



Let the women be silent

A non-Mormon scholar argues that Paul's advice was misunderstood

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I Corinthians 14:34-36 is a problem text, an embarrassment to liberal and conservative alike. It is no surprise that few feminists applaud the command to silence women, but the demand for total silence outdoes even the most militant traditionalists as well. Those who invoke the command themselves only obey it in part, and thereby invite others to reject it altogether. As a weapon in the war of the sexes, I Corinthians 14 usually backfires. No doubt it would be ignored completely—banished to the land of difficult passages—were it not central to any discussion of women in the church. The growing concern over women's roles highlights the need for a new interpretation, one which can be believed and put into practice.

Observations on the Text

Before proceeding to the various interpretations of I Corinthians 14:34-36, let us review the text itself and draw attention to its key words and concepts.

"The women should keep silence in the churches." The phrase "should keep silence" is a translation of the Greek verb *sigao*, which in its nine New Testament occurrences always denotes complete silence, rather than mere quietness (Luke 9:36; 20:26; Acts 12:17; 15:12, 13; Romans 16:25; I Cor. 14:28, 30, 34). Indeed, the same word appears two other times in the fourteenth chapter of I Corinthians and both times means true silence.

"For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate." "To speak" presumably refers to asking questions, speaking in tongues, praying, or prophesying. The Greek verb *laleo*, here translated "to speak," denotes normal conversation as well as formal speaking. Moreover, verse 35 explicitly states that even asking

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questions is prohibited. The ban thus applies to all forms of speech in church, not merely to giving sermons or directing services.

"... as even the law says." This allusion to the law is very puzzling, for nowhere in the Old Testament are women denied the right to speak in religious assembly. On the other hand, rabbinic oral law, which reflected the Jewish customs of Paul's day, did explicitly silence women in the synagogues.

"If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home." When rabbis taught in a synagogue or at the Temple, it was both normal and proper for the listeners to ask questions and interject comments. The statement above denies women the right to participate in this standard give and take learning process. If a woman desires clarification or has something to contribute, she must wait until she has returned home, and there, in private, may speak to her husband. It follows that a woman who is unmarried, widowed, or married to an unbeliever lacks even this indirect means of expression (although, perhaps, she may speak through other male relatives such as a father, brother, or son).

"For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church." The prohibitions in verses 34 and 35 are reinforced with a very strong word (*aiskron*, here translated as "shameful," and appearing also in I Cor. 11:6, Eph. 5:12, and Titus 1:11). The author seems to regard the very sound of a woman's voice in church as a sin against God and a crime against nature.

"What! Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached?" The exclamation combines anger and disbelief. Paul appears to be accusing his readers of taking the word of God into their own hands. It is not altogether clear, however, just what or whom he is attacking.

The Traditional Interpretation

Traditionally, Christians have interpreted I Corinthians 14:34-36 as a scathing attack on anyone who dared permit women to pray, prophesy, or ask questions in public. Allowing a woman to say anything in church was so obviously inexcusable that the apostle Paul dismissed the practice in a mere five sentences, saying: (1) Women are to maintain total silence in church (as is the custom everywhere). (2) This ruling is supported by God's law (i.e., the Old Testament scriptures). (3) If women must express themselves, it should only be in private and through their husbands. (4) Anything more is a "shameful" violation of tradition, tantamount to rewriting God's word. The final verses of the chapter possibly extend this argument by emphasizing Paul's apostolic authority but more likely return to and conclude the discussion of spiritual gifts which comprises most of chapters 12 through 14. Thus, verses 34-36 are seen as Paul's stern response to a flagrant and infuriating heresy.

It should be no surprise that this interpretation has been used to drastically limit the ministries of Christian women and to justify all manner of sex discrimination in Christian churches. Despite its longstanding popularity, however, the traditional interpretation is flawed and untenable. It is loaded with inconsistencies and contradictions.

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Problems of Context

The command to silence women appears as a new and unrelated topic in an otherwise unbroken exposition on the gifts and life of the Christian body, beginning in chapter 12 and extending through chapter 14. The transitions both to and from the topic are so abrupt that several commentators conclude that verses 34-36 were inserted by an overly zealous scribe, and even the proponents of the traditional interpretation concede that Paul must have added these verses as a parenthetical afterthought, since a better place for them would have been together with his earlier discussion of women in chapter 11.

