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Does Paul Really Want All Women to be Silent? 1 Corinthians 14:34-35

by Waldemar Kowalski

Paul's command, silencing women in the congregation (1 Cor 14:34-35), continues to perplex biblical scholars and readers. How is this instruction understood in light of previous guidelines on how women are to pray and prophesy in a congregational setting where men and spiritual powers are present (1 Cor 11:3-16, esp. v. 10)?¹ In 1 Cor 14:26 the command that "everyone" should have something to contribute anticipates that both men and women will participate in the service.²

Some scholars remove 1 Cor 14:34-35, treating these verses as a non-Pauline textual interpolation, most likely from someone antagonistic to female ministry or to women in general.³ Others choose to effectively remove them, seeing them as architectural artifacts (segregated worship spaces);⁴ cultural artifacts (exemplars of chauvinistic, male-dominated,

¹This passage gives every indication of mixed worship: the requirements make no sense in a setting of single-gender worship, as the instructions are given equally to men and women. Cf. Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 232, 238-40; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 800-805. For the importance of appearance in 1 Corinthians 11, cf. Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

²Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 690, cf. esp. 52 n. 22.

³Conzelmann dismisses 33b-36 with a brief paragraph, stating that these are "to be regarded as an interpolation." Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, *Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1975), 246. For a defense of textual interpolation, cf. Fee, 699-705; Philip Barton Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 225-267; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Interpolations in 1 Corinthians," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48, (1986): 90-92, 94. Fee argues strongly against textual emendation (transposition of vv. 34-35) and for interpolation. Thematically, the issue is not only the prohibition of female speech but also the appeal to the Law in v. 34, which is seen as non-Pauline.

⁴Among others, albeit cautiously, cf. N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 199.

or patriarchal cultures);⁵ as a Pauline citation of Corinthian material with which he disagrees;⁶ or intrusion of pagan practices in Christian worship.⁷ Still others claim the right to what has been called “experiential” interpretation (also called a Pentecostal hermeneutic).⁸ Those who have been given the Holy Spirit can re-interpret Scripture in new ways. If that interpretation “works” for them, then that re-interpretation is correct.

These views treat 1 Cor 14:34-35 as a problem to be removed. Do these approaches have merit? The idea of a Holy Spirit-given interpretation that contradicts what Scripture itself says is impossible (Gal 1:8-9). Disruptive pagan cultic practices and questions shouted out from a segregated seating area may have occurred as disorderly intrusions in Corinthian worship. But the text does not indicate this and such a suggestion does not have traction in current scholarship.⁹ Contemporary culture differs from that of Paul’s Corinth, but discarding a Pauline instruction on that basis is dangerous. What else may we discard because it does not please us? Beyond this “slippery slope,” nothing in the text indicates that this was localized either geographically or temporally, and the stress on “*all the churches*” (v. 33) and the broader Christian community (vv. 36-38) argues to the contrary.¹⁰ The notion that the Corinthian worshipers themselves were trying to curtail

⁵Cf. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, 10th anniversary ed. (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1994), 230-33. Schüssler Fiorenza argues that single women are permitted to pray and prophesy in public, but not married women.

⁶This assumes that v. 36 is a sarcastic rebuttal of vv. 34-35. For a defense of the rebuttal view, cf. Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, Reading the New Testament Series (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1987), 91-95.

⁷For the view that the problem was a disruptive and inappropriate intrusion of Greco-Roman cultic practices by female worshippers, cf. Anne B. Blampied, “Paul and Silence for ‘the Women’ in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35,” *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 13, no. 2 (1983); Catherine Kroeger, “The Apostle Paul and the Greco-Roman Cults of Women,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30, no. 1 (1987); Schüssler Fiorenza, 232. Cf. also Jon M. Isaak, “Hearing God’s Word in Silence: A Canonical Approach to 1 Corinthians 14.34-35,” *Direction* 24, no. 2 (1995). Isaak offers a cultural excision, stating, “Today the Western church finds itself in a cultural location where it is not ‘shameful for a woman to speak.’ Since the argument in the text is based on this time-conditioned assumption, the restriction of women in ministry is not literally normative today.” (61)

⁸This approach was taken in a sermon the writer heard as a member of the congregation. The individual promoting this view will not be named.

