

Disciples but not teachers: 1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15

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In 1976 The Pontifical Biblical Commission decided that by itself the New Testament does not permit exegetes to settle the problem of the accession of women to the presbyterate. This uncertainty may explain why, in 1994, Pope John Paul II did not refer to 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12 in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, his *Apostolic Letter on Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone*, but based his case on the precedent of Christ in choosing male apostles.

The church has not in the past shared this diffidence, since right from the beginning it justified the reservation of the apostolic ministry for men by recalling these two texts. Nor need it share this diffidence now, for they explain why the ministry of the gospel should still be reserved for men. I would therefore like to examine them closely to show how they forbid the ordination of women in the church.¹

1. 1 Corinthians 14:33b-38

Translation and structure

While commentators have often found it hard to make sense of this passage, rhetorical analysis has shown the unity of vv 33b-38 as a coherent argument (Dautzenberg: 253-73, 291-98; Hauke: 364-96). Its argument may be set out as follows:

As in all the churches² of the saints,
let the women remain silent in the churches,
for it is not permitted³ for them to speak,
but let them be subordinate⁴, as the law says.

If they wish to learn something,
let them interrogate⁵ their husbands at home,
for it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.
What, did the word of God go out from you⁶,
or has it reached you alone?

If anyone considers that he is a prophet or a spiritual person,
let him recognise that what I write is a command of the Lord.
If, on the other hand, anybody does not acknowledge (this), he is not

¹ This essay is a reworked version of an earlier paper published in the *Lutheran Theological Journal* (Kleinig, 1995).

² Paul uses *ekklesia* as a liturgical term both for the congregation as the assembly of the faithful and the place of assembly for worship.

³ The passive form is most likely used to indicate that God does not permit this. Aalen argues that, like the rabbis, Paul here refers to what God has forbidden in his word in contrast to what he has allowed to be done.

⁴ The active verb *tassō* means to 'place or station a person or thing in a fixed spot' (see BAGD, 1). While the passive form *hypotassomai* means 'to be placed under someone's authority' (see BAGD, 1b), its middle form signifies the willing self-location under the headship of someone in a given order. Note the play on words here in this chapter. Paul calls on women to be *subordinate* by fitting in with God's *order* for the preaching of his word and the celebration of the Lord's supper in the liturgical assembly (14:40). All members of the congregation must fit in with that divinely instituted order by practising subordination to Christ, his word, and the male teachers of his word, so that the congregation can be built up as his temple (14:26) and enjoy peace rather than *disorder* (14:33).

⁵ See Lockwood, 506; Thislelton, 1159f.

⁶ See the use of the same idiom in 1 Thess 1:8.

acknowledged (by God).⁷

Rhetorically speaking, the passage falls into two main parts. It begins with an unqualified directive for silence from women in all churches, followed by a subordinate clause explaining why they are not to speak. This reverses the previous pattern in 27,28 and 29-33a of reference to 'speaking' before mentioning some restriction of it with 'silence'. Paul then treats three problems associated with this directive in three conditional sentences.

In keeping with the pattern established in vv 26-33a, the flow of the argument is determined by two third person jussives for silence and subordination in v 34, followed by two conditional jussives about the questioning of husbands and the acknowledgment of Christ's authority in vv 35-37. This culminates in the conditional threat in v 38 against those who reject this teaching.

Thus this passage is a coherent piece of Pauline rhetoric. It is presented in the form of regulations for the operation of the church as a liturgical community (Hauke: 267, 370-71).

The place of the passage in 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

Paul's directives on the silence of women are part of his larger discussion in 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14 about the use of spiritual gifts in church that culminates in a discussion on the place of tongues and prophecy in public worship. More immediately, it comes as the climax of Paul's liturgical regulations in 1 Corinthians 14:26-40. In this last section Paul deals with three problems: the demand by some tongues' speakers for the right to 'speak' in tongues in the church; the demand by some prophets for the right to 'speak' their words of prophecy; and the demand by some female prophets for recognition as 'speakers in church'. Paul counters these demands for the right to speak with the demand for appropriate silence in vv 28, 30, and 34.

In keeping with this theme, the structure of 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 is as follows:

- a. Introduction (26)
 - General problem: the use of spiritual gifts in public worship
 - General directive: the edification of the congregation
- b. Speaking in tongues (27-28)
 - Permissible *speaking*, if there is an interpreter
 - **Silence**, with private speaking to God, if there is no interpreter
- c. Speaking of prophecy (29-33a)
 - Permissible *speaking* with assessment of prophecies
 - **Silence**, if another prophet receives a revelation
- d. Speaking of women (33b-38)
 - **Silence** of women in the church
 - Prohibition of *speaking* except for questioning at home
- e. Conclusion (39-40)
 - Encouragement of prophecy without prohibition of tongues
 - Need for order in worship.

