BIBLIOTHECA SACRA 154 (October–December 1997): 461–72

DOES 1 CORINTHIANS 11:2–16 REFER TO WOMEN PRAYING AND PROPHESYING IN CHURCH?

Harold R. Holmyard III

On the basis of 1 Timothy 2:11–12 and 1 Corinthians 14:33b–35 many evangelicals are convinced that women should not speak in local church gatherings. Yet 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 gives instructions for the behavior of women when they pray or prophesy. The traditional view is that 1 Corinthians 11 as a whole pertains to the corporate worship of the church. However, several components of 1 Corinthians either allow for or press the conclusion that 11:2–16 does *not* address congregational settings. Thus if 11:2–16 pertains to nonchurch settings, it does not conflict with 14:33b–35. The former instructs women to wear headcoverings when they pray or prophesy in nonchurch gatherings, and the latter instructs them to remain silent in local-church gatherings.

1 CORINTHIANS 11 VERSUS 1 CORINTHIANS 14

In 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 Paul began to discuss worshipful activity by the Corinthians. However, female praying and prophesying may be a transitional subject leading into the gathered church setting that characterizes a good portion of chapters 11–14. The worshipful behavior addressed in 11:2–16 may be less formal in setting. This interpretation springs from Paul's dictate in 14:34 that women keep silent in the congregation. This charge would contradict 11:2–16 if the latter text concerned women praying and prophesying in church.

House seeks to resolve the apparent conflict between 11:2–16 and 14:33b–35 by saying that "speak" (λαλέω) in 14:34 disallows

Harold R. Holmyard III is a Bible student in Dallas, Texas.

all forms of speech to women except divine utterances.[1] But this assessment contradicts not only Paul's blanket prohibition in 14:34 but also the tenor of the discussion in 14:1–33. In 14:1–25 Paul discussed "spiritual things" (πνευμάτικα, v. 1), that is, things given by the Holy Spirit. Whether prayer or singing, tongues or prophecy, the assumption is that the Holy Spirit was giving the utterance. Thus when Paul summarized his expectations in 14:26–40, he presupposed that what someone had to contribute (v. 26) should be an utterance from the Spirit. All the speaking in 14:1–33 is of this nature (cf. 1 Pet. 4:10–11).

Because 1 Corinthians 14:34 follows and qualifies the discussion about the use of gifts in 14:1–33, its exclusion of women from speaking roles in gathered church worship limits the identity of "each" (ἕκαστος) person in verse 26 who has a vocal contribution to make. "Each" may refer to each male speaker since in verse 34 Paul enjoined the women to be "silent," using the same verb (σιγάω) which in verses 28 and 30 restrains the use of spiritual gifts. Likewise the word for "speak" (λαλέω) in verse 34 is identical with the verb used of the exercise of spiritual gifts in verses 2, 6, 9, 11, 13, 18–19, 21, 23, 27–29.[2] The plain intent of verse 34, then, is to exclude women from the speaking mentioned in verses 1–33.

The desire of the women to "learn" (v. 35) corresponds to the desire to learn mentioned in verse 31. Paul's introduction of questioning by women in verse 35 suggests that Spirit-led questioning was an accepted aspect of church gatherings. For Paul implied that the desire to question was what could tempt the women to speak. If questioning had been inappropriate in the worship service, Paul could simply have said so, without connecting the prohibition with femininity. Rather, Paul barred women from engaging in an activity permitted to men.

Several writers, noting the words "learn" and "speak" in both 14:29–33a and 14:33b–36, have bound the latter verses to the discussion of prophecy in verses 29–33a. These authors say verses 33b–36 conclude the discussion in verses 29–33a by denying women the right to judge prophetic messages.[3] Carson holds that

---

1 H. Wayne House, "The Speaking of Women and the Prohibition of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 (July–September 1988): 310. According to James B. Hurley the majority of interpreters historically have had a view like that of House ("Did Paul Require Veils or the Silence of Women? A Consideration of 1 Cor. 11:2–16 and 1 Cor. 14:33b–36," *Westminster Theological Journal* 35 [Winter 1973]: 190).

2 L. Ann Jervis claims that the "unqualified" use of "speak" in 14:34 differs from its qualified use earlier in the chapter ("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 [1995]: 61).