⁹Keener observes, “Distant seating of men and women would be difficult in a house church, and we currently lack evidence for gender segregation in early synagogues.” Craig S. Keener, *1–2 Corinthians*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 118, n. 253.

¹⁰Compare this, for instance, to the “present crisis” language in 1 Cor 7:26, which might allow Paul’s instruction here to pertain to the Corinthian congregation at this time without setting a universal principle in place.

female involvement in worship and that Paul is countering them is dubious. This chapter is about Paul curbing rather than encouraging Corinthian disorder.¹¹

An interpolation argument seems the best contender to remove this troublesome instruction. Rather than refuting the interpolation theory, this paper argues that the verses are not a textual or thematic intrusion.¹² Vv. 34-35 continue Paul's instruction on appropriate demeanor and practice in a charismatic worship service. This work re-examines these passages to see whether the "obvious" meaning of the text, at least in the common English translations, is also the correct meaning of the text.

One reason for the readers' confusion is that the bulk of 1 Corinthians, starting with 7:1, is Paul's response to a letter received from the Corinthian church, apparently requesting his input (1 Cor 7:1).¹³ Unfortunately, the modern reader has the answer but is missing the question or problem. The Bible scholar/reader is like a detective, deducing certain contexts and situations. This is like finding someone lying unconscious on a sidewalk, clutching an open and empty bottle of aspirin. What health situation led to their condition? The need for aspirin seems clear; the problem or disease is not. This could be heart disease, a debilitating migraine, an overdose, extreme physical pain, or a number of other conditions.¹⁴ A correct diagnosis affects the proper treatment of the unconscious person. Similarly, the reader of these passages knows that there is an issue, and reads Paul's prescription, but has difficulty in establishing the cause of the problem.

Solving this puzzle requires a reconstruction of the original situation. 1 Corinthians 14 addresses orderliness in congregational worship. The whole chapter is dedicated to correct various disorders in charismatic congregational practice, including instructions on women's involvement in specific elements of congregational practice and worship in vv. 34-35.

Before reading our target verses, we need to observe that many approaches to vv. 34-35 violate one of the cardinal rules of exegesis—that of observing the context. When these two verses are viewed as an anomaly, separate from their context and the whole of the letter, it is easy

¹¹Cf. David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 667; Thiselton, 1151-52; Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 279-80.

¹²Cf. also Witherington, 288; Thiselton, 1147-50.

¹³“Περὶ δὲ ὃν ἐγράψατε...” This introductory “περὶ δὲ” will recur in 7:25, 37; 8:1; 12:1; and 16:1. Cf. Fee, 266-67. Fee sees this not as “a friendly exchange, in which the new believers in Corinth are asking spiritual advice” but rather “taking exception to his position [in the Previous Letter] on point after point.”

¹⁴The use of crushed aspirin as an externally applied solution for dandruff is not likely to imply that a really large flake of dandruff hit and knocked out this mysterious patient.

to end up with an incorrect interpretation. We shall see that these verses are not about women per se, but are a part of Paul's instruction on proper congregational worship.

Some issues arise with a number of English translations. The 1984 New International Version (NIV) splits v. 33 in the middle, making the universal rule silence for women.¹⁵ The NASB, KJV, and others treat the verse as a unit: the universal rule is that God is a God of peace rather than confusion (the topic of the whole chapter). There are good reasons for preferring the punctuation of the KJV, NASB, and others. First, it makes more sense that peace is the universal rule, observed in all the churches. Second, the repetition of ἐκκλησία in vv. 33 and 34 is awkward. A third reason relates to the interpolation theories and textual variants. In some Greek manuscripts, vv. 34 and 35 appear at the end of the chapter rather than after v. 33 (one reason why some scholars consider this text added later by a scribe). If vv. 34-35 are essentially "portable," then one cannot simply tack the latter part of v. 33 onto v. 34. The newer edition of the NIV (2011) rectifies this and renders v. 33 as one logical unit.¹⁶

Several corrections to the English text are necessary. First, v. 33 proclaims that God is a God of peace and not disorder. This is to prevail in all congregations, including in Corinth. Second, the immediate context (1 Cor 14:27-36) gives good reason to question whether Paul's command is indeed an intrusion. It is noteworthy that three groups are told to be silent under a specific circumstance. The writer employs a single Greek verb with identical inflection for all three (σιγάω), varying only in that the third group is plural and the first two are singular.

