Gender Based Boundaries for Gathered Congregations:

An Interpretive History of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35

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Interpreters through the centuries have struggled to know just what Paul meant when he wrote of women "praying and prophesying" in 1 Corinthians 11:5, yet instructed women to "keep silent" and not "to speak" in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. How does one understand these apparently differing Pauline statements? Is there a reasonable solution to this apparent contradiction? Did Paul intend gathered congregations to observe gender based restrictions in the exercise of church ministry? Is there sufficient evidence to regard the text of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 as authentic and thus authoritative for believers? And what did Paul mean by his reference to "the law" in verse 34? Throughout the history of the church, knowledgeable commentators, church leaders and biblical scholars have offered their solutions to these interpretive questions.[1]

In this article we will examine the interpretive history of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. An historical perspective on the interpretation of this text will help us move closer to resolving the apparent contradiction between 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Corinthians 14 and determine whether Paul intended for there to be gender based ministry boundaries when the church is gathered. After examining some of the key interpretive proposals historically, I will offer my own comments and reflections on this challenging interpretive issue.

The Apostolic Fathers

The early church fathers were familiar with the text found in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. They quoted and expounded it in their sermons. None of the church fathers I read made any comments regarding the authenticity of the text. It appears that the early church leaders sensed no need to question the Pauline authorship and authenticity of the text.

Tertullian (160-215)

Tertullian, the African apologist and theologian, recognized the validity of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and quotes the text to confirm the principle of a woman's silence and subjection in the church. The subject comes up not in a commentary or sermon, but in his discussion of the power of conferring baptism.[2] Tertullian recognizes that some of his day were appealing to the spurious *Acts of Paul and Thecla* as the basis for a woman's authority to teach and baptize. In this 2nd century manuscript, Thecla rather than Paul occupies center stage. She comes to faith while Paul is speaking in Iconium. Thecla is condemned to the fire, but rescued when a sudden cloudburst quenches the flames. Later in Antioch she is condemned to fight wild beasts, but there too is delivered. At this point she baptizes herself and continues with Paul in active ministry. Tertullian reports that the elder who authored this spurious work was removed from office although he had written the work "out of love for Paul."[3]

Tertullian suggests that the woman who has "usurped the power to teach" will likewise seek the authority to confer baptism. He quotes Paul's words in 1 Cor. 14:34-35 to make his final point. "Let them be silent," he [Paul] says, "and at home consult their own husbands." Tertullian makes no comment regarding the apparent contradiction between 1 Corinthians 14 and chapter 11, but he clearly regards the participation of women in teaching and the administration of sacraments as inappropriate.

Origen (185-254)

Origen, the Alexandrian theologian who later established a famous school in Caesarea, responds in his commentary on 1 Corinthians to the question of public ministry by prophetesses. Since Philip had four daughters who prophesied, "why can we not let our own prophetesses speak?"[4] Origen answers the question by making two points. First, if prophetesses have truly spoken from God, let them manifest "the signs of prophesy." Origen is probably thinking of miracles or fulfilled prophesy as proof of the gift of prophesy. Second, even if the daughters of Philip did prophesy, "they did not do so inside the church."[5]

Origen acknowledges the existence of Old Testament prophetesses like Deborah (Judges 4:4) and Huldah (2 Kings 22:14). But he comments that there is no indication that these prophetesses ever "corporately addressed the people in the way that Isaiah or Jeremiah did."[6] While one might dispute this latter comment, it is clear that Origen saw a distinction between the ministry of prophesy and the use of the gift in a public, corporate setting. Although Origen makes no comment regarding the matter of women "praying and prophesying" (1 Corinthians 11), his distinction between public and private ministry may have helped him resolve the apparent contradiction with chapter 14.

Apostolic Constitutions (2-4th century)

Eight books on church pastoral and liturgical practice constitute what is known as the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* or *Apostolic Constitutions*. They are attributed to Clement of Rome (90-100), but were compiled a century or two later.[7] These early records bring us right into the midst of the life of the early church. And it is very clear that the author affirmed the integrity of 1 Corinthians 14:34 and its relevance to church polity and practice.

The author declares, "We do not permit our women to teach in the church but only to pray and hear those that teach."[8] He proceeds to support this practice by appealing to the pattern of Jesus. While he sent the Twelve out for public ministry, He "did nowhere send out women to preach, although He did not want such."[9] He goes on to point out the many women who were associated with Jesus' ministry, none of whom were commissioned to preach in the churches. There seems to be a fairly consistent attitude being expressed by second and third century church leaders. Women may possess speaking gifts, but they are not to use such gifts in the gathered congregation.

John Chrysostom (344-407)

John, the "golden-mouthed" bishop of Constantinople provides plenty of commentary and discussion on the matter of gender based ministry boundaries. He preached a complete homily on the text of 1 Corinthians 14:34.[10] In setting the context for his exposition, Chrysostom notes that Paul had just addressed a disturbance which arose from tongues and prophesy. Those who speak in tongues should do so in turn, and they who prophesy should be silent when another begins. Next, Paul addresses "the disorder which arose from the women."

