

Exegetical Paper:

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ATS

NT 503-Reading the New Testament
Spring 2020
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April 18th, 2020

Main Idea

In 1 Corinthians 14:34-40, Paul speaks to the Corinthians about order and proper conduct in the church, reprimands them about their conduct in the church, and Paul is holding them accountable for their conduct as believers.

Outline

A. Women should act a certain way in church and should comply to certain conduct.

(14:34)

1. Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says.

B. If a married woman wants to discuss a matter with her husband, she should do it at home and not in church. (14:35)

2. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

C. The word of God is not just in one place and no one should think they are better because they know who God is. (14:36)

3. Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?

D. The people reading this letter that are believers should head Paul's advice and see it as truth. There are consequences if they don't acknowledge what Paul has said. (14:37-38)

4. If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's Command. But if anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored.

E. Prophesying and speaking in tongues are gifts from God. It is expected that there will be order and respect in the church. (14:39-40)

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

Introduction

Reading 1 Corinthians 14:34-40 at first glance is challenging, especially as a woman whose goal is to one day be a pastor. However, going through all five steps of the interpretive journey with this text brings interesting perspectives from commentaries at what Paul could be saying. Is Paul actually saying that women should be silent in church? Through research and investigation, some scholars think it is possible that Paul did not write this. Lucy Peppiatt discusses that it is possible Paul was quoting his adversaries and didn't put the punctuation.¹ Meaning that this is not Paul's belief that women should always be silent in churches.

While cross referencing several commentaries and articles one thing is for certain that in order to be a good steward of the word there are always several steps taken in understanding what the message is that these ancient texts are trying to communicate now. Looking at Paul's message there seems to be a call of proper order in conduct while in church. The message is not to silence, but to ask for a more orderly behavior in worship services.

Context

The church of Corinth was established by Paul and his letter to them in 1 Corinthians is following a few years after Paul had left them.² Corinth was originally a Greek seaport city that had been overthrown by Rome.³ Paul went to Corinth on his second missionary journey.⁴ In Acts 18, the account of Paul and his experience in Corinth is recorded.

¹ Peppiatt, Lucy. "Women and Worship at Corinth: Paul's Rhetorical Arguments in I Corinthians," January 1, 2018.

² Hays, Richard B. 2011. *First Corinthians: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Vol. Pbk. ed. Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press. 6.

³ Hays, Richard B. *First Corinthians*. 3.

⁴ MacArthur, J. "Bible Introductions - 1 Corinthians by John MacArthur." Blue Letter Bible. Last Modified 7 July 2019.

Paul had a challenging time trying to convert the Jews to Christianity. It got to the point that the Jewish people became abusive and from then on Paul announced he would only preach to the Gentiles. Paul stayed and taught in Corinth for a year and a half. However, the longer he was there the more persecution Paul faced. As challenging as it was in Corinth there was still people led to Jesus and baptized. After leaving, Paul still would be in communication with people in Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 1:11, Paul mentions the people of Chloe, who were in communication with him, were telling him of what was going on in Corinth. They had let Paul know of the issues that were going on which led to Paul's writing to the church in Corinth.

The believers of Corinth were struggling with their behavior and understanding of who they were now because of their belief in Christ. The themes of 1 Corinthians include sexual immorality, love, community, worship, and resurrection. In short, there was division and sin happening in this community. This is not the first letter that Paul had written to the Corinthians. In chapter 5:9, Paul mentions having written to the Corinthians before. His purpose in writing to the Corinthians is to clarify his previous letter and to reaffirm their new identities as believers in Christ and encouraging them to change from their old way.⁵

Women at this time especially those of lower class and slaves were considered morally loose in social circles especially with how they conducted themselves in public settings with the opposite sex.⁶ The women in Corinth were not conducting themselves in a proper manner. Paul discusses in 1 Corinthians issues with marital relations, women taking the veil that marked them as honorable, and women that were having conversations with men that they were not married too or relatives off.⁷ This was not acceptable behavior and one that would warrant Paul to address and stop it.

⁵ Tucker, J. Brian. 2017. *Reading 1 Corinthians*. Cascade Companions. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books.

⁶ Paige, Terence. 2002. "The Social Matrix of Women's Speech at Corinth: The Context and Meaning of the Command to Silence in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36." *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 12 (2): 229. h

⁷ Paige, Terence. "The Social Matrix of Women's Speech at Corinth." 240.