First, speakers in tongues are limited to two or at the most three, and are to be silent if there is no interpreter present (1 Cor 14:27-28). Next, prophets are limited to two or three while the others judge. If a prophecy (or possibly a judgment of prophecy) is given to someone seated, the one currently prophesying is to be silent. Presumably, the prophecy being delivered has been judged and found wanting (1 Cor 14:29-30).¹⁷ The

¹⁵The NIV (1984 edition) has been the default pew Bible in many North American non-KJV evangelical churches and thus has a significant effect on what is "read in the pew." A number of the other common pew Bibles, such as the ASV, CEB, CEV, ESV, GNT, HCSB, NCV, NET, NRSV, and RSV, similarly place a full stop in the middle of v. 33.

¹⁶Common English Bibles that render v. 33 as one sentence include the Darby, Douay-Rheims, J.B. Phillips, KJV and its modern variants, NASB, NIV (2011), NLT, TNIV, and YLT.

¹⁷With the prophets, it may well be that there were to be no more than two or three prophecies before discerning or judging ensued, with more prophecies then permitted after such judging, given the references to all prophesying (vv. 26, 31). Cf. Fee, 693.

third group is “the women” of 1 Cor 14:34-35, who likewise are to be silent, with Paul employing the same Greek root word.¹⁸

The NIV and some other modern English translations render the same Greek verb three different ways: “should keep quiet” (v. 28), “should stop” (v. 30), and “should remain silent” (v. 34).¹⁹ This variation in rendering obscures the fact that a similar instruction—indeed an identical command—is given to three groups. This change in translation effectively brings about the logical separation of “the women” from the other charismatics being addressed. Correctly understanding this directive requires the reader to recognize and restore the correlation of three groups with three parallel instructions.²⁰

A further piece of the puzzle is the specific identity of “the women.” While “women” can be an appropriate translation for the plural form of γυνή, these particular women have husbands. They are to interact with their own husbands (τοὺς ἰδίους ἄνδρας). Therefore, in this context these women are specifically wives.²¹

All three groups are enjoined to silence rather than speech in a particular situation. Speech itself is not generally being forbidden. In fact, the first two groups are first instructed to speak, and secondarily told to limit that speech under certain conditions. The wives are not

¹⁸The value of more literal translations such as the NASB, ESV, and even the KJV can be seen here, as one English word, “silent,” is consistently used to render the one Greek term. The NIV obscures this from the reader, using “keep quiet,” “should stop,” and “remain silent” for the one word. It is unfortunate that the English reader has had this parallel usage hidden from him or her, and the NIV does the modern reader a significant disfavor here.

¹⁹Translations that render the three uses of σιγᾶω with substantially different English words include the CEV, Douay-Rheims, GNT, J.B. Phillips, KJV (but not NKJV), NCV, NET, NIV (all variants), and NLT. Translations that employ essentially identical English words include the AV (“keep silence”), CEB (“keep/be silent”), Darby (“be silent”), ESV (“keep/be silent”), HCSB (“keep/be silent”), NASB (“be silent”), NKJV (“keep silent/silence”), NRSV (“be silent”), RSV (“keep silence/be silent”), and YLT (“be silent”).

²⁰Miller states that “this triplet is clearly a structuring device” (67) and that a result of the inconsistent translation is that “the reader of the NIV will likely infer that Paul offers mild and specific guidance to those who speak in tongues and prophesy but gives stern and sweeping directives to women.” (68) Cf. J. David Miller, “Translating Paul’s Words About Women,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 2009, no. Spring (2009).