Chrysostom's homily makes it quite clear that silence is expected of women in the assembly. He points out that if those who have the gifts are not permitted to speak, even when moved by the Spirit, then certainly this would apply to "those women who prate idly and to no purpose." Chrysostom notes that Paul is "not simply exhorting here or giving counsel, but even laying his commands on them vehemently, by the recitation of an ancient law on that subject." Paul, taking the law along with him, thus "sews up their mouths."[11]

Raising the obvious question, Chrysostom queries, "And where does the law say this?" Chrysostom is the first of the church leaders whose comments on this subject are preserved for us. The text he directs us to is Genesis 3:16, "Yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (NASB). According to Chrysostom this text "not only enjoins on them silence, but silence too with fear." He argues that if they should so respect their husbands, how much more should this apply in the context of teachers, and fathers, and the general assembly of the church." In commenting on verse 35, Chrysostom points out that if the women are not even to ask any question in the church, "much more is their speaking at pleasure contrary to law."[12]

The Reformers

Regrettably, I am not able to provide a survey of the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 during the Middle Ages. However, I suspect that a survey through this period would not prove very fruitful. Throughout the Middle Ages interpretation was bound to church tradition and multiple meanings. Mickelsen remarks that throughout medieval times "there was no fresh, creative thinking about the Scriptures themselves."[13] And so we move on to the Reformers who recognized the Bible as the supreme and sole authority. Their emphasis on *sola scriptura* advanced the principles and practice of biblical exegesis, as well as a concern for the careful application of Scripture.

John Calvin (1509-1564)

The French Reformer, John Calvin, was a prolific commentator and expositor. In addition to his most important work, *The Institutes of Christian Religion* (1536), he wrote commentaries on 23 books of the Old Testament and all the New Testament except Revelation! Calvin addressed the role of women in ministry in his commentary on First Corinthians. Regarding 1 Corinthians 14:33, he writes, "Paul accordingly forbids them to speak in public, either by way of teaching or

prophesying."[14] Calvin acknowledges that situations may arise which call for women to speak. But he believes that Paul is confining his comments in First Corinthians to "what is fitting in a properly organized congregation."[15] Apparently Calvin believed that there were opportunities for women to minister publicly in contexts outside the meeting of the church. He does not specify in his commentary what opportunities these may be.

In his commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:34, Calvin notes the incompatibility of women exercising a teaching role when commanded to "be in subjection." He writes, ". . . the task of teaching is one that belongs to someone with oversight, and is for that reason inconsistent with being in subjection."[16] "How unsuitable," he declares, "it would be for a woman, who is in subjection to one of the members, to be in an authoritative position over the whole body! It is therefore an argument based on incompatibilities; because, if the woman is under subjection, she is therefore debarred from having authority to teach in public." Calvin interprets Paul to mean that teaching in the worship service of a properly organized congregation is out of keeping with the woman's role of being in subjection, for in teaching, she is "set over all the men."[17]

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Martin Luther, the German Reformer did not write a commentary on 1 Corinthians 14, but he did address the issue of women in ministry in his discussion of "infiltrating and clandestine preachers." Here Luther acknowledges that Paul did not permit women to preach. He writes, "But in the New Testament the Holy Spirit, speaking through St. Paul, ordained that women should be silent in the churches and assemblies [1 Cor. 14:34], ..."[18] Luther provides further discussion of this matter in his comments on 1 Timothy 2:11, a verse which Luther applies to the "public ministry, which occurs in the public assembly of the church." In this context he writes, "There a woman must be completely quiet, because she should remain a hearer and not become a teacher. She is not to be the spokesman among the people. She should refrain from teaching, from praying in public."[19] Luther makes it clear from these comments that he does not view the New Testament as granting women public office or authority. She may pray (1 Corinthians 11), but may not exercise this ministry in a public service of the church.

Luther makes no comment regarding "the law" (1 Cor. 14:35) as the basis for women's subjection in the church. But his comments on Genesis 3:16 also make it clear that Luther believed that the wife was under the "rule" of her husband and that "she is compelled to obey him by God's command."[20] Luther appeals to Titus 2:5 to demonstrate that the wife should stay at home, look after the affairs of her household, and not go beyond her most personal duties in the home.

Luther clearly regards the subjection of women as the result of judgment that came upon Eve and her female descendants at the fall (cf. Genesis 3:16). He writes, "If Eve had persisted in the truth she would not only not have been subjected to the rule of her husband, but she herself would also have been a partner in the rule which is now entirely the concern of males."[21] While they cannot perform the functions of men in terms of teaching and ruling, Luther acknowledges that in procreation, feeding and nurturing their offspring, "they are masters." They rule over their children, but not in the church.

Luther saw the submission of women as a punishment resulting from the fall rather than part of creation order resulting from God's design. However, the fact that Adam was created before Eve (Gen. 2:7, 1 Tim. 2:13), charged with keeping the garden (Gen. 2:15), and named Eve "woman" (Gen. 2:23) suggests that God intended Adam to exercise leadership and authority over Eve *before* the events of the fall. While the ability of women to submit to authority was no doubt aggravated by the fall (Gen. 3:16),[22] the basis for female submission has its roots in creation order rather than the tragic events of Genesis 3.

The Classic Commentators

John Wesley (1703-1791)

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, had a good deal to say about church polity and renewal.[23] Although he did not write a commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, his opinions are reflected in two letters written to his sister, Sally. In 1761 he wrote, "The Methodists do not allow of women preachers."[24] Later in 1769 he advised her, "Pray in private or public as much as you can. Even in public you may properly enough intermix short exhortations with prayer; but keep as far from what is called preaching as you can. Therefore never take a text; never speak a continued discourse, without some break, above four or five minutes."[25]

These brief remarks make it clear that Wesley must have understood 1 Corinthians 13:34-35 to have current application to public ministry by women. It is interesting that he did not prohibit women from speaking or praying in public, but limited their participation in such activity to "four or five minutes." Beyond such time period the ministry of a woman might sound too much like the ministry of a preacher—and that was not allowed! While Wesley had an opinion on this matter, his opinion does not appear as rigid as on matters of doctrine and morality. His comments to his sister make no appeal to Scripture as a basis for his counsel.