There is growing recognition among scholars that the link between 14:27-33a and 14:33b-38 is provided by Paul's requirement in 14:29 that all prophecies must be duly weighed and assessed to discover their significance and proper application (Clark: 186; Hurley: 18892; Grudem: 250-251; Bacchiocchi: 167; Hauke: 376; Carson: 151; Witherington, 102; Thiselton, 1158). Paul does not state exactly how this is to be done. He does, however, indicate that the whole congregation ('the others') should

⁷ See Fee, 712. This passive form is most likely to be construed as a divine passive that refers to God's eschatological verdict. Käsemann identifies this, together 3:17; 5:3-5 and 16:22, as an example of holy law in the New Testament (248-55).

somehow be involved in this. It probably involved a general discussion that resulted in an authoritative judgment on its sense and its application by the teachers of the congregation in the light of Christ's teaching (Matt 7:15-27; Rev 19:10), the confession of Jesus as Lord (1 Cor 12:3), and the analogy of faith (Rom 12:6).

As Johansson (57-71) has shown from Acts 20:7-12, this kind of discussion was not restricted to the weighing of prophecies; it seems also to have been associated with the homilies given by teachers in the early church. While all members could share their insights into the meaning and application of a text from the Old Testament, they could not challenge the final teaching given by the leaders of the congregation, as some women seem to have done in Corinth (1 Cor 14:35).

Paul's argument runs as follows. Speaking in tongues is allowed in worship provided that it is properly interpreted. It thereby becomes a prophecy for the congregation. Prophecies may also be given in the church provided that they are limited in number and weighed in the light of the apostolic teaching, since all prophecy is to be understood and evaluated in the light of the apostolic tradition. The reason for this is that God's Spirit does not contradict himself. So, those who hand on the apostolic tradition are finally responsible for assessing prophecy. They are the speakers in the church, those who have been appointed to teach the word of God and to ensure that it is heeded in the liturgical assembly.

The nature of the demand for silence from women

Paul's demand for the silence of women is explained in two ways. They are not permitted by God to be 'speakers' in the liturgical assembly. While the verb *lalein* is used in many different ways in the New Testament, it is never used in the sense of chattering (Barrett, 332). Here, as is often the case, it is a synonym for the teaching of God's word (eg. Acts 4:1; 18:25; 1 Cor 2:6-7; 2 Cor 2:17; Heb 13:7). In addition, the silence of the women involves subordination. Remarkably, Paul does not mention the object of their subordination. He does not refer to the general subordination of all women to all men, or the subordination of wives to husbands. Context indicates that they are to be subordinate to the male teachers of God's word and so to the word itself. Women are therefore not allowed to be speakers in the liturgical assembly, but, like all the other members of the congregation, they must be subordinate to those who have been appointed to fulfil that task. By their subordination they fit into the liturgical order that is established by the ministry of God's word in the church.

Paul quite clearly insists on relative rather than absolute silence, since he allows women to speak in tongues (1 Cor 14:5,23), prophecy (1 Cor 11:5; 14:5,23,31), and engage in liturgical prayer (1 Cor 11:5; 1 Tim 2:1-10). The kind of speaking that Paul prohibits is defined in three ways. First, a woman may not 'be a speaker in a liturgical assembly' (14:35). The unusual absolute form for 'speaking' indicates that Paul uses it as a technical term for someone authorised to speak in an official capacity (Johansson: 53f). Since this prohibition does not apply at home it has nothing to do with the subordination of a wife to her husband.

Secondly, the forbidden speaking is associated with God's word which has come to Corinth via its apostolic emissaries from Jerusalem (14:36; see Acts 1:8; 1 Thess 2:13). We may therefore conclude that its content was the transmission and application of the apostolic teaching that had been entrusted to the leaders of the congregation, as described by Paul in 2 Timothy 2:2.

Thirdly, while this kind of 'speaking' is related to prophecy and the disputation that is connected with the weighing of prophecy in the congregation, it is nevertheless distinguished from prophecy and is more authoritative than prophecy, since it transmits the commands of Christ and requires the acquiescence of prophets (14:37-38). So when Paul forbids women to act as speakers in a liturgical assembly of the church, he excludes them from the ministry of the apostolic word.

The basis and authority for the prohibition

Paul bases his case on four sets of authority that he marshals in ascending order of importance.