²¹Spurgeon argues that “Paul seems not to have differentiated between ‘wives’ and ‘women’ in this passage as he did elsewhere [citing numerous examples in 1 Cor 7]. Most likely Paul was addressing *all* women, and the phrase τοὺς ἰδίους ἄνδρας (lit., ‘their own men’) in 14:35 means their husbands, fathers, or brothers.” Spurgeon fails to prove that Paul has changed his usage between Ch. 7 and Ch. 14, and even if the reference is to male heads of households, the principle established would still stand. Spurgeon cites Witherington to support his contention, but Witherington, while noting lack of certainty, states “But probably ‘husband’ is what is meant.” Cf. Andrew B. Spurgeon, “Pauline Commands and Women in 1 Corinthians 14,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168, no. July-September (2011): 321-22; Witherington, 287 n. 43.

instructed to speak, but are told to be silent, using the same word (συνάω, here in the plural form) used for the tongues-speakers and prophets.

Some scholars, especially those who interpret these as “women” rather than “wives,” suggest that women are chattering or being disruptive, perhaps because of a segregated worship facility. Others see this as a case of Christian women mimicking pagan female worship activity, which could be quite profane and disruptive. These suggestions are not likely correct, as the word used for speaking in v. 34 is used of edifying speech earlier in the chapter.²² In fact, the parallel groups also speak (λαλέω): vv. 27 and 29. Besides, this does not resolve the issue in this chapter of an apparent abrupt change of topic on order in charismatic worship.

Why might this command be limited to the wives? Why are they to ask their husbands in private? Perhaps we can deduce the issue from another clue: the verb translated as “ask” (ἐπερωτάω, *eperōtaō*).²³ In nearly all of the 56 times it appears in the New Testament (NT), the context is one of interrogation, often in a quasi- or genuinely judicial context.²⁴ It is used when Christ is being tested by the religious authorities, and also during his trial appearances. The NIV and ESV usually translate this as “ask” (45 times NIV, 54 times ESV), while the NASB uses “question” 30 times and “ask” 26 times, regardless if the context is interrogation or a simple request for neutral information. Likely, the problem here is not simply asking a question, but rather the public judgment/interrogation by a wife of her husband. That would indeed be offensive and need to be limited.²⁵

²² Cf. vv. 3, 6, 9, 19. Cf. also Marion L. Soards, *1 Corinthians*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 306.

²³BDAG offers the following meanings:

1. to put a question to, ask
 - a. generally (1 Cor 14:35 is cited as being in this category of meaning) ;
 - b. of a judge’s questioning (interrogation) in making an investigation;
 - c. with regard to questioning deities;
2. to make a request, ask for.

²⁴The fifty-six usages are Matt. 12:10; 16:1; 17:10; 22:23, 35, 41, 46; 27:11; Mark 5:9; 7:5, 17; 8:23, 27, 29; 9:11, 16, 21, 28, 32, 33; 10:2, 10, 17; 11:29; 12:18, 28, 34; 13:3; 14:60, 61; 15:2, 4, 44; Luke 2:46; 3:10, 14; 6:9; 8:9, 30; 9:18; 17:20; 18:18, 40; 20:21, 27, 40; 21:7; 22:64; 23:6, 9; John 9:23; 18:7; Acts 5:27; 23:34; Rom 10:20; 1 Cor 14:35. As can be seen, the majority of these are in the gospels. Many of these are confrontational queries made of Jesus.

²⁵Cf. Wright, 199-200; Thiselton; George T. Montague, *First Corinthians*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 256; Blomberg, 282. Contra this, cf. James Greenbury, “1 Corinthians 14:34-35: Evaluation of Prophecy Revisited,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51, no. 4 (2008). Greenbury argues that this interpretation (the weighing of prophecies) would not have occurred to him, and asks, “Would it have occurred to the Corinthians themselves?” (731) Greenbury ignores the fact that Paul’s instruction here is in response to questions they

There are some reasonable objections to the parallelism argument as well as issues with the terms employed in vv. 34-35. One objection is that the first two groups are given numeric limitation—two or at most three—while this is not present with the third group, the wives. However, the specific action being undertaken is the judgment (*διακρίνω*) of prophecy, which has been commanded of the entire congregation, or at least the other prophets (v. 29).²⁶ The prophets, at the very least, are expected to weigh what had been said, which would explain how a prophecy might be cut short (v. 30).²⁷ While the number of delivered prophecies was being limited, there is no such limitation on the succeeding judgments. Hence there is no limitation on the permission of women to judge prophecy: just not that of one's spouse. Beyond that, there is an obvious numeric limitation for the third group. It is a reasonable assumption that each husband would have only one wife (although this does not limit the number of overall judgments by others). Thus, the number of prophecies judged by prophets' wives is limited to the number of prophecies given.