Charles Hodge (1797-1878)

Princeton educated Charles Hodge became an instructor at Princeton Seminary in 1820 and served most of his career there as a defender of orthodox Christianity and the verbal inspiration and infallibility of Scripture. Hodge begins his discussion on verse 34 by addressing an editing issue. He makes a good case for including the words, "as in all the

churches of the saints" (14:33) as connected with verse 34.[26]

In his commentary on verse 34, Hodge understands Paul as requiring the silence of women in "the public assemblies." He believes that Paul's prohibition against speaking refers to "public speaking, and especially in the church."[27] While he recognizes that women may receive and exercise the gift of prophesy (Acts 2:17, 21:9), he makes it clear that it is "the public exercise of the gift that is prohibited."[28] Hodge argues that there are rational and biblical grounds for the prohibition. As for the rational basis, Hodge writes that a woman teaching in public is contrary to the role of submission God has assigned her in relationship to the man. The biblical ground, says Hodge, is that God has made known His will in "the Law," the Old Testament. Although Hodge does not refer to a specific text, he remarks, "There, as well as in the New Testament, the doctrine that women should be in subjection is clearly revealed."[29]

While Hodge is quite restrictive with regard to women and their public ministry, his appreciation for the gifting and learning of women is seen in his comments on verse 35. He acknowledges that Paul is not repressing their "desire for knowledge" and that "facilities for its acquisition are not to be denied them."[30] They may learn all they need to know without taking a public teaching or preaching role.

In his commentary Hodge presents a classic and careful analysis of Paul's words and logic. He does not find 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 to be inconsistent with Paul's teaching presented elsewhere. Nor does he appear to see any difficulty in retaining these verses in the original Greek text.

Heinrich August Meyer (1800-1873)

The German clergyman and New Testament scholar, H. A. Meyer, shares with F.C. Baur the laurels for founding the modern critical approach to the New Testament. His chief contribution to scholarship was his internationally famous commentary series. In Meyer's discussion of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, he regards the text as an "appendix to the regulative section regarding the gifts of the Spirit (vv. 26-33)" which is directed "against the public speaking of women."[31]

He points out that the command, "let them subject themselves" (v. 34) excludes their speaking "in the assemblies" for this would constitute "an act of uncomplying independence" from the law.[32] As with many other commentators, Meyer interprets the νομος as referring to Genesis 3:16. One wishes for a more careful defense of this linking of νομος with Genesis 3:16. It is almost as if the commentators cannot think of any other possible text that may be preferable to the Genesis reference.

Frederic Godet (1812-1900)

F. L. Godet, the Swiss exegete, pastor, and New Testament professor defended orthodox Christianity against the growing theological liberalism in Europe during the 19th century. Godet is the first of the classic commentators to interact carefully with the textual problem of 1 Corinthians 13:34-35. He suggests that several Latin copyists transposed verses 34 and 35, putting them after verse 40 "in order thus to connect more directly the last words of v. 33 with v. 36.[33] According to Godet, the transposition of these verses to the end of verse 40 was intended to provide clarity by not breaking the flow of thought in between verse 33a and verse 36. He notes that the authenticity of these verses is guaranteed by the fact that no document rejects them.[34] Godet believes that the main point in verse 34 is that the women at Corinth should "behave like those of the saints in all the churches."[35]

He regards Paul's reference to the "law" as referring to Genesis 3:16 and suggests that the speaking of the woman in public is "in contradiction to the position assigned to her by the Divine will expressed in the law."[36] While the law said nothing regarding the participation of women in worship assemblies, "by determining the character of their life in general, it had, according to Paul's view, indirectly settled the question."[37]

Godet's attempt to reconcile Paul's words in chapter 11 with his prohibition against public speaking is interesting. He takes chapter 14 as referring to public "speaking in the Church . . . which has for its end to teach and edify."[38] But chapter 11's "prayer and prophesy" refers to the Spirit's influence by means of a sudden revelation. Thus a woman properly veiled may give utterance to a prayer or prophesy without Paul's objection. But in general, they are to keep silent. For it is improper for them to speak publicly and with the authority of a teacher in the church. It is clear that Godet saw some tension between Paul's instruction in chapter 11 and his remarks in chapter 14, but he seems uncertain as to how this might be best resolved.

Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer

Archibald Robertson, not to be confused with the Southern Baptist Professor of Greek Grammar, was a British churchman and scholar who served as Principal of King's College in London. Robertson and his colleague Alfred Plummer, who taught at University College in Durham, wrote a classic commentary on First Corinthians for the International Critical Commentary series in 1911. The authors reflect a high view of Scripture in the careful exegesis and commentary on the text.

Robertson and Plummer interpret 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 to teach that women are to keep silent in the public services of the church. They may join in the "Amen" (14:16), but are otherwise "not to be heard."[39] Regarding 1 Corinthians 11:5, the authors express uncertainty whether Paul contemplated the *possibility* of women prophesying "in exceptional cases" or whether his comments were hypothetical. They conclude that Paul forbids women the right of "teaching in public," a rule they

believe was "taken over from the synagogue and maintained in the primitive Church (1 Tim. 2:12)."[40]

Like other scholars before them, Robertson and Plummer suggest that Paul's comment regarding "the law" should be interpreted as a reference to "the primeval command" of Genesis 3:16. This is cross-referenced with Eph. 5:22. Robertson and Plummer note the case of Gaia Afrania, a contentious lady who insisted on pleading her own causes in court, and made such a nuisance of herself that an edict was made prohibiting women from pleading before the courts (c. 48 B.C.).

