1; *Sukkah* 2:8; *Tosefta Berabbot* 6:18; *Babylonian Talmud Qiddushin* 34a.

³⁰Ancient writers could state general rules with the understanding that these sometimes permitted specific exceptions (see Quintilian *The Orator's Education* 7.6.5; Craig S. Keener, *And Marris Another* [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991], pp. 24-28).

broad Greco-Roman world.³¹ What is surprising in light of this—problematic for all interpretations except the view that Paul did not write it—is that the law nowhere specifically commands either women's silence or their submission! Interpreters differ as to whether Paul appeals to a particular passage in the law, perhaps to the verdict at the Fall (Gen 3:16), or to the general status of women in the period treated in the Pentateuch (cf. I Pet 3:5). In either case, the texts *describe* women's subordination rather than prescribe it, and Paul could uphold the law to avoid offense (I Cor 9:20).

Though inspired, biblical law worked within a broader cultural milieu and, like any civil law, limited sin rather than creating the kingdom ideal. Because it often represents concessions to human weakness enshrined in existing culture, very few would argue that it represents God's highest ideal (cf., e.g., Ex 21:21; Lev 19:20; Mk 10:5).³²

Paul might well appeal to the creation order, as in I Corinthians 11:8-9 (though only those who press transculturally Paul's mandate concerning head coverings in this earlier chapter should press transculturally the claims of I Cor 14:34). But the creation narrative itself does not teach women's subordination, and when Paul appeals to the creation narrative, his appeals do not force us to read it this way, especially given his application of Scripture (including some texts related to the creation of man and woman) elsewhere in his writings.³³

Assuming (as I do) that Paul would have known this, it seems easier to believe that he appeals to the law as allowing rather than mandating this situation. God challenged some aspects of ancient Near Eastern patriarchal tradition but nevertheless worked within patriarchal societies (cf. also I Pet 3:5-6), including the modified Greco-Roman patriarchalism of Paul's day. This hardly mandates the continuance of such structures today when the spirit of Paul's teaching militates against them, any more than we would maintain slavery today (e.g., Eph 6:5-9).

Paul's Solution

Rather than let the women learn by asking questions in the church, Paul admon-

³¹Josephus *Against Apion* 2.201.

³²Cf. Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*, pp. 188-93. All students of the Old Testament are familiar with the repetition of many of the categories of casuistic law found in earlier Mesopotamian legal collections.

³³See in much more detail in Keener, "Women in Ministry," pp. 58-63; Joy Elasky Fleming, "A Rhetorical Analysis of Genesis 2-3 with Implications for a Theology of Man and Woman," Ph.D. diss., University of Strasbourg, 1987. See also chapter four in this volume.

ishes them to ask their husbands at home. From what we know of the culture, most of the women would have been married, and most such statements can address the general group without denying the existence of exceptions.³⁴

To most modern ears this proposal sounds sexist, but if we read Paul less anachronistically, in his own social context it would have helped the women as well as establishing order. Paul implicitly makes husbands responsible for their wives' tutoring, but Plutarch tells us that most men did not believe that their wives could learn anything. (This would be especially true of Greek men, who on average were a decade or more older than their wives.) Plutarch regards himself as one of the most progressive voices of his day because he instructs a young man to take an interest in his wife's education—though Plutarch goes on to note that this is necessary because if left to themselves women produce only base passions and folly.³⁵

Happily, Paul's concern for women's private tutoring does not cite such grounds! Paul avoids social impropriety by advising the women to avoid questioning other men during the Christian education component of the gathering, but he is not against their learning. Yet as noted above, their lack of learning may have been precisely part of the problem. With greater understanding, they might become better able to articulate themselves intellectually in the same assemblies in which they could pray and prophesy. Viewed in this light, the real issues are not gender but propriety and learning—neither of which need restrain women's voices in the church today.

Conclusion

Scholars have read this passage from various angles. Most likely the passage addresses disruptive questions in an environment where silence was expected of new learners—which most women were. It also addresses a broader social context in which women were expected not to speak much with men to whom they were not related, as a matter of propriety. Paul thus upholds church order and avoids appearances of social impropriety; he also supports learning before speaking. None of these principles prohibit women in very different cultural settings from speaking God's word.

³⁴For the married status of most women, see Keener, *And Marries Another*, pp. 68-74, and "Marriage," 680-81; for general statements allowing exceptions, see *And Marries Another*, pp. 24-28.

³⁵Plutarch, *Advice to Bride and Groom* 48, *Moralia* 145BE. Earlier, cf. similarly Xenophon *Oeconomicus* 3.10-16; 7.4-5, 10-22; 9.1.