A second objection to the parallelism argument is that the first two groups are expected to speak, except under certain circumstances. The English rendering seems to enjoin complete silence of “*the women.*” This is not actually the case, since women are previously identified as prophets (1 Cor 11:5) and instructed that prophets (or the entire congregation) are to judge prophecies (1 Cor 14:29). The charismatic wives are then a third category of those generally permitted to speak. Along with tongues-speakers and prophets, they are to limit that speech under specific circumstances. A separate instruction to speak, except under specific circumstances, is thus not needed.

Another objection is the use of *ἐὰν δὲ* (*ean de*) in vv. 28, 30, apparently missing in vv. 34-35.²⁸ This translates as “and if” and expresses a conditional instruction: “should it be the case that . . .” In v. 35 Paul uses *εἰ δέ* (*ei de*) instead, which is somewhat more definite: “but if . . .” This minor difference fits the situation well and is consistent with the previously mentioned distinctions. In the case of “the women,” it is

themselves have raised, so the modern reader can be pretty sure that the Corinthians knew what Paul was referring to.

²⁶Fee, Thiselton, and others argue for this as a reference to the entire congregation rather than just the prophets. (Cf. Fee, 694; Thiselton, 1140.) Either way, women would be present as part of the group judging.

²⁷Charismatic praxis in the Pauline communities seems to have been rather more vigorous and interactive than is common today, given the need to establish the existence of an interpretation/interpreter for tongues (vv. 5, 13, 28) and the expectation of weighing or judgment of prophecy (v. 29).

²⁸I am indebted to Prof. Takamitsu Muraoka for pointing this out during discussion following Session Three of the William Menzies Lectureship Series at Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, Baguio, Philippines (Feb 1, 2017).

all wives *as wives* who are instructed to abstain from public, congregational speech, “interrogating” their husbands in private.²⁹

What about the statement that it is “disgraceful” for a woman/wife to speak in church (v. 35)? The word translated “disgraceful” (αἰσχρός, *aischros*) is used in 1 Cor 11:6, where “*it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off.*” Both passages refer to things that are considered shameful in the culture of the time. The context for 1 Cor 11:6 women speaking in the congregation, disgraced not in the act of speaking but in inappropriate demeanor (an uncovered head). The disgrace of 1 Cor 14:35 would also logically be related to inappropriate actions or demeanor (interrogating one’s husband in public), not the act of speaking in itself.³⁰ The repeated use of disgrace (αἰσχρός) here in 14:34-35, echoing 11:5-6, reinforces that the activity in question has to do with charismatic worship, specifically prophecy.

Other terms connect vv. 34-35 to the overall charismatic instruction in 1 Cor. For instance, v. 31 gives “*be instructed*” (NIV) (lemma μανθάνω, *manthanō*, present subjunctive) or “*to learn*” (ESV) as one of the functions of prophecy. V. 35 states that if the wives “*want to inquire*” (NIV) (lemma μανθάνω, aorist active infinitive with the present active indicative) or “*desire to learn*” (ESV) about something, they are to do so at home. The ESV does a better job than does the NIV of letting the reader know that vv. 31 and 35 are connected by the use of the same verb, “to learn.”³¹

The precise instruction or learning in both instances is undefined. In 1 Cor 4:6 what is learned is a corrective, and this may be the case in 1 Cor 14:31 and v. 35. Paul uses a similar construction (θέλω μαθεῖν, *thelō mathein* – present active indicative with the aorist active infinitive) in Gal 3:2, where he is pressing the Galatians. He “*would like to learn just one thing*” from them: “*Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?*” The “learning” in Gal 3:2 is clearly not a simple request for information but is presented with a more interrogatory intention. This matches the context of judging prophecy found in 1 Cor 14:29ff.