Regarding the asking of questions (v. 35), Robertson and Plummer point out that questions might be objections to what is preached or even contradictions. They can raise such questions with their own husbands at home, but not at church. The authors note the word αισχρον ("disgraceful") is a strong word, used of women being clipped or shorn (1 Cor. 11:6). They conclude, "It is really a scandalous thing for a woman to address the congregation or disturb it by speaking."[41]

While Robertson and Plummer consistently address the matters of textual criticism in their commentary, they raise no concern in their discussion regarding the authenticity of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.

The Modern Commentators

Until recent times, virtually all commentators regarded 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 as authentic and understood that the text prohibited women from engaging in public preaching or teaching at the meeting of the church. But a dramatic change comes with modern commentators who are compelled by the gender debates of today to give considerable attention to Paul's words regarding boundaries for women and their ministries. It is significant and revealing that most of the concerns regarding Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 have been raised by modern commentators.

Gordon Fee

Prominent among modern commentators is Gordon D. Fee whose thorough and well researched commentary makes a valuable addition to the New International Commentary series.[42] Fee recognizes no problem with the women of Corinth "praying and prophesying" so long as they follow Paul's instruction and are not ακατακαλυπτος ("uncovered"). He cites 1 Cor. 11:5 as "clear evidence that women participated in the worship and ministering gifts in the Christian communities."[43] One wonders if Fee is not leaning too hard on a text that is so full of questions and difficulties. The problem arises for Fee in 1 Corinthians 14:34 where Paul declares that the "women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak." While acknowledging that 1 Cor. 14:34-35 "are found in all known manuscripts,"[44] Fee pronounces these verses as "not authentic" and then proceeds to argue his case.[45]

First, he appeals to transcriptional improbability. It is noted that several manuscript witnesses in the Western text tradition transpose these verses to follow verse 40. Fee suggests that it is more likely that these verses were placed in the text in two different places than that they would have been deliberately transposed. He argues that one would be hard pressed to explain why a scribe would deliberately move the verses. But the appearance of the verse in the text would be easily explained, he suggests, as intended (1) to check a rising feminist movement, or (2) to reconcile 1 Corinthians 14 with 1 Timothy 2.[46]

Second, Fee appeals to intrinsic improbability. In his opinion, one can make better sense of the structure of Paul's argument "without these intruding verses."[47] Even if they were authentic they appear at best as an "afterthought to the present argument." He explains that these verses stand in obvious contradiction to 11:2-16 "where it is assumed without reproof that women pray and prophesy in the assembly."[48] Finally, he argues that material in these verses seems "quite foreign to Paul." The real problem in this regard is Paul's appeal to "the Law." Fee insists that nowhere else does Paul appeal to the Law in this way as "binding on Christian behavior." "More difficult yet," he adds, "is the fact that the Law does *not* say any such thing."[49] Perhaps this comment reflects a perceived weakness in the linking of the "law" with Genesis 3:16. But such a casual dismissal of the appeal to the "law" seems arrogant since Paul *does* appeal to the "law" elsewhere (Rom. 13:8-9, 1 Cor. 9:8, 14:21).

Although I appreciate Fee's efforts to find harmony between Paul's words in 1 Cor. 11 and the statements in 1 Cor. 14:34-35, I find his views subjective and contrary to the textual tradition of 1 Corinthians. His viewpoint certainly goes against the grain of all the scholars and commentators who preceded him. Perhaps he is plowing new ground and challenging traditional thinking. But there is a difference between refining exegesis and removing the texts from that which exegesis is derived. The latter leads us along a dangerous and risky path.

H. Wayne House

Wayne House has taken a more traditional approach in attempting to resolve the apparent conflict between 1 Corinthians 11 and 14:33b-35. He argues that the word "speak" (λαλεω) in 14:34 is a general prohibition which includes all forms of speech except divine utterances, which Paul allows (1 Cor. 11:2-16).[50] Women are not to speak in tongues, ask questions of their husbands, or judge the prophets. But when speaking under divine control, they are not expressing their own authority, but God's and would not be in violation of Paul's prohibition in 1 Corinthian 14:33b-36.[51] This view appears nearly identical to Godet's which allows women to pray and prophesy under the Spirit's influence, but otherwise to remain silent.[52]

The interpretation of House seems balanced and somewhat persuasive. But one wonders if λαλεω should be limited to certain kinds of speech. It is clear that the kind of speech Paul is discussing in 1 Corinthians 14 is that which is generated by the ministry of the Spirit, as the greater context makes clear (12:3,8,11,13). It seems that this context, rather than comments in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, should determine what kind of speech is prohibited.

Antoinette Clark Wire

In an excursus on 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, Wire advances the proposal that the text is a very early gloss or insertion probably on the original letter, by the author or amanuensis, or possibly by the first person to copy the letter. She argues that since no surviving manuscript lacks these words or puts them in a third place, "that all the manuscripts sharing the displacement stem from one archetype."[53] She concludes that the text we are familiar with today reflects Paul's authorship and the original placement of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.[54]

Wire suggests that 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is a concession by Paul, allowing women to speak with certain restrictions, but that his real aim in 1 Corinthians 14 is to silence the female prophets. She points out that Paul's arguments silencing women prophets are clear and logical. According to Wire, Paul claims strong sanctions "from God's nature and church practice against" women prophets speaking.[55] She explains that Paul's silencing of the women prophets is not merely a parenthetical discussion in chapter 14, but the "culmination of his regulations for spiritual speech."[56] Paul silences uninterpreted tongues, simultaneous prophesy and "all women in the churches."[57]

While Hays criticizes Wire for "an elaborate speculative reconstruction of the role of the women prophets at Corinth,"[58] her work on the text and its cultural context appears rather convincing. Whether or not the primary issue behind Paul's comment was the female prophets at Corinth, Wire allows the text to speak for itself. According to her understanding, Paul denies women the use of their spiritual speaking gifts in the church.

