

**First Epistle to the Corinthians**

**26 – Essay Four: Women and Men in Church (4.6, 4.7) – Keeping Silent in Worship?**

*1 Corinthians 14:26-14:40*

1. Outlines

a. *ESV Study Bible*

- i. Divisions over Corporate Worship (11:2–14:40)
  - 1. Head coverings and worship (11:2–16)
  - 2. Social snobbery at the Lord’s Table (11:17–34)
  - 3. Elevating one spiritual gift above others (12:1–14:40)

b. *Reading the New Testament Series*

- i. Problems in Corporate Worship (11:2-14:40)
  - 1. Prayer and Prophecy (11:2-16) – Different Though Equal in the Lord
  - 2. The Lord’s Supper (11:17-34) – Social Significance of the Supper
  - 3. Prayer and Prophecy (12:1-14:40) – Regulation, Not Suppression of Spiritual Gifts

c. *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle*

- i. In Response to the Corinthian Letter (7:1-16:12)
  - 1. Marriage and Related Matters (7:1-40)
  - 2. Food Sacrificed to Idols (8:1-11:1)
  - 3. Women (and Men) in Worship (11:2-16)
  - 4. Abuse of the Lord’s Supper (11:17-34)
  - 5. Spiritual Gifts and Spiritual People (12:1-14:40)

d. Bailey<sup>1</sup>

- i. Worship: Men and Women in the Church (11:2-14:40)
  - 1. Men and Women Leading in Worship (11:2-16)
  - 2. Order in Worship: Sacrament (11:17-34)
  - 3. Gifts and the Nature of the Body (12:1-30)
  - 4. The Hymn to Love (12:31-14:1)
  - 5. Spiritual Gifts and the Upbuilding of the Body (14:1-25)
  - 6. Order in Worship: Word (14:26-33)
  - 7. Women and Men Worshipping (14:33-40)

Table 1: Bailey, locations 4802, 4854, 4954

| <b>1 Corinthians 14:26-40 (ESV)</b> |   |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>A</b>                            | <p>26 What then, brothers [<i>and sisters</i>]? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">27 If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">28 But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them <u>keep silent</u> in church and speak to himself and to God.</p> | <p>Order – For building up</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Tongue?<br/>Two or three</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Silence</p> |

<sup>1</sup> Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians*, loc. 3428.

|          |  |  |
|----------|--|--|
|          | <p>29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.</p> <p>30 If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first <u>be silent</u>. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, 32 and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.</p> <p>33 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints...</p>   | <p>Prophets?<br/>Two or three</p> <p>Silence</p> <p>Order – as in all the churches</p>   |
| <b>B</b> | <p>33 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints,</p> <p>34 the women [wives] should <u>keep silent</u> in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law [Torah] also says.</p> <p>35 If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home.</p> <p>For it is shameful for a woman to speak [wife to chat] in church.</p> <p>36 Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached?</p> | <p>Order – as in all the churches</p> <p>Wives – no chatting during worship</p> <p>Questions at home</p> <p>Wives – no chatting during worship</p> <p>Order – as in all the churches</p> |
| <b>C</b> | <p>37 If anyone thinks that he is a prophet [chap 11], or spiritual [chap 12],</p> <p>he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. [chap 13] 38 If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.</p> <p>39 So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy [14:1-12], and do not forbid speaking in tongues [14:13-25].</p> <p>40 But all things should be done decently and in order [14:26-33].</p>  | <p>Prophecy<br/>Gifts</p> <p>Command to love</p> <p>Gifts – prophecy and tongues</p> <p>All things done in order</p>   |

## 2. Rhetoric

### a. Tongues and Prophecies

- i. Interpretation and evaluation
- ii. Silence if no interpreter. Speaker to give floor (be silent) to new revelation.
- iii. For the purpose of building up the church
- iv. Maintain decent order during worship **so all can hear and learn (exercise love)**