First, he appeals to ecumenical practice (14:33b). Some scholars claim that, since Paul uses a similar ecumenical formula in 1 Cor 4:17; 7:17 and 11:16 to conclude a section of argument, this phrase must belong to v.33a. Yet that is most unlikely, since it is not used as a conclusion in 7:17 and it functions elsewhere to assert the catholicity of Paul's teaching (Witherington: 96; Carson: 140-41; Thiselton: 1155).⁸ Paul claims that his ruling does not just apply to the church in Corinth, but to all churches everywhere.

Secondly, he appeals to the law in the Old Testament. The absence of the far more common citation formula, 'it is written' makes it unlikely that he refers only to Genesis 3:16 or any other specific verse. Rather the use here of the summary formula: 'as the law says' (see 1 Cor 9:8), shows that Paul has in mind the whole of Genesis 2 and 3. It is best understood in the light of Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 2:12 on the primacy of Adam, his headship as the husband of Eve,⁹ and God's commission to him in Genesis 2:15-17.

Thirdly, he appeals to his hearers' sense of shame in 14:35. For Paul, shame did not just arise from failure to meet the social expectations of peers according to customary norms, as in 1 Corinthians 11:6, but also from loss of face with God (Phil 1:20; 2 Tim 1:12), and at the failure to meet his expectations (Rom 6:21; 2 Cor 4:2; Eph 5:4,12; Col 3:8; Phil 3:19). In fact, in Eph 5:12, the only other place apart from 1 Cor 11:6 where Paul uses the formula, 'it is shameful', that formula covers what is unacceptable to God rather than what is merely socially unacceptable. In 14:35-36 the appeal to shame is closely allied with Paul's challenge to the presumptuousness of certain women prophets in questioning their teachers and in regarding themselves as either the generators or exclusive recipients of God's word.

Lastly and most significantly, Paul appeals to a specific command of the Lord in 14:37 which he has received together with other sayings of Jesus. It, like 1 Thessalonians 4:15, is not recorded in any of the gospels (see Johansson: 90-98; Hauke: 385-90; Lockwood, 511-14). As last in the list, this most weighty authority is meant to clinch the argument. When Paul speaks about the Lord's command, he most likely refers to the prohibition in v.34. Its passive formulation denotes that it comes from God himself. Only its divine origin provides an adequate basis for his unequivocal pronouncement in 14:38 that those who reject Paul's ruling on the silence of women in the church will not be recognised by God as prophets or Spirit-filled people. Since they do not base their ministry on Christ and his word, their work will not survive the fire of God's judgment on the last day (1 Cor 3:11-14; see Hauke: 383-85; Lockwood, 514). That grave threat makes sense only in the light of Christ's prohibition of women as speakers in the church.

The appeal of Paul to such a full range of authorities discloses the gravity of the matter under discussion. If he were dealing with culturally inappropriate behaviour or disruptive chatter by women, he would have had no need to employ all these authorities. Indeed, its force would be totally disproportionate to the alleged offence, much like the use of a steamroller to squash a bull ant.¹⁰ A simple appeal to their better senses would suffice.

To conclude: Paul's appeal to such a wide range of authorities, his mention of Christ's command, his reference to the apostolic tradition and his responsibility for it, and his

⁸ If it were to be taken retrospectively, it would, rather strangely, assert the catholicity of God's 'orderly' character.

⁹ Thus in Ephesians 5:23,32 Paul quite clearly connects the headship of a husband and the headship of Christ with the role of Adam as the primal husband.

¹⁰ The only other place where Paul argues in a similar fashion is in 1 Cor 9:3-14 where he defends his rights as an apostle. This provides an instructive parallel, which, incidentally, also supports the unity of 14:33b-38. There he also works with four sets of authority: the precedent of apostolic practice (9:4-6), custom (9:7), the law (9:8-13) and the Lord's command (9:14). There he also arranges his authorities in ascending order of importance with the command of Christ as the capstone of his argument.

threat of divine disapproval for those who reject his teaching, makes sense only if he is engaged in the defence of the divinely instituted ministry of the word.

2. 1 Timothy 2:11-15

It is generally agreed that this passage, more clearly than 1 Corinthians 14:33b-38, excludes women from the apostolic ministry of the word. Whereas that text deals with a specific situation in Corinth, Paul here gives far more general instructions to his pastoral protegee Timothy about the reorganisation of the church in Ephesus.