3 Thomas R. Schreiner, "Head Coverings, Prophecies, and the Trinity: 1 Corinthians 11:2–16," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Re-*

the gift of prophecy did not guarantee truth in every detail, and so comparing prophecies with apostolic doctrine was essential. Since Paul in 1 Timothy 2:11–15 reserved teaching and the exercise of authority to men, they were the ones to make the comparison.[4] However, the language in 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36 does not specify a form of speech as impermissible; instead it excludes female speech from church assemblies. A direct allusion in verse 34 to the judging in verse 29 seems unlikely because Paul's topic in verses 29–33a is prophecy. To revert to judging in verse 34 would call for some cue, such as the use of the word "judge" (*διακρίνω*).[5]

Furthermore judgment of prophecy is also a spiritual gift, and may be the same as the gift of discerning of spirits. Just as Paul paired tongues with the interpretation of tongues and spoke of their exercise in church services (14:27–28), so he paired prophecy with the discernment of spirits (12:10), mentioning the coordinate use of both in church (14:29). Discernment of spirits supplemented prophecy just as interpretation of tongues aided tongues. Paul used the word "spirits" (*πνεύματα*) of the prophets in 14:32, and the verb "judge" (*διακρίνω*) in 14:29 is related to the noun "discernment" (*διάκρισις*, rendered "distinguishing" in the NASB and NIV) in 12:10. The word "spirit" occurs elsewhere in the Bible in connection with inspired messages, whether holy (Num. 11:25), unholy (1 Kings 22:22; 2 Cor. 11:4), or uncertain (2 Thess. 2:2; 1 John 4:1). As those messages were supernatural, God gave a spiritual gift for the distinguishing of His message.[6] Taking 1 Corinthians 14:34 as a prohibition of judging prophecy would contradictorily permit women in church to exercise the gift of prophecy but not the gift of discernment of spirits. Grudem's view that 14:33b–35 prohibits women from evaluating prophecy is

---

sponse to Evangelical Feminism, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 132; D. A. Carson, " 'Silent in the Churches': On the Role of Women in 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism,* 151–53; Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1982), 239–55; W. J. Dumbrell, "The Role of Women—A Reconsideration of the Biblical Evidence," *Interchange* 21 (1977): 20–21; and James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 190–91.

4 Carson, "Silent in the Churches," 152–53.

5 Grudem (*The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians,* 252) and Hurley (*Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective,* 190–91) argue that the context restricts the meaning of "speak" to the judgment of prophecy.

6 H. A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), 283, 331; and C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* Harper's New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 287.

prompted by the need to harmonize this text with 11:2–16, which Grudem says describes worship services in which women spoke.[7]

However, the speech denied to women in 14:33–35 does not seem to be limited to the evaluation of prophecy. It seems to include all the kinds of speech mentioned in 14:1–33. The fact that women might receive direction or revelation from the Spirit and still need to be silent should not be surprising, for people ready to speak by the Spirit needed to be silent in numerous circumstances (vv. 6–14, 16–19, 27–30). In verse 34 Paul contrasted female speech with female subjection, appealing to the Law for the duty of feminine submission. The Pentateuch, both in its treatment of man's creation (cf. 1 Tim. 2:13; 1 Cor. 11:7–9) and fall (Gen. 3:16; cf. 1 Tim. 2:14) and in its legal stipulations, declared the headship of the male. Paul reaffirmed this principle earlier in 1 Corinthians 11:3.[8] Functional male headship in the family was applied by extension to the church (cf. 1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9); conversely 1 Corinthians 14:34 suggests that church worship should display the proper roles of men and women. Therefore even asking questions in church settings was to be the prerogative of only men (v. 35).

Yet the words for "prophesy" (*προφητεύω*) and "pray" (*προσεύχομαι*) in chapter 14 are the same as those in 11:5, where Paul wrote that women may pursue these activities. This leads to the suggestion that the setting in 11:2–16 differs from that in chapter 14. Since 11:2–16 does not specifically name any setting, one might conclude that the passage refers to women praying or prophesying in any situation except the one forbidden in 14:33–35, namely, congregational worship.