Richard B. Hays

In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Hays provides a brief excursus on 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 where he outlines the viewpoints and embraces the position that the text is a gloss inserted by someone who "sought to squelch women's public roles in the church."[59] He advises readers to recognize that the Bible is not a homogeneous or systematic body of teachings and that there are many points of internal tension. He invites us to make "theologically informed" judgments on these issues, recognizing that the gifts of the Spirit are given to all members of the church, men and women alike. Texts such as 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 "should not be allowed to override this vision."[60]

The viewpoint of Hays is not much different from Fee, but his commentary does reflect the direction Fee's approach may take us. If 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is a gloss to be rejected, then next on the list of offending texts is 1 Timothy 2:11-15. Are we to invite readers of Scripture to make their own judgments as to what is theologically correct, consistent and should be followed in terms of church polity and practice?

Wayne Grudem and D. A. Carson

Since Wayne Grudem and D. A. Carson share the same view, they will be treated together. Carson does an admirable job in addressing the text-critical question of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. He points out that these verses appear in "all known manuscripts, either in their present location, or, in the case of all Western witnesses, after verse 40."[61] He carefully refutes Fee's appeal to the transcriptional and intrinsic probabilities against including the text. There is no need to repeat Carson's arguments here, but his conclusion is worth noting. Carson remarks, "With all respect to a brother whose text-critical prowess is far greater than my own, his arguments in this case sound a bit like the application of a first-class mind to the defense of a remarkably weak position."[62]

Having assured his readers that the text under consideration is Pauline and authentic, Carson plows through a half dozen interpretations which he regards as unsatisfying: (1) the demand for silence is absolute; (2) there is a contradiction with chapter 11; (3) the subordination is to the order of worship, not men; (4) the subordination is based on Jewish Hellenistic tradition; (5) the call for silence is based on local doctrinal or cultural issues; (6) the verses in question are a Corinthian letter; (7) the restrictions apply to wives only.[63] Each of these viewpoints is carefully refuted in thorough Carsonian style.

Carson then presents a viewpoint "constrained by the context." He argues the viewpoint presented briefly by Hurley[64] and developed thoroughly by Grudem[65] that women may not participate in the evaluation of prophets. Grudem's contribution to our study arises out of his doctoral dissertation, "The Gift of Prophesy in 1 Corinthians."[66] After careful research on the New Testament words for "prophet" and "prophesy" Grudem concludes that New Testament "prophesy" is not "predicting the future" or "proclaiming a word from the Lord," but rather "telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind."[67] The New Testament prophets would report something that God had laid on their hearts or brought to their minds. Such prophecies would contain some things that are edifying and good. But there might be some things spoken by the prophet which may be inconsistent with other revelation or apostolic teaching. Hence, it is necessary for those listening to the prophets to evaluate and pass judgment on what has been spoken (cf. 1 Cor. 14:29). Grudem calls this process "sifting prophecies," sorting out the good from the bad, what should be embraced from what a

congregation should not accept.

With this background and understanding in mind, Grudem argues that while Paul allows women to prophesy in the church (1 Cor. 11:5), he forbids them to speak publicly during the evaluation or judging of prophecies (1 Cor. 14:34-35). Carson agrees that although women may participate in prophesying, "they may *not* participate in the oral weighing of such prophecies."[68] In defending this position, Carson argues that no other interpretation of these disputed verses "so neatly fits the flow of the argument."[69]

Grudem builds his case largely on the assumption that 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 teaches on matters concerning worship in the local church and that women may pray and prophesy in this context.[70] If this is true, then his argument is rather strong and convincing. But if 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 describes a situation other than that of public worship, as I will suggest later, then we may not be so convinced by his interpretation of 1 Cor. 14:34-35. Much hinges on the assumed, but not proven context of 1 Cor. 11:2-16.

Grudem makes a strong case for a contextual understanding of Paul's instructions that the women are to "keep silent" and not "to speak" (1 Cor. 14:34). He points out that the use of σιγαω ("be silent") in the New Testament "never implies a total, unrestricted silence of all kinds of speech at all times, but that the context always specifies a restriction on the kind of silence intended."[71] He presents numerous examples to show that σιγαω does not require total silence, but silence concerning a particular topic for a particular time (cf. Lk. 9:36, 18:39, Acts 12:17, 15:2,13, 21:14). He also cites examples to show how negative statements with verbs of speaking such as λαλεω have the same kind of topical or modal restriction which is usually supplied by the context (Matt. 13:34, Mk. 4:34, John 18:20, Rom. 15:18). Grudem's research indicates that the "silence" Paul calls for in 1 Cor. 14:34 should be defined within the immediate context of 1 Corinthians 14 where Paul is discussing the subjects of prophesy and speaking in tongues.