What about the instruction that the wives are to be “*in submission*” (ὑποτάσσω, *hupotassō*, present passive imperative) in v. 34? In v. 32,

²⁹This is another parallel, in that the tongues speakers of v. 27 are not commanded to be absolutely silent, but rather silent in the congregation, speaking between themselves and God. Likewise, these wives who desire to judge their husband’s prophecy are not enjoined to absolute silence, but rather appropriate silence for the public context.

³⁰Fee disagrees. “Again, as with the rule and prohibition in v. 34, the statement is unqualified: It is shameful for a woman to speak in church, not simply to speak in a certain way.” Fee, 708.

³¹This verb will appear also in 1 Tim 2:11.

Paul has observed that the spirits of prophets are “*subject to the control*” of those prophets (NIV) (ὑποτάσσω, present passive indicative). Again, a number of English translations imply a sweeping instruction to the wives, compared to a benign observation regarding the prophets. The NASB renders the word more consistently: “*are subject to*” (v. 32) and “*are to subject themselves*” (v. 34). Both prophets and wives are to be under control: Paul observes that the prophets can control their use of their gift and similarly instructs the wives to control their speech. The wives are instructed to “*be subject*,” albeit without specification of to whom they are subject or by whom they are subjected. Thiselton suggests, “In v. 32 the verb is used in the middle voice to denote *self-control*, or **controlled speech**.”³² Why should the use of the verb in v. 34 not also be understood as in the middle voice, so that in fact the wives are to be self-controlled or exercise controlled speech?³³ Most other Pauline uses of ὑποτάσσω are transitive and it is specified to whom or what the subject is submitting. The pattern in 1 Cor 14:34 viz. v.32 has similarity to Rom 13:5 viz. v.1. In Rom 13:1, the imperative of ὑποτάσσω, used in transitive form, commands submission to the ruling authorities, followed by intransitive use of the passive infinitive of ὑποτάσσω in v.5. Here the NIV supplies words not found in the original: “*to the authorities*,” referring back to v.1 for the implied object or reference. I suggest that the intransitive use of ὑποτάσσω in 1 Cor 14:34 should likewise be directed back to v.32. In this case, the wives who are prophets are to be in a state of self-control.

What about the reference to the Law in v. 34? Paul refers to the law six times in 1 Corinthians and a number of these are indeterminate.³⁴ The use of “law” (νόμος) in v. 34 is not a reference to an identified prohibition in the OT,³⁵ nor can it be effectively argued as deriving from later rabbinic Judaism or Josephus. Although Paul does not appeal to

³²Thiselton, 1153. Emphasis in the original.

³³BDAG does not list the middle voice as an option for ὑποτάσσω, but does distinguish between “become subject” and “subject oneself” for the passive voice. It would seem that “subject oneself” has a clear middle sense.

³⁴Of these, two references are an appeal to the Law of Moses (1 Cor 9:8, 9), one is a reference to an undefined law but likely the systems of Judaism (1 Cor 9:20), one is a general reference to the Old Testament (1 Cor 14:21), one is the observation that “the power of sin is the law” (1 Cor 15:56), and finally there is 1 Cor 14:34, which refers to another indeterminate law.

³⁵Cf. L. Ann Jervis, “1 Corinthians 14.34-35: A Reconsideration of Paul’s Limitation of the Free Speech of Some Corinthian Women,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 58, no. June (1995): 56-58. Jervis argues that this reference to the law functions similarly to 1 Cor 7:19, where “Paul appeals to ‘the commandments of God’ in a similarly abstract way and for the purpose of persuasion.” The idea that this to be identified with Gen 3:16 “is a sensible choice only with an a priori understanding that the agenda of 1 Cor. 14.34-35 concerns the promotion of gender hierarchy. The circular nature of the argument is clear.” (p. 58)

law/the Law in his instructions in 1 Corinthians 11, he twice mentions the transmitting of tradition, once as introduction to the instructions on the demeanor of both men and women in worship (v. 2) and once in his preface to the ceremonial observance of communion (v. 23). Soards observes of v. 35, “Perhaps Paul is not referring to the OT at all.”³⁶ Though Paul refers here to “the law,” he may be referring to the customs of the times rather than the Pentateuch or even the whole OT, given the difficulty of citing a specific precedent for this instruction.³⁷ If the submission of women is not to some external force or object but instead a reference to self-control, the law here may be a reference to the rabbinic material about learning in a state of quietness.³⁸