THE WORD "CHURCH" IN 1 CORINTHIANS 11 AND 14

If 11:2–16 refers to any environment other than congregational worship, then it is distinct from 11:17–34, whose setting is clearly congregational worship. But the use of the word "church" (*ἐκκλησία*) in both chapters 11 and 14 seems to some writers to discourage a sharp distinction between the scenes of 11:2–16 and 11:17–34. Verse 16 states that neither Paul nor the churches allowed women to pray or prophesy with their heads uncovered. Verse 17 opens the next section with reference to the Corinthians gathering for worship, and verse 18 speaks of their gathering "in church." These two references to church in verses 16 and 18 could

---

7 Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, 240, 247, 250.

8 See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "*Kephalē* in 1 Corinthians 11:3," *Interpretation* 47 (1993): 52–59; and Schreiner, "Head Coverings, Prophecies, and the Trinity," 124–32.

link the two sections. Furthermore similar words appear in 14:33–34, where Paul wrote of "all the churches of the saints" and "let the women be silent in the churches."[9] The unity in 14:33–34 between the plural "churches" and the phrase "in the churches" might argue for a link between the two similar occurrences of the word "church" in 11:16–18.

Yet Paul employed the word "church" in two senses in both chapters. The first sense is like that in 1:2, where he wrote "to the church of God which is at Corinth," that is, all the city's believers. And believers in other cities are designated in 11:16 and 14:33 by the word "churches."

The word "church" is used in a second sense in 1 Corinthians to refer to a local group. This is seen in the phrases "when you come together in church" (11:18, author's trans.) and "let the women keep silent in the churches" (14:34). This variation in usage of the word "church(es)" permits a backdrop for 11:2–16 distinct from 11:17–34. "Churches" in 11:16 may speak of all believers in an entire city with specific reference to the *public* activity of their women, whereas the concept of one local "church" as believers gathered for worship commences in 11:18.

DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN 11:2–16 AND 11:17–34

Repetition of "I praise" (ἐπαινῶ) in 11:2 and 17 might suggest a unity between verses 2–16 and 17–34.[10] However, what links verses 2–16 and 17–34 is Paul's scrutiny of both activities as to their praiseworthiness. In 11:2, subsequent to the general words of 10:31–11:1, Paul broadly praised the Corinthians' keeping of apostolic "traditions" (παραδόσεις).[11] This praise functions as a preface more than an integral part of 11:3–34, because both verses 3–16 and verses 17–34 negatively qualify it.[12] Together with the

---

9 D. C. Arichea discusses the possibility that 1 Corinthians 14:33b belongs in the sentence with 14:33a as in the King James Version and the New American Standard Bible ("Silence of Women in the Church," *Bible Translator* 46 [January 1995]: 102–3). This article favors the argument of Robert W. Allison that 11:33a reaches an argumentative climax on the absolute nature of God ("Let Women Be Silent in the Churches [1 Cor 14.33b–36]: What Did Paul Really Say and What Did It Mean?" *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32 [February 1988]: 30). See Carson, "Silent in the Churches," 140–41.

10 H. Wayne House argues against distinct settings for 11:1–16 and 11:17–34 on this basis ("Should a Woman Prophesy or Preach before Men?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 [April–June 1988]: 143, n. 5).

11 The word "traditions" need not refer only to a worship assembly, for Paul used it elsewhere regarding truths associated with the gospel (2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6).

12 The words of praise that introduce the first chapter (1:4–5) and this new section of the letter (chaps. 11–14) somewhat lessen the blow of the criticisms that follow.

subject matter of 11:3–16, the adversative δέ ("but") in verse 3 restricts the praise. And the negative οὐκ ("not") that precedes the "I praise" in verse 17 shows that the activity criticized in verses 17–34 did not merit praise. In verses 3–34 Paul gave commands (vv. 6, 10, 28, 33–34) that sought to remedy shortcomings in the keeping of the traditions he had delivered to the Corinthians.[13]

The praying and prophesying of the Corinthian women doubtless showed that they imitated Paul (11:1) and that they were faithful to the "traditions" (v. 2). Some women in the New Testament era, such as the daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9), had gifts of prophecy. Women joined the apostles in prayer before the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (1:14). There was also a tradition of female prayer and prophecy in the Old Testament era. But Paul limited his praise of the Corinthians because the abandonment of head coverings overthrew a worthy standard upheld in the other churches (1 Cor. 11:2–16).