Both Grudem and Carson argue that the immediate context of Paul's command for the women to "keep silent" and not "to speak" is instruction concerning prophesy and the evaluation of prophets. Indeed, 14:29 does refer to the judging of prophets, but the comment is rather brief. Paul writes, "And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment." Nothing more is said about passing judgment in this context. Paul does not say that the judgment is to be expressed publicly. The immediate context goes on to refer to those who are given a prophetic revelation. One is to speak while the other prophets remain silent (14:30). Paul rules that the prophets are to do so "one by one" while the others listen and learn (14:31). There is no cause for interrupting each other since "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets" (14:32) and God is not [a God] of "confusion but of peace" (14:33). Reflecting on the case presented by these careful and highly respected scholars, I am yet to be convinced that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 connects "so neatly" with Paul's brief mention of evaluating prophets.

A major objection that has been raised against this interpretation is that it requires a much broader view of prophesy than is usually associated with the prophetic gift. Carson argues in reply that "prophesy" in the New Testament is an extraordinarily broad category, "extending all the way from the product of the pagan Muse (Titus 1:12) to the Old Testament canonical prophesy."[72] Grudem supports this view with thorough research from historical and biblical sources.[73] According to Grudem and Carson, prophesy in the New Testament is a Spirit-prompted utterance, but with no guarantee of divine authority in every detail. Hence, prophesy in the church was in need of evaluation. With all respect to these scholars, I wonder why the Holy Spirit had such a difficult time getting God's message across through the early church prophets when the pattern set forth in the Hebrew Bible gives every indication that biblical prophets spoke God's message with His authority. God was even able to use Balaam, a pagan diviner, to get His message through to His people. Yet Paul does write, "let others pass judgment" (14:29) and we wonder what he means. Could Paul merely be saying that not everyone who stands up to speak is a true "spokesperson" for God? Some speak by their own spirit rather than God's Spirit. So the Corinthians need to be *discerning*. They need to evaluate or discriminate (διακρινω) those who speak to determine whether they are prophets or pretenders. Paul does not say anything about speaking out publicly in the context of such evaluation or judgment.

Carson does advance our discussion and understanding of Paul's reference to "the law." He breaks with the traditional viewpoint in suggesting that Paul has in mind the "creation order" reflected in Genesis 2:20b-24 rather than Genesis 3:16.[74] He notes that this is the text Paul turns to on two other occasions when discussing the role of women (1 Corinthians 11:8-9, 2 Tim. 2:13). Paul understands from creation order that the woman is to be subject to the man. This would certainly apply in evaluating the prophecies of her husband or other men. But would it apply as well when other women spoke an utterance by the Spirit? Would the silence Paul calls for in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 prohibit women only in their evaluation of their husbands or other men? Could they participate in judging prophetesses? It does not seem that Paul's demand for silence would allow this. Yet the reasons given for silence (submission to male leadership according to the law) would not seem to apply in this case.

Anthony C. Thiselton

Students of First Corinthians will long be indebted to Anthony Thiselton for his monumental contribution to the New International Greek Testament Commentary series.[75] Thiselton is professor of Christian theology at the University of Nottingham, England and Canon Theologian of Leicester Cathedral. His treatment of First Corinthians brings into

consideration ancient as well as contemporary works.

Thiselton begins his discussion of 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 by considering the possibility that this text is a non-Pauline interpolation or a quote from the Corinthians. Both views he soundly rejects. He then begins a careful examination of Paul's use of certain "contextual terms" which appear in verses 34-35 *and* the immediate context. He focuses on four key words: "speaking," "silence," "order," and "churches."[76]

The prohibition against speaking (σιγαω, "to speak"), suggests Thiselton, means either to "stop speaking" in an absolute sense, or "to refrain from using a particular kind of speech, or speech in a presupposed context."[77] He argues for the latter view noting that verses 29-33 clearly concern a particular kind of speech, "prophetic speech." But then Thiselton reasons that "since 11:5 makes it clear that Paul approves of women using prophetic speech," the silence called for must refer to something else. He opts for the view which he attributes to Witherington[78] (also expounded by Carson and Grudem) that Paul forbids women from sitting in judgment over "prophetic speech" or asking questions under the guise of "sifting what has been said."[79] He suggests that "weighing the words of prophets" may have involved asking probing questions about their theology or lifestyle in public. This would be especially problematic if wives were cross-examining their own husbands.[80]

Thiselton points out that Paul's concern for "order" is reflected in the requirement for women's submission (υποτασσω), as the "law" (νομος) directs. He rejects the majority opinion that the "law" refers to Genesis 3:16 and argues that Paul has in mind "the patterns of order demonstrated in divine actions of creation" which are integral to the Pentateuch. Thiselton reminds us that God's work of transforming chaos into order, which is so evident in creation is a theme which runs throughout the scriptures.[81] Women, then are called to keep to their ordered place in keeping with the creation order revealed in the Pentateuch.

With regard to the "churches," Thiselton interacts briefly with the view that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 reflects a "more formal *church* setting than 11:2-16." He argues that this opinion is not easy to sustain since Paul goes on from his discussion of women "praying and prophesying" to a consideration of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17-33). We shall return to this possibility shortly.

While defending his viewpoints with impressive research and arguments, it appears to me that much of Thiselton's discussion on the "sifting" prophetic speech is built on hypothesis. While Paul does mention the concept of "judgment" in 14:29, he says nothing about how this is to be accomplished. The idea that the women at Corinth were out of order in cross-examining the prophets, possibly their husbands, is built on thin fabric. I also believe that he has too quickly dismissed the possibility that 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 might be related to a context other than the official and public meeting of the church.