1. This, I believe, is the crux to interpreting this final part of Essay Four

### b. Wives

- i. Maintain decent order during worship **so all can hear and learn (exercise love)**
- ii. Wives should not interrupt
- iii. Wives should ask questions at home

- c. Summary of Essay Four
  - i. All spiritual gifts are given for the building up of the church
  - ii. Love for one another is shown through the proper exercise of spiritual gifts
  - iii. All spiritual gifts are valuable and necessary – desire them
  - iv. Public worship should be done decently and in proper order
- 3. Additional preliminary observations
  - a. The essay opened with women and men leading public worship
  - b. This section's concern is with men and women as worshippers (congregation)
  - c. Recall: center of essay dealt with love as the vessel in which all activity takes place
  - d. The central concern for Paul is that worship must always lead to building up the entire community – nothing there should create or highlight existing factions and divisions
- 4. Section A – Tongues and Prophecies in Worship – 14:26-33
  - a. Not specifying order of worship, but an *ad hoc* example of elements that is part of public worship: hymn, lesson (reading, teaching), revelation (prophecy), tongue, interpretation
    - i. The primary purpose of worship is the building up of the church community
  - b. Tongues
    - i. Not all at once – as may have been typical in pagan ecstatic worship
    - ii. Two or three, each in turn, followed by interpretation
      - 1. “At most” – infers that tongues should be a minor part of worship
    - iii. If no interpretation, worship should not include the use of tongues
      - 1. Keep silent
  - c. Prophecy
    - i. Two or three at a time, in turn, followed by evaluation of what was spoken
    - ii. Revelation may come upon those who are seated and listening
    - iii. Give opportunity for all who receive revelations to speak
      - 1. I.e., unlike tongues, there is no limit to the number of individuals who may prophesy – just make sure it is done two or three at a time so that the evaluation may effectively take place
      - 2. The one speaking needs to hurry up and end his revelatory speech (be silent) if someone else signals she or he has a revelation
    - iv. The role of prophecy: teaching and encouragement for the church
  - d. God is a God of peace: *shalom*, harmony
    - i. This is the practice in all of God's churches
    - ii. Worship should be harmonious. It should not be marked by discord or turmoil.
    - iii. But notice – there is nowhere in this passage or the entire essay where Paul establishes enforcement of order. He does not set up hierarchy or authority to maintain order. He believes it will naturally arise when the church acts in love.

What is striking in this entire discussion is the absence of any mention of leadership or of anyone who would be responsible for seeing that these guidelines were generally adhered to. The community appears to be left to itself and the Holy Spirit. What is mandatory is that everything aim at edification.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle, 1 Cor. 14:26.*

Now Paul is arguing that the basis of all these instructions is ultimately theological. It has to do with the character of God, probably vis-à-vis the deities of the cults, whose worship was characterized by frenzy and disorder. The theological point is crucial: the character of one's deity is reflected in the character of one's worship.<sup>3</sup>