In contrast the Corinthians' keeping of the "tradition" of the Lord's Supper deserved no praise because of their behavioral aberrations (vv. 27–30). If Paul sought to correct one aspect of the women's activities, he was wholly critical of the Lord's Supper observance. Paul's praise in verse 2 and his reproof in verses 27–30 could indicate a difference in the settings of verses 2–16 and verses 17–34.

Several elements in 11:17–19 suggest a transition between the two subjects. The disjunctive δέ (v. 17) often introduces a new subject, and τοῦτο ("this") in verse 17 seems anticipatory, looking forward to what Paul commanded about the Lord's Supper (rather than looking back to what he had indicated about head coverings). In concluding the paragraph of 11:17–22 Paul repeated the words "this" and "I do not praise" from the beginning of verse 17. Since the antecedent for "this" in verse 22 is abuse of the Lord's Supper, the inclusio formed by the repetition suggests that "this" in verse 17 also refers to the Lord's Supper.

In chapter 11 Paul did not introduce the subject of congregational gatherings until verse 17, where he said the meetings did "more harm than good" (NIV). Their divisiveness (vv. 18–19) was his first evidence that the Corinthian Christians' assembling was "for the worse" (v. 17): "For in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you" (v. 18). However, he had just expressed vigorous disapproval of a woman

---

[13] Troels Engberg-Peterson supposes that some Corinthian women were misapplying Paul's teaching that there are no distinctions in the Lord, that is, that men and women have equal worth before God in Christ (Gal. 3:26–29) ("1 Corinthians 11:16 and the Character of Pauline Exhortation," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110 [1991]: 681, 683).

praying with an uncovered head, equating her with one who shamed her head by shaving it (vv. 4–5). It is difficult to see why he would bypass this issue as an evidence of coming together "for the worse" if verses 2–16 refer to church worship.

The link between Paul's discussions of head coverings and gatherings for the Lord's Supper may simply be indirect in that both involved traditions that were being followed inadequately. The fact that Paul could praise the Corinthians (v. 2) even though their coming together was for the worse (v. 17) suggests that his praise in verse 2 was broader than gatherings for worship. Thus the setting of 11:2–16 might not be a church gathering.

Objections to Distinguishing the Settings in 11:2–16 and 11:17–34

House says most commentators opt for a church worship setting in 11:2–16,[14] but that some do not agree.[15] Commentators supporting a nonchurch setting include Darby, Olshausen, Meyer, Ellicott, Beet, Vine, Lenski, Grosheide, Clark, and MacArthur.[16] Also a number of other writers say Paul commanded women to wear head coverings in any public appearance.[17]

---

[14] House, "Should a Woman Prophesy or Preach before Men?" 143, n. 5.

[15] House, "The Speaking of Women and the Prohibition of the Law," 305, n. 12.

[16] John N. Darby, *Notes of Readings on the Epistles to the Corinthians* (London: Morrish, n.d.), 85–87; Hermann Olshausen, *Biblical Commentary on St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1855), 174; Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians,* 249; Charles T. Ellicott, *St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Longmans, Green, 1887), 202; J. Agar Beet, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians,* 6th ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1895), 181; W. E. Vine, *1 Corinthians* (London: Oliphants, 1951), 147; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963), 437; Frederik W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians,* New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 341–42; Gordon Clark, "The Ordination of Women," *Trinity Review* 17 (January–February 1981), 3–4; and John MacArthur Jr., *1 Corinthians,* MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 256.

[17] In a study of thirty commentaries Ralph N. V. Schutt found twelve with this view ("A History of the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:2–16" [M.A. research project, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978], 74). For example John Calvin concluded, "However it might meet the situation quite well to say that the apostle expects this unassuming conduct from women, not only in the place where the whole congregation is assembled, but also in any of the more formal gatherings, either of matrons or of men, such as sometimes meet in private houses" (*The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians,* Calvin's Commentaries [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960], 231). But if 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 relates to settings other than the church, why apply it at all to church, where Calvin understood that women were to be silent? Paul did not signal an intent to delay censure of female prayer in church until chapter 14 such as Calvin supposed (ibid.). Such a delay would seem harsh and confusing.