Content

A. Women should act a certain way in church and should comply to certain conduct. (14:34)

What is most important about this verse is looking and asking what were the women like in Corinth? Culturally, in Corinth, these women were more outspoken than traditional views of ancient women. Roman women had more freedom to go out and participate in social events with their husbands and even voice their opinions. Women that walked around freely were usually of lower classes and slaves.⁸ There was still a traditional view that women should remain as the caretakers of households and women were still regarded as lower status than men.⁹

This means that the women of Corinth may have been more outspoken if Paul asks them to remain silent. Paige Terence argued that one reason why Paul asked them to be silent was because both believers and non-believers would have been able to see the women:

Everyone in the neighborhood of the house that sponsored the church meeting knew that something was going on there. They observed people coming and going—in some cases without their spouses. They heard things going on in the house. The behavior of the women in the assembly was being observed and noted, not only by their fellow believers, but by neighbors and all to whom their gossip should come, including in some cases the non-Christian husbands of these women (cf. 1 Cor 7:13-14). That some Christian women were spurning marital relations with their husbands, dispensing with the veil that marked them as modest and virtuous married women, and then having casual conversation with men who were neither husbands nor close relatives was all clearly material for scandal.¹⁰

These women were being called out by Paul not because they were prophesying or praying, but he was responding to the motive of their actions and the result of them seeking attention.

Paul goes in great lengths to talk about the covering of heads for both men and women in 1 Corinthians 11:2-15. While it is uncertain what law Paul is referencing, in verse 34, there is a

⁸ Paige, Terence. “The Social Matrix of Women’s Speech at Corinth.” 233.

⁹ Schubert, Judith. 2014. *101 Questions and Answers on Women in the New Testament*. New York: Paulist Press. 1.

¹⁰ Paige, Terence. “The Social Matrix of Women’s Speech at Corinth.” 240.

possibility Paul could be referring to his previous point on head coverings and shame or potentially rabbinic law.¹¹

Paul is asking the women of Corinth to be silent in the churches because they have been causing disorder during worship. He needed them to exercise discipline by not speaking rather than gossip, slander, rude remarks, promiscuity, or interruption of service. That is Paul's meaning behind trying to reign in how they behaved during the service. Paul is specific by saying that they should remain silent in churches. He previously went on about how women should have their head covering when they are prophesying and praying. Which would include a woman "speaking" out loud in a church. This verse would then be commenting on the conduct of women in the church and not that women have no place prophesying or praying.

B. If a married woman wants to discuss a matter with her husband, she should do it at home and not in church. (14:35) 2.

In this verse, Paul gets specific in who he is talking to and where the better place is to have this discussion. Scott Nash argues that the Greek verb used in the translation is not appropriate for the context of the verse. That instead of the verb "asking" a better translation would be "scrutinizing," "investigating," or "interrogating."¹² It seems that the wives were not upholding appropriate behavior while in service. If the women were probing or scrutinizing the men and probably elders of the church, it was then causing disruption to the service and would call for Paul to address it in his letter.

If the women were also interrogating other men that they were related or married too, that would also cause an issue within the church. Honor of women was important in this period and if a woman was acting out it not only brought shame on her, but on her husband, father, and

¹¹ Hutson, Christopher R. 2003. *1 Corinthians: A Community Not of This Age*. Streams of Mercy Study Series. Abilene, Tex: Leafwood Publishers. Ch.12.

¹² Nash, Scott. 2009. *1 Corinthians*. Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary. Macon, Ga: Smyth & Helwys Publishing. 383.

brother as well.¹³ Paul had female coworkers so, it is not that Paul or God for that matter, did not women participating in service.¹⁴ Paul was worried about the women and wanted them to not appear disgraceful or shameful in service.

This is why he was than urging them to be silent and ask questions at home to their husbands so that they would not bring dishonor on themselves or their household. Paul then was not viewing women as incapable or unable to participate in service but wanted there to be conduct and order in service. He wanted women to show respect to their husbands and brothers in Christ. It is not a matter of women being excluded from worship but wanting them to uphold their honor in society.

C. The word of God is not just in one place and no one should think they are better because they know who God is. (14:36)

The church of Corinth was a member of the body of Christ. It was one church that had been established since Jesus's resurrection. However, it was not the only church in existence, and it was not the only church that had experience the Holy Spirit. Paul is calling out the pride of the Corinthians.¹⁵

This is not the only time in Paul's letter that he calls out the Corinthians for arrogance and pride. Paul also does this in 1 Corinthians 4:18-21:

Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit?

¹³ Paige, Terence. "The Social Matrix of Women's Speech at Corinth." 238.

¹⁴ Nash, Scott. 2009. *1 Corinthians*. Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary. 381.

¹⁵ Hays, Richard B. 2011. *First Corinthians: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. 244.

These verses demonstrate that Paul is dedicated to discipline if needed. He continues the theme from verses 34 through 35 of requiring the church of Corinth to behave and act in a certain way. The theme of order in service is not just for the women of Corinth but the church as a whole. Paul expected them to act in a certain way. He was not going to tolerate the church in Corinth saying that they are believers of Christ but not acting like it.