5. Section B – Wives in public worship – 14:33-36
- a. Verse 33 is a “hinge” verse – it goes both ways
    - i. This sets up the reason for Paul’s admonition that follows
    - ii. Something about the wives speaking during worship is disrupting harmony and contributing to turmoil and confusion
    - iii. The question for us is, what was going on?
    - iv. Paul has already made it clear that women are certainly allowed to speak during and to lead public worship – so why this sudden turn here?
  - b. Four hypotheses<sup>4</sup>
    - i. Literal reading: Paul really did forbid wives (and possibly women) to speak out during worship. Problem: it goes against what he already wrote (ch. 11)
    - ii. Scribal gloss: Later scribes and redactors added vv.34-35 as additional commentary, possibly based on what he wrote in Ephesians, 1 Timothy, and Titus (Pauline authorship of these epistles are disputed); or they are genuine Pauline words moved to this position by redactors. Problem: it deals with the difficulty by ignoring it.
    - iii. Corinthian assertion: vv.34-35 are Corinthian assertions that Paul quotes to refute them. Problem: there is little textual evidence to support this hypothesis.
    - iv. Historical-cultural reason: There were historical and cultural reasons behind Paul’s instructions of vv.34-35.
      1. Many scholars believe the reasons are mostly lost
      2. Nevertheless, this instruction is not a general principle to be applied across all times, places, and peoples – it is specific to the Corinthian church at that time
  - c. Ken Bailey describes his personal experience in the Middle East in Chapter 4.7, “Women and Men Worshipping: No Chatting in Church”<sup>5</sup>. His reasoning, broadly, is as follows:
    - i. Joel 2:28-32 specifies both women and men will prophesy, and social order will be disrupted as well
    - ii. Jesus had women disciples
    - iii. 1 Timothy 5:1-2’s “older men” and “older women” is more appropriately translated “male elders” [*presbytero*] and “women elders” [*presbyteras*]
    - iv. Is Paul really reversing all Christian traditions by writing against women speaking/leading in worship by his words of 1 Cor. 14:34-35?
    - v. Paul is correcting some kind of an error. To take the correction as a definitive, universal statement is in itself a serious error.
    - vi. The Corinthian church was perhaps the most diverse in composition – including those fluent in Greek and those with just enough to get by

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<sup>3</sup> NICNT, 1 Cor. 14:33.

<sup>4</sup> *Understanding the Bible Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, “§43 Women and Order at Worship (1 Cor 14:33 b–36)”.

<sup>5</sup> Bailey, location 4842ff.

- vii. Some of those speaking during worship may have had strong accents of a non-native Greek speaker – making understanding difficult for some hearers – thus they might inquire amongst themselves what they were hearing
  - viii. Due to their cultural upbringing, women were handicapped with a very short attention span, as short as fifteen seconds
    - ix. When they were not being directly addressed and/or didn't understand what was being said, they would quickly begin chatting amongst themselves
    - x. Men and women *may* have sat separately. If this was the case, wives may have shouted across the divide to their husbands to ask them to explain<sup>6</sup>
    - xi. Therefore, the wives are instructed to respect the others in worship and remain silent and ask questions once at home
    - xii. In a predominantly oral culture, as soon as the speaker pauses the audience begins discussing the subject amongst themselves. It is particularly prominent in women's gatherings. It is their way of learning and retaining information.
    - xiii. Paul's instruction is not that women should stop participating, speaking, and leading worship. Paul's instruction is that they should keep quiet so that everyone is afforded the opportunity to hear what the speaker is saying.
  - d. Shame – not wrong or immoral or bad – just “improper”
6. Section C – Closing Comments – 14:37-40
- a. Paul touches on highlights from the beginning of Essay Four
  - b. The center is “a command of the Lord”<sup>7</sup>
    - i. This should not be seen as referring to the immediate antecedent – i.e., wives/women should remain silent
    - ii. It must be seen in its rhetorical context – it is pointing to chapter 13, the command to love
  - c. Paul's key point of Essay Four is that everything in public worship must be done with love and respect toward one another for the purpose of encouraging and building up the community. Anything that leads to division and/or highlights existing differences must be left outside the church.

On the one hand, the Corinthian spirituals contended that some gifts were better than others; indicated that they wanted the higher gifts; took the position that tongues were a sign for unbelievers, prophecy for believers; and held that women should not occupy a leadership role in Christian worship. On the other hand, the apostle argued that there are a variety of gifts and that each one makes its own contribution to the common good; showed love to be the indispensable motivation for the manifesting of any gift; insisted that understandable speech is mandatory in corporate worship for both believer and unbeliever; and stood firm for the principle that Christian corporate worship is not a male-dominated enterprise.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> C.f., *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 1 Cor. 14:33b-35.

<sup>7</sup> Bailey, location 4960.

<sup>8</sup> *Reading the New Testament: Reading Corinthians*, 1 Cor. 14:20-36, “Conclusion”.