House deals with the context in part by stating correctly that the theme of abuse of freedom in Christ, the chief theme of chapters 8–10, continues in 11:2–16 and beyond, since 11:17–34 and most of the letter involve such abuse. The women's exercise of spiritual gifts seems to have contributed to their not wearing head coverings (v. 5), an abuse of their freedom in Christ.[18] And presumably Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts in chapter 12 pertains not just to worship services but to the entire life of the body of Christ.[19] In 11:2–16 Paul may have stressed the same point he made in 14:31–33, 40, namely, exercise of spiritual gifts in no way nullifies normal expectations for order and propriety. It was appropriate that women exercising the gifts of prayer and prophecy (11:2–16) acknowledge (by wearing a head covering) the male leadership that governs the body of Christ.[20]

In contending that women praying or prophesying with their heads covered (11:2–16) pertains to gathered church worship, House asks whether such an admonition would be needed in a private, small-group setting.[21] Yes, acknowledgement of male headship by women speaking by the Holy Spirit pertained to small groups; the head covering would be evidence that the women were acting in subordination to church authority rather than acting independently.[22]

---

[18] Another theme running through much of the letter is pride over spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 1–4; 12–14).

[19] After 11:17–34 Paul may have explicitly addressed a setting of corporate worship only in chapter 14, so that 11:17–34 and chapter 14 frame more general remarks in chapters 12–13.

[20] Werner Foerster shows clearly that in 11:10 ἐξουσία ("authority") concerns the issue of the relationship of woman to man ("ἐξουσία," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964], 2:573–74). W. Gerald Kendrick objects to the traditional concept that ἐξουσία refers to a sign of authority to which the woman is subject, since the Greek word elsewhere in the New Testament always has an active sense ("Authority, Women, and Angels: Translating 1 Corinthians 11:10," *Bible Translator* 46 [July 1995]: 337). On the assumption that Paul spoke of church worship in 11:4 Morna D. Hooker contended that women were receiving a new authority in contrast to Jewish custom ("Authority on Her Head: An Examination of 1 Cor. 11.10," *New Testament Studies* 10 [1964]: 415). Paul might have meant that women derive their authority, or permission, to speak by allegiance to male leadership expressed through the head covering. Dumbrell thinks the head covering "marks a woman for what she is and thus authorizes her to assume her rightful role in the created order" ("Role of Women," 19–20), and Hurley agrees (*Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective,* 177).

[21] House, "Should a Woman Prophesy or Preach before Men?" 143, n. 5.

[22] For the idea that the relationship in 11:3–16 is essentially one between the husband and his wife, see J. Winandy, "Un curieux *casus pendens:* 1 Corinthiens 11:10 et son interprétation," *New Testament Studies* 38 (1992): 621–29. But 11:12 states that "the man is through the woman"; Paul evidently spoke of male and female, not

House also asks whether the exercise of Paul's principles in a small group of Christians would differ from their exercise in the gathering of the whole church.[23] Yes, the outworking of almost every principle of conduct varies according to the situation. House's own position on 14:34–35—that Paul disallowed all forms of speech to women except divine utterances—distinguishes between behavior in church assemblies and in the rest of life. Surely women did not need to be silent in all social settings, including the marketplace.

Believers in church gatherings represent the body of Christ, the society of God's people. Those who speak are in *de facto* leadership roles, since all others must listen. In planned, formal meetings men ought to assume these authoritative responsibilities. But in the many small, fortuitous groupings of everyday life a woman's speech need not imply authority over males. Males might not be present, or they might be non-Christians, or they might, because of sickness or other difficulties, be the ones in need of a word to or from God. Many other circumstances could explain the propriety of a woman praying or prophesying with men present in a nonchurch setting.[24]

House asserts that the instruction in 11:2–16 "is related directly to the need to conform to the practices of the other Christian congregations, which was certainly an issue of public worship."[25] Not all church-related conformity, however, referred to gathered public worship. The letter of the Jerusalem Council gave directions to all Gentile churches with reference to food and sexual immorality (Acts 15:29). The letter of 1 Corinthians seeks churchwide adherence in areas such as litigation and marriage (1 Cor. 6:1–11; 7:1–40). Just as Paul provoked the Corinthians to correct their conduct by alluding to pagan standards in 5:1, so in 11:16 he may have referred to everyday conduct expected of Christian women in other cities.