I propose, then, that this is not a change of topic nor is it an intrusion.³⁹ The repetition of terms (σιγάω, λαλέω, μανθάνω, ὑποτάσσω) and parallel construction firmly embed vv. 34-35 as part of this charismatic instruction. The topic is still the proper employing of spiritual gifts in building up the congregation. All of the prophets bear responsibility to judge or weigh a prophecy as it is given (1 Cor 14:29), with no indication that the female prophets were excused from this responsibility. However, when it came to the issue of a wife judging her husband’s prophecy, she was to abstain from doing so in the congregation, doing this at home instead.⁴⁰ The disruptive effect of such public action would be offensive in virtually any society.⁴¹ The

³⁶ Soards, 306.

³⁷Cf. Grant R. Osborne, “Hermeneutics and Women in the Church,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20, no. 4 (1977): 345. Osborne cites an unpublished D. Min. thesis by A. Stouffer, and presents Stouffer as arguing “that the law should be understood in a general sense to refer to the customs of the time.” To this he responds that the articular use (ὁ νόμος) is more likely a reference to the Biblical norm, but that “this does not obviate” Stouffer’s thesis.

³⁸Among others, *m. ‘Abot 1:17; 3:14; 5:7*. Cf. also the discussion on silence or quietness while learning in Áida Besançon Spencer, *Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson, 1985), 74-81.

³⁹Payne argues that vv. 34-35 are textually separated from vv. 29 and cannot therefore be a part of the same discussion. In fact, Payne argues that vv. 30-33 are not an elaboration on v. 29a because of the statement that “all may prophesy” in v. 31. (cf. Payne, 222). This ignores the parallelism that is clearly a part of vv. 27-28 and 29-30, and in my argument, also of 34-35. Beyond that, the strong statements and commands of orderly worship of vv. 36-40 most decisively must be seen as a part of the whole instruction of 1 Corinthians 14. Consider, for instance, the parallels between vv. 33 and 36, stressing the universality of Paul’s instruction.

⁴⁰Given Paul’s reciprocation statements in 1 Cor 7, it can reasonably be assumed that the reciprocal would also be intended here. In other words, no spouse should judge their mate’s prophecy in the congregational setting. This is not explicitly stated, and the reason for this may be that husbands were not in the practice of judging their wife’s prophecy, while wives were doing so. We must keep in mind that this is a response to a specific problem in a specific congregation.

⁴¹Thiselton, 1156-61.

instruction to these wives in 1 Cor 14:34-35 is therefore dealing with charismatic events, not general behavior. These verses belong in the general instruction of 1 Corinthians 14. This passage does not restrict all women from all speech in congregational settings.

In the Context of Bandung, Indonesia

In our survey of Pauline practice, spiritually empowered and gifted women were not restricted from speaking ministry in the congregations. This even held true for prophecy, which Paul lists before and above teaching.⁴² Churches which accept and encourage contemporary exercise of spiritual gifts would experience significant loss of such activity of the Spirit if women were not permitted to use their gifts today. This is as similar in Bandung as in any North American Pentecostal or Charismatic church.

Our gatherings in Bandung are diverse in gender, race, people-group, and social status. No group or gender plays a lesser or restricted role. We do not try to take away the voice that God has given each of our participants. We value the work of all, but if the women were absent, silent, or restricted, a great deal less Kingdom work would occur.

In our context, the traditional reading of 1 Cor 14:34-35 seems alien, foreign to the surrounding culture. It does not reflect what is done in the *kampung*, the village, nor in our gatherings, the church. A contextual reading, one of respect for one's spouse in public gatherings, resonates with the people to whom we minister. Restricting women does not.

⁴²Gordon D. Fee, "Issues in Evangelical Hermeneutics Iii: The Great Watershed--Intentionality and Particularity/Eternality: 1 Timothy 2:8-15 as a Test Case," *Crux* 26, no. 4 (1990): 36.