Paul wanted them to realize the church is not special because the church is in Corinth, but because they are given authority because of what Jesus did for them and He has given them authority. The church of Corinth is not the only place the gospel had reached. In fact, it was Paul's mission to go and preach to many people and spread Christianity to the masses.

D. The people reading this that are believers should head Paul's advice and see it as truth. There are consequences if they don't acknowledge what Paul has said. (14:37-38)

Paul is coming to a close on this part of the letter and wants the church of Corinth to understand that these are not suggestions. Paul is writing with authority and wants what he has said to be understood as truth. Verse 37 comes as a warning that if anyone says that they are a prophet or gifted but does not acknowledge what Paul has said as the truth they are not in accordance with the Spirit. They would not be a good prophet and they would be against what the Lord wants for the church of Corinth.

Paul in verse 38 is exerting his authority over the church of Corinth. If someone in the church of Corinth were to reject Paul's instructions, they should not be accepted as a prophet of the church. Hays goes as far to mandate these verses as such, "In fact, however, the verse should be understood as a 'sentence of holy law,' announcing God's eschatological punishment on those who reject the word of God."¹⁶

¹⁶ Hays, Richard B. 2011. *First Corinthians: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. 244.

If Paul is going so far to let them know his authority comes from God and should be recognized and changed should happen. That means that the people of Corinth were not abiding by what Paul had commanded them to do before. This arrogance also shows how individuals saw themselves as a higher prophet than Paul or tried to undermine what Paul was trying to communicate to them. Paul is communicating not only his authority but that anyone who does not abide by Paul's warnings are not of God. These false prophets should not not recognized and have no authority in the church of Corinth.

E. Prophesying and speaking in tongues are gifts from God. It is expected that there will be order and respect in the church. (14:39-40)

Paul throughout this letter has emphasized and explained the purpose and procedures of both prophecy and tongues. He ends this section with reaffirming that they are gifts from God. He ends with the purpose of the whole section is an "orderly way" and worship should happen with this order.

Hays argues that Paul doesn't want "order for order's sake."¹⁷ The reason why Paul is saying that there is an expected conduct for the Corinthian church is because as believers God, values obedience. Hays describes why Paul demands for order:

The order that he desires to see in the Corinthian assembly allows for great flexibility and for the diverse and unpredictable spiritual contribution of all the members of the body of Christ. Order is necessary only to constrain self-indulgent abuses and to create an atmosphere in which the gifts of all can worker together to build up the community in love.

At the end of the day Paul wants to see the church of Corinth to be a thriving community of believers that have the love of Christ, an intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit, and harmony

¹⁷ Hays, Richard B. 2011. *First Corinthians: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. 245.

with one another. That is why he clarifies the importance of spiritual gifts, calls out the members on their arrogance, and puts restrictive commands on the members in order to help them change.

Application

This passage of scripture has many critiques and different interpretations. Some scholars believe that verses 34 and 35 are not written by Paul and some argue were added later by editors.¹⁸ Others believe that verses 34-35 are missing punctuation that would have made it so Paul is quoting someone else.¹⁹ There are footnotes in bibles that note that verses 34-35 follow verse 40 in certain original manuscripts. All of this to say, verses 34 and 35 are included in the Bible. The importance of these verses to us today is looking at the audience they were written for.

The women in the church of Corinth were not respecting one another. They were rudely questioning the men and their husbands in the church. This questioning was causing disruption in services. Paul wanted the women not to bring shame on themselves by continuing with this conduct and called them to be silent. This verse is not mandating that women in all periods always be silent in the church. The application from verses 34 and 35 is calling for women to be respectful and orderly while in church. There is also nothing specific in this verse that says women should not be in ministry.

The second application comes from verses 36 through 38 for the church today is to understand that arrogance in the church is not tolerated and that if someone is a prophet or has the Holy Spirit, they will not go against what God commands.

The last application is from verses 39 and 40, which is do not diminish spiritual gifts however, there is still a certain conduct and respect for one another that is expected while

¹⁸ Schubert, Judith. 2014. *101 Questions and Answers on Women in the New Testament*. New York: Paulist Press. Question 86.

¹⁹ Lucy etc etc.

holding service. This section of the chapter 14 in Corinthians is labeled as “Good Order in Worship.” While these titles are added, it summarizes what Paul is trying to accomplish in this section of his letter. His goal was not to diminish women the church of Corinth or women of today. Paul wanted them to understand that as believers they are expected to not only respect and love the Lord but one another as well. His instructions are to help them in areas that they were not disciplined in and produce growth in the church of Corinth.

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