Assessment and Proposal

It is helpful in doing exegesis to see how other good minds and godly people have interacted with the same text. Consulting other scholars may serve to correct, confirm or help modify our own conclusions. The historical survey of how 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 has been interpreted in the past has certainly helped clarify my own thinking. Before concluding this paper, I would like to offer a brief assessment and proposal.

The authenticity of the text has been challenged, debated and defended. I believe that the objections raised by Fee have been carefully and thoroughly answered by Carson and others. After a detailed and meticulous study of the textual variations and history, Niccum concludes, "No extant MS offers evidence for an original omission of 1 Cor. 14:34-35 . . . . No other reading has claim to being original other than that of preserving the traditional sequence of verses."[82] In light of these conclusions, I would urge evangelical scholars to embrace this text as authentically Pauline and wrestle with its meaning in context rather than taking the easier route of removing these verses as a later interpolation.

If it were not for Paul's remarks in 1 Cor. 11:2-16, the difficulty of interpreting 14:34-35 would be significantly reduced. The prickly issue is how Paul can seemingly approve "praying and prophesying" by women in chapter 11 and then silence them in chapter 14. A survey of the interpretations by theologians, biblical scholars, and church leaders indicates that most understood Paul as restricting the *public* ministry of women when the church was gathered in official assembly. Modern interpreters have tended to argue that since Paul seems to clearly endorse the involvement of women in prayer and prophesy, the restriction in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 must not be absolute, but limited to certain types of speech. Carson, Grudem and Thiselton have made a strong case for the view that Paul prohibits women from "sifting" or judging the prophets. This interpretation has much to commend it. The viewpoint is well reasoned and support for it may be drawn from the context of 14:29 where Paul mentions those who "pass judgment" on the prophets and 14:35 where he admonishes women to "ask their own husbands at home."

While this is a reasonable hypothesis in harmonizing Paul's comments in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, I wonder if it rests on too much speculation. Paul does not actually tell us anything about judging the prophets. The Greek word διακρινω means to "distinguish," "discriminate," or "discern."[83] While it can be used in the context of discussion and debate (Acts 11:2), self-judgment (1 Cor. 11:31) would certainly not require such verbal activity. Perhaps Paul is simply asking the believers at Corinth to be discerning with regard to what they hear. Not everyone who claims to be a prophet truly speaks for God! But being discerning does not require interrupting the church service to

express one's opinion. Paul forbids interruptions (14:27,30), including the raising of questions (14:35). The verbal judging or interrogation of prophets during the meeting of the church would seem to be inconsistent with the requirement that the service proceed in an orderly manner (14:40).

A viewpoint that is deserving of further consideration is the possibility that Paul was addressing two different situations in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14. Could Paul have been referring in 1 Cor. 11:2-16 to women "praying and prophesying" in contexts other than the meeting of the church? If so, is it possible that his restriction in 1 Cor. 14:34-35 applies only when the church is gathered in public assembly for the preaching of the Word and observing the ordinances of communion and baptism? It has been objected that 1 Corinthians 11 addresses the issue of communion, certainly a church event. But there is a clear transition between Paul's discussion of the head covering in 11:2-16 and his teaching regarding the Lord's Supper in 11:17-34. Only in the second section of chapter 11 does Paul mention the believers as coming together: "you come together" (11:17); "when you come together" (11:18); "when you meet together" (11:20); "when you come together" (11:33). Paul is clearly thinking of the *gathered* church in 11:17-34. But no such allusions appear in 11:2-16. One could make a strong case for the view that Paul is addressing two different contexts in chapter 11—the first where believers are gathered in small groups for prayer, and the second where the church is gathered for teaching, preaching and communion. The ministry boundaries for one situation may differ from that of the other.

Additional support for this interpretation has been contributed by Holmyard in his recent article.[84] He calls our attention to the disjunctive δε in 11:17 which often introduces a new subject, and τουτο ("this") which seems anticipatory, looking forward to Paul's discussion of the Lord's supper rather than back to the matter of head coverings. Holmyard does an excellent job in answering objections to distinguishing the settings in 1 Corinthians 11:2-26 and 11:17-34.[85] If Holmyard is correct in distinguishing two different settings in 1 Corinthians 11, this could have significant implications for our study of 14:34-35. Is it possible that Paul is giving a restriction on public speech in the church, a restriction which would not apply in the home or other informal group meetings? Paul does contrast the church and the home in 14:35 where he points out that it is permissible for women to ask questions in one place but not in the other. The possibility that Paul is addressing two different contexts in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 is worth pursuing.

The question of what Paul meant by "the law" is another subject of debate. Until modern commentators, most believed Paul had in mind Genesis 3:16. While this verse does speak of the "rule" of the husband, Thiselton's suggestion that Paul is arguing for female submission based on creation order (Genesis 1-2) has much to commend it. Certainly, Paul made such an appeal elsewhere (1 Cor. 11:8-9, 1 Tim. 2:13). There are examples in the Pentateuch where wives and daughters are placed under the authority of husbands and fathers. Numbers 30 rules that while the vow of an adult male is binding, the vow of an unmarried daughter may be overruled by her father (30:3-5), and the vow of a wife can be abrogated by her husband (30:6-8). That the husband or father has the authority to confirm or annul an oath made by a wife or daughter is evidence of his leadership in the home and that wife and daughter are under authority. Numbers 30 concludes, "These are the statutes which the LORD commanded Moses, as between a man and his wife, and as between a father and his daughter" (Num. 30:16). Paul may have had this and perhaps other creation order texts in mind (Genesis 1-2) when he wrote, "as the Law [i.e. the Torah] also says."