When Corinthian women exercised spiritual gifts in the permitted sphere outside assembled church worship, they were to don a commonplace symbol of female respect for male head-

---

just of the husband and wife. Winandy holds that the woman must have authority over her head by covering it in wifely reticence (ibid., 629), but the Corinthian women were already exercising authority over their heads but in the wrong way. However, David W. J. Gill observes that not wearing a head covering was liable to be seen as dishonoring one's husband ("The Importance of Roman Portraiture for Head-Coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16," *Tyndale Bulletin* 41 [1990]: 256).

[23] House, "Should a Woman Prophesy or Preach before Men?" 143, n. 5.

[24] For example a person ministered to might be a close relative of the woman or might be a stranger to the men.

[25] House, "Should a Woman Prophesy or Preach before Men?" 143, n. 5.

ship.[26] Mention of societal norms in 11:5b–6, 14 could relate the call for head coverings not only to the society in general but also to the church's testimony. Use of head coverings in religion was a standard practice among Romans, and Corinth was a Roman colony.[27] So pagan Corinthians may have considered prophecy or prayer by women with uncovered heads as inappropriate behavior, even if it occurred in nonformal settings of the home or community.

Carson equates the settings of 11:2–16 and 11:17–34 on the grounds that Paul thought of prophecy in the context of church meetings, where evaluation was possible.[28] This reasoning begs the question, however. If 11:2–16 speaks of prophecy in informal settings, then Paul did not think of prophecy only in worship services. Rather the proper exercise of prophecy in church assemblies is addressed in chapter 14. Steeped in the Old Testament, Paul need not have limited his understanding of prophecy to worship assemblies, and New Testament records do not otherwise do so.

Both Carson and Schreiner contend that an informal setting for the exercise of prophecy in 11:2–16 would exaggerate the distinction between private and public gatherings in the early church, since many churches met in houses.[29] However, the fact that a church meets in a home does not greatly affect the characteristics of a church assembly, whether in the first century or today. A church meeting, in contrast to many other meetings, gen-

---

[26] For the widespread use of head coverings see Gerd Theissen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology,* trans. John P. Galvin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 158–75. For the certain use of head coverings in Jewish circles before, during, and after Paul's time see Louis M. Epstein, *Sex Laws and Customs in Judaism* (New York: KTAV, 1967), 36–41. Epstein states that in public places "bareheadedness suggested haughtiness and arrogance" (ibid., 41).

[27] Richard Oster gives evidence that Roman women wore head coverings in worship ("When Men Wore Veils to Worship: The Historical Context of 1 Corinthians 11.4," *New Testament Studies* 34 [1988]: 494, 501, 503). He also shows that Roman influence was substantial in Corinth in Paul's day (ibid., 484–93). For Roman men covering their heads in worship and Roman women veiling themselves in public, see Plutarch, *On Morals* 4.266–67. Cynthia L. Thompson reports that women covering their heads in public was common in Tarsus and Syria ("Hairstyles, Head-coverings and St. Paul: Portraits from Roman Corinth," *Biblical Archaeologist* 51 [June 1988]: 113). Roland de Vaux found evidence for the veiling of Greek women limited but ancient. In Chalcedon in Bithynia it was common, but in Greece most cases concerned religious initiations or marriage ceremonies ("Sur le voile des femmes dans l'orient ancient," *Revue Biblique* 44 [1935]: 398–99). Conceivably head-coverings in Paul's day were more common in religious contexts than in other settings.

[28] Carson, "Silent in the Churches," 145.

[29] Ibid.; and Schreiner, "Head Coverings, Prophecies, and the Trinity," 132.

erally means church leaders are present, church members are welcomed, and the meeting time has been announced.