Translation and structure

1 Timothy 2:11-15 forms a single literary unit with 2:8-10. The following translation of that unit indicates its basic structure:

I therefore require
that in every place men should pray,
lifting holy hands without anger and quarrelling,
and that women too (should pray), dressing themselves with modesty and
chastity by means of respectable deportment,
not by means of gold-braided hair or pearls or expensive dress,
but through good works, as is suitable for women who profess
reverence for God.
Let a woman learn in quietness¹¹ with entire subordination.¹²
Yet I do not permit a woman to teach
or to have authority over a man.
But she must remain in quietness;
for Adam was formed first, then Eve;
and Adam was not deceived, but the woman, being deceived, came into
transgression.
Nevertheless a woman will be saved through child bearing,
provided that she remains with chastity in faith and love and
sanctification.

Two things are worth noting in this. First, the repetition of 'chastity' in verses 9 and 15 acts as a bracket that introduces and closes the teaching on the participation of women in public worship. Secondly, the repetition of 'quietness' in verses 11 and 12 creates a chiasmic construction which is highlighted by the contrast between woman and man in verse 12a. This is how it is structured:

- a Let a woman learn in **quietness** with entire subordination.
- b Teaching, on the other hand, for a woman I do not permit,
- b' nor having authority over a man,
- a' but being in **quietness** (I permit).

It follows from this that Paul's main concern here is with learning as a disciple rather than with teaching, and that 'teaching' and 'having authority' are to be regarded as complementary activities.

The place of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in its context

This passage is part of Paul's written pastoral 'charge' to Timothy about his work in the church at Ephesus and the need to combat the teachers of false doctrine there (1 Tim 1:3,18; 4:11; 5:7; 6:17). The heart of this charge is the congregational code in 2:1-3:16.¹³ This code gives instruction on how the household of God, the church of the living God, is to operate liturgically (1 Tim 3:14,15).

¹¹ See the use of the same term in 2:2.

¹² For a helpful analysis of this term, see Brunner, 24-30.

¹³ See Witherington, 118. This part of Paul's letter, then, is not a household code but rather a congregational code, since he speaks about conduct in the church as God's household (contra Towner, 210).

The congregational code covers the following matters:

- a. The nature and basis of congregational prayer (2:1-7)
- b. The involvement of both sexes in congregational prayer
 - Praying by men without anger and quarrelling (2:8)
 - Praying by women without ostentatious dress (2:9,10)
- c. The involvement of women in learning rather than in teaching (2:11-15)
- d. Qualifications for leaders in public worship
 - Bishops as teachers in God's household (3:1-7)
 - Deacons as their assistants (3:8-13)
- e. The purpose of Paul's charge (3:14-16)

The authority of Paul in 1 Timothy 2:11-15

Even though Paul uses 'I' in addressing Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:1,7,8,12, he does not give his personal opinions on congregational worship. Rather, in 2:7 he emphasises that he has been appointed by God both as an 'apostle' (see 1:1) and as a 'teacher of the faith and its truth to the gentiles'. He therefore writes about what 'must' (*dei*) be done not just in Ephesus, but in the whole church which is God's household (1 Tim 3:14,15; see Hurley: 196; Bacchiocchi: 145-48,151-52). His teaching therefore transcends the particular local problems of the church in Ephesus.¹⁴

The meaning of 'teaching' in the Pastoral Letters

Since 'teaching' is the key term in this text, its exact sense needs to be established before we can examine Paul's argument. Paul uses the terms for 'teaching' in a much narrower, technical sense than we do in modern English (eg. 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11). It usually refers to the teaching and application of God's word by Jesus and his apostles. A teacher hands on the apostolic tradition and uses it to build up the church as a liturgical community.

As the teacher of the gentiles (1 Tim 2:7), the apostle Paul is also a teacher of the gospel (2 Tim 1:11) which God has entrusted to him (1 Tim 1:11). He has been Timothy's teacher (1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 2:2) and has passed on to him what he himself has received from Christ (2 Tim 1:13,14). Paul therefore urges Timothy to teach what he has received from him (1 Tim 4:11; 6:2) and to live a life consistent with that teaching (1 Tim 4:16). Timothy is to use the Old Testament (2 Tim 3:16) and the words of Jesus (1 Tim 4:6; 6:3) in his teaching which is usually associated with the public reading of the Scriptures (1 Tim 4:13) and the preaching of the word to the congregation (2 Tim 4:2). By teaching he convinces and encourages his hearers (2 Tim 4:2); he rebukes and corrects those who teach what is contrary to the apostolic tradition (1 Tim 1:3). So Timothy is required to hand on to other faithful men what he has been taught by Paul, and to appoint them as teachers in the church (2 Tim 2:2).