Every age brings new issues and concerns before the church which must be addressed biblically. The matter of female boundaries for ministry has been extensively explored and debated over the past decade. While some believe that we are closer to understanding the original intent of Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 than in earlier eras, this survey of past and present interpretations suggests that we need humility and careful attention to the text of Scripture itself in an ongoing pursuit of that worthy goal. ■

[1]M. D. Hooker, "Authority on Her Head: An Examination of 1 Cor. XI. 10," *New Testament Studies* 10 (1963-64) 410-16; James B. Hurley, "Did Paul Require Veils or the Silence of Women? A Consideration of 1 Cor. 11:2-6 and 1 Cor. 14:33b-36," *Westminster Theological Journal* 35 (1972-1973) 190-220; Harold R. Holmyard III, "Does 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Refer to Women Praying and Prophesying in Church," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154 (October-December 1997) 461-72.

[2] *On Baptism*, XVII; *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. III, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 677.

[3]Ibid., 677; *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia*, 1975 ed., s.v. "Acts of Paul," by R. McL. Wilson.

[4]*Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 4.74.6-16; *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, Vol., VII, ed. Gerald Bray (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999) 146.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid.

[7]The first seven books appear to be written in the second or third century, with the eighth book being dated at the end of the fourth or beginning of the fifth century. See "Introductory Notice," *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. VII (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 389.

[8]*Apostolic Constitutions*, Book III, section vi; *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. VII, 427.

[9]Ibid.

[10]*Homily* XXXVII; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. XII, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 222-225.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid.

[13]A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids:

Eerdmans Publishing Co.) 36.
[14]John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, trans. John W. Fraser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960) 306.
[15]Ibid.
[16]Ibid.
[17]Ibid., 307.
[18]Martin Luther, *Church and Ministry II*, ed. Conrad Bergendoff (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958) 390.
[19]Martin Luther, *Lectures on 1 Timothy*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House) 276.
[20]Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1-5*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis, Concordia Publishing Company, 1958) 202.
[21]Ibid., 203.
[22]Susan T. Foh, "What is The Woman's Desire?" *Westminster Theological Journal* 37 (Spring, 1975) 376-83.
[23]See Howard A. Snyder's *The Radical Wesley & Patterns for Church Renewal* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1980) 67-165.
[24]John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley* Vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1872) 353.
[25]Ibid., 355.
[26]Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1857) 304. First, he points out that verse 33 has an appropriate conclusion in the words, "God is not a God of confusion but of peace." Second, he argues that the words, "as in all the churches of the saints," if connected to verse 33, do not make good sense. The undeniable truth of verse 33 needs no appeal to the authority or experience of the churches. Third, if connected with verse 34, this text is parallel to 11:16 where Paul discusses the conduct of women and appeals to the custom of the churches as authoritative.
[27]Ibid., 305.
[28]Ibid.
[29]Ibid.
[30]Ibid.
[31]H. A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1884) 333.
[32]Ibid.
[33]F. Godet, *Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957) 309.
[34]Ibid.
[35]Ibid., 310.
[36]Ibid., 311.
[37]Ibid.
[38]Ibid., 313.
[39]A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911) 324.
[40]Ibid., 325.
[41]Ibid., 326.
[42]Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).
[43]Ibid., 508, n. 67.
[44]Ibid., 699. The verses are included in the major uncial manuscripts, including Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus, and Codex Alexandrinus, Ephraemi Rescriptus.
[45]Ibid., 697.
[46]Ibid., 699, n. 6
[47]Ibid., 701. Fee acknowledges in footnote 12 that this can be a "more subjective criterion," and I would certainly agree.
[48]Ibid., 702.
[49]Ibid., 707.
[50]H. Wayne House, "The Speaking of Women and the Prohibition of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 (July-September 1988) 310.
[51]Ibid.
[52]Godet, *Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 313.
[53]Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) 149-58.
[54]Ibid., 152-53.
[55]Ibid., 154.
[56]Ibid., 156.
[57]Ibid., 159.
[58]Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 247.
[59]Ibid., 248.
[60]Ibid., 249.
[61]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*, eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991) 141.
[62]Ibid., 145.
[63]Ibid., 145-151.
[64]James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 188-193.
[65]Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophesy in 1 Corinthians* (Washington: University Press of America, 1982) 245-255.
[66]A popular summary of Grudem's research appears in his article, "Why Christians Can Still Prophesy," *Christianity Today* (September 16, 1988): 29-35.
[67]Ibid., 29.
[68]Carson, "Silent in the Churches," 151.
[69]Ibid., 152.
[70]Grudem, *The Gift of prophesy in 1 Corinthians*, 72-73, 240.
[71]Ibid., 242.
[72]Ibid., 153. Carson develops this further in his book *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 91-100.
[73]Grudem, *The Gift of Prophesy in 1 Corinthians*, 21-33, 181-219.
[74]Carson, "Silent in the Churches," 152.
[75]Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).
[76]Ibid., 1152-1156.
[77]Ibid., 1152.
[78]B. Witherington, "Women in the Earliest Churches," *Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series* 59 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 90-104.
[79]Ibid., 1153.
[80]Ibid., 1158.
[81]Ibid., 1154.
[82]C. Niccum, "The Voice of the Manuscripts on the Silence of Women: The External Evidence for 1 Cor. 14:34-35," *New Testament Studies* 43 (1997) 254-55.
[83]G. Abbot-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1968), s.v. diakrinw, 108.
[84]Harold R. Holmyard III, "Does 1 Corinthians 11:2-26 Refer to Women Praying and Prophesying in Church?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154 (October-December 1997) 461-72.
[85]Ibid., 465-472.