Carson finds the wording of 11:16 suggestive of a church concern, not of the private practice of piety. He notes that Paul had taken a stand on the issue of head coverings in conjunction with the other churches.[30] However, even if women's praying and prophesying occurred in a private meeting, it was capable of introducing issues relevant to the entire church. One woman praying with an uncovered head could inspire others to do so. Paul's comment in verse 16 merely expresses the irregularity of such prayer, just as verses 13–15 illustrate the unnaturalness of it. If Paul's remark in verse 16 seems similar to those in 14:33b, 36, it is because he spoke in both places with apostolic authority.

Carson correctly observes that 11:2–16 does not limit female prayer and prophecy to private homes or small groups.[31] The apostle may have assumed widely accepted conventions for such actions by women. When Paul later clarified that such female speech would be inappropriate in church assemblies (14:33b–36), he asserted the universal and traditional nature of his instruction. If most Corinthians were aware of it, he would not have needed to broach it in 11:2–16 where the setting was not a church assembly. He could have saved it for an addendum to his discussion of spiritual gifts in the assemblies.

If 11:2–16 concerns nonchurch settings, as suggested in this article, Carson wonders whether a Christian wife at home would have had to put on her head covering before she prayed privately.[32] The answer is that the coupling of prayer with prophecy in verse 4 implies a vocal activity; the issue of head coverings implies a public setting, not prayer in private.[33] This is prayer or prophecy that others would hear.

Another reason Carson objects to a distinction in setting between 11:2–16 and 14:33b–36 is that a blanket prohibition of speech by women in public assemblies (14:33b–36) runs counter to Joel's promise of God's outpouring of His Spirit on men and women.[34]

---

30 Carson, "Silent in the Churches," 145.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., 145–46.

33 Epstein's entire discussion of head coverings assumes their public nature (Epstein, *Sex Laws and Customs in Judaism,* 36–52). "The tradition that women veil themselves when they go out in public is very old in the Orient" (ibid., 36). He states that a woman's place was in her home, that the veil afforded modesty in public, and that in private women had freedom to "go about with uncovered head" (ibid., 40–42, 49).

34 Carson, "Silent in the Churches," 146.

However, the emphasis in Joel 2:28–29 is on the future, universal nature of the Spirit's working; it will affect male and female children, the elderly, and adult men and women. This gift will not rest on a small number of men and women as it did under the Old Covenant. The change need not abolish limitations in the exercise of the gift. There is no record that women who prophesied under the Old Covenant did so in Israel's worship services (Exod. 15:20; Judg. 4:4; 2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chron. 34:22; Neh. 6:14; Isa. 8:3; Luke 2:36).[35] Distinction in the exercise of prophetic roles of men and women can persist in the New Covenant era, even if the gift is possible for everyone.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF A COMMUNITY SETTING FOR 11:2–16

As stated earlier, Paul's commendation of the Corinthians in 11:2 on the heels of 10:31–11:1 is altogether general. The principles in 11:3 are likewise broad. A reader coming to the words about praying and prophesying in verses 4–5 would naturally give them the widest possible ambit, unless Paul limited their scope. Prayer and prophecy occurred in worship services (chap. 14), but they also took place outside of worship settings in the early church, as incidents in the ministries of Peter and Agabus reveal (Acts 9:40; 21:10). If Peter and Agabus could pray and prophesy in nonchurch settings, then doubtless the daughters of Philip or the Corinthian women could do so also. Since the praying and prophesying of women in 1 Corinthians 11:4–5 could occur in nonchurch environments, a reader would have no particular reason to limit verses 4–16 to a church setting.

If 11:2–16 teaches that a Christian woman gifted with prayer or prophecy is to acknowledge male headship in the employment of her gifts, it is in harmony with the concept of submission to male leadership found in 14:33–35 and 1 Timothy 2:11–15. A woman's ministry in the community is to be exercised in the same spirit of submission that should characterize her demeanor in public worship meetings.

Many writers say that 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 refers to women speaking with their heads covered in corporate worship services. However, a number of observations suggest that these verses refer to women wearing head coverings when praying or prophesying in nonchurch settings. This view, then, does not conflict with Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 14:33b–35 that women are not to exercise spiritual gifts of speech in church worship services.

---

[35] Exodus 15:20–21 describes a spontaneous celebration of the Lord, not a worship service.

ATLAS erials

Copyright and Use:

As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.

No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.