Paul uses a number of terms to describe the role of the teachers in the church. As 'bishops' they supervise the worship and life of the congregation (1 Tim 3:2). As 'elders' they arrange the worship of the congregation and manage its operation (1 Tim 5:17). As 'servants' of the risen Lord they represent him in their teaching and work with him (2 Tim 2:24). Their basic qualification is that they are teachable and skilled in teaching (1 Tim 3:2; 2 Tim 2:24). They teach God's word in the church (1 Tim 5:17); they use the healing doctrine of Christ to encourage the faithful and to refute those who contradict it (Tit 1:9).

So then, for Paul a teacher is a minister of God's word, a pastor who has been authorised to teach what the apostles taught.

¹⁴ The ecumenical extent of his charge is also evident from his instruction in 2:11 about prayer 'in every place' of worship (see Mal 1:11; Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 2:14; 1 Thess 1:8; 2 Thess 3:16).

The argument of 1 Timothy 2:11-15

Paul makes it quite clear that, unlike Jewish women who did not join in the public prayers of the synagogue and were not allowed to be students of the rabbis, Christian women were expected to join in the intercession of the church for the world and to 'learn' God's word as disciples of Jesus Christ. In fact, he commands them to be disciples, students who learn God's word. The unusual absolute form of this verb suggests that this command has to do with being disciples rather than with learning a particular lesson. Like all the men, they too are recipients of the apostolic tradition (2 Tim 3:14). As disciples they are to pray and do good works. These activities, rather than teaching, are the marks of their discipleship.

Their proper disposition as disciples is characterised by two terms. First, they are to learn in quietness. This describes their attitude to God's word, their state of being as disciples. Such quietness involves stillness and harmony, receptivity and teachability, respectful listening and readiness to receive direction (see Acts 11:18; 21:14; 22:2; 1 Thess 4:11; 2 Thess 3:12; 1 Tim 2:2). It is the mark of a wise learner, a sage who never ceases to be student. Secondly, women are to be in a state of entire subordination. As in 1 Corinthians 14:34, Paul does not mention the object of their subordination. Since it is linked with being a disciple, it refers to Christ's word and to those who teach that word rather than to men in general (Moo: 183).

Even though women must be disciples, they are not permitted to teach in the liturgical assembly. The use of *de* introduces a contrast between learning which is commanded and teaching which is forbidden (Bacchiocchi: 149; Moo: 184). In other words, 2:12 explains the concept of subordination in negative terms. The responsibility for teaching in public worship is associated with the 'exercise of authority' over a man.¹⁵ The sense of 'a man' is not immediately clear. While it could be men in general or a husband, it most obviously refers to the male teacher(s) of the congregation. The relationship between teaching and exercising authority can be taken in three ways. Paul could be prohibiting two separate activities or two identical activities or, most likely, from the syntax, two similar activities (Köstenberger). Whatever the case, it is clear that Paul does not allow women to be teachers in the church.

Paul bases the subordination of women to their male teachers on God's will as revealed in the priority of Adam's creation. God appointed him as the teacher of his wife and his family by giving him his original command and promise (Gen 2:16,17). The priority of Adam established his God-given responsibility to be the head of the human family; it also established firstborn males as the heads of every Israelite family. As such they were the teachers of their families. In worship they represented their families before God. This role of Adam as the liturgical head of the human family was fulfilled by Christ (see Col 1:15-23); it is now exercised by him through the male teachers in the church.

While Paul's mention of Adam's priority over Eve establishes the position of male teachers in the congregation, his subsequent reference to Eve's deception is a warning against the refusal of some women in Ephesus to remain students of God's word. The point of comparison is between Eve as an insubordinate student of God's word and all Christian women as receptive disciples. Thus Paul does not assert that women should be excluded from the ministry of the word because they are more responsible for the fall than Adam, or because they are somehow more susceptible to deception by Satan than men. That is obviously not so. Rather, he warns that Christian women should not become teachers like Eve, but remain disciples of Christ, subordinate to him and his word and to those who teach that word.

So, while Paul teaches the full involvement of all women in the public worship of the church as intercessors and disciples, he does not allow them to be teachers in the church.

¹⁵ For this translation of *authentein*, see Panning, Knight, and Köstenberger.

3. CONCLUSION

The exalted Lord Jesus has appointed ministers of the gospel to convey his gifts to the faithful in the church. He has chosen to do so by calling male apostles and male teachers of his word. But he has not authorised any women to perform this ministry. Paul, in fact, claims that Christ has forbidden women to be teachers in the assembly of the saints. Christ has not given them the task of giving his word and his sacraments to the people of God. So, since he has not been given it to them, they cannot exercise this ministry without usurping that office in violation of Christ's command.

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