Problems of Authority

Verses 34 and 35 demand silence as a matter of obedience to the law: "The women . . . are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says." Now, Paul never referred to non-biblical writings, or traditions, or personal opinions as "the law." Instead, he either used the term abstractly, to denote God's old Covenant with Israel², or concretely, to refer to specific Old Testament passages. (See, for example, verse 21,

where "the law" refers to Isaiah 28:11-12.) But verses 34 and 35 violate this pattern, for although Jewish tradition and rabbinic oral law required women to remain silent during religious services, the Old Testament clearly did not. Apart from Paul's own writings, not one verse in all the Bible suggests that "the women should keep silence in the churches." It follows that the command to keep silence either (1) was based on a misinterpretation of scripture, or (2) was derived from Jewish customs and rabbinic sayings.

Since neither of these alternatives enhances the apostle's image, scholars have often suggested that "the law" was an allusion to Genesis 3:16. But Genesis 3:16 says nothing about silence, concerns marital relationships rather than sex roles in general, and in any case is a curse, not a commandment.³

To the woman he [God] said, "I will greatly multiply thy pains and thy groanings; in pain thou shalt bring forth children, yet thou art turning to thy husband and he will rule over thee." (Septuagint Version.)⁴

It is true that Jewish rabbis often reworked this statement into elaborate proofs of woman's inferiority, and Saul the Pharisee was probably familiar with such stories; but it is hard to believe that Paul the Apostle would have based his teachings on speculative legends concerning "the ten curses of Eve."⁵ Otherwise, one is forced to accept Barclay's conclusion that "Paul, in his conception of the place of women within the church, was unable to rise above the [rabbinic] ideas which he had known all his life."⁶ In short, the unsubstantiated reference to "the law" is totally uncharacteristic of Paul.

Problems of Consistency

Nowhere else in his epistle to the Corinthians does Paul indicate that women ought to remain silent. On the contrary, his statements in chapter 11 clearly imply that they may both pray and prophesy in public:

Any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonors her head . . . Judge for yourselves; is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? (I Cor. 11:5, 13.)

Now, it would have been senseless for Paul to encourage women to wear veils while prophesying, if at the same time he was insisting that they not even speak. Following the traditional interpretation one must surely conclude that the real offense in Corinth was not that women were prophesying *unveiled*, but that they were prophesying *at all!* This contradiction is especially striking given the proximity of the two statements; scarcely an hour of dictation could have separated 11:5 from 14:34. It would appear that the apostle either deliberately contradicted himself or else was blind to the obvious inconsistency of his statements.

Some commentators seek to resolve this dilemma by suggesting that Paul had difficulty making up his mind about women, that he initially allowed them to pray and prophesy and then later decided to silence them. But the language of 14:34-36 is not the least bit indecisive—its author claims to stand firmly on the word of God, and the length and language of the discussion in chapter 11 indicate a position that is no less strong or carefully considered. Moreover, if Paul had decided to reverse his original position, he would have explained his reasons or

would have removed his original statements; he certainly would not have rebuked the Corinthians for believing what he himself had advocated just hours before!

The command to silence women also contradicts the general spirit of Paul's epistle. Chapters 12 through 14 repeatedly emphasize that the church is an organic unity, a body in which each member is indispensable and none may be excluded:

For by one Spirit we were *all* baptised into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and *all* were made to drink of one Spirit. . . . there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable. (1 Cor. 12:13, 20-22.)

The traditional interpretation implies that after claiming "We are all baptised into one body . . . [so that] the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,'" Paul proceeded with an apostolic wave of his hand to tell his

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Christian sisters, "I have no need of you." Yet in chapter 14 itself, Paul repeatedly stressed that the church is most effective when "all" participate in its services:

Now I want you *all* to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy (14:5).

If *all* prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by *all*, he is called to account by *all*, . . . (14:24).

For you can *all* prophesy one by one, so that *all* may learn and *all* be encouraged. . . (14:31).

Verse 26 demonstrates that the group may participate in instruction and hymn singing as well as tongues and prophecy:

When you come together, *each one* has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation (14:26).

And Paul concluded his argument with a plea to let the gifts flow freely:

So my brethren, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues, . . . (14:40).

According to the traditional interpretation, Paul broke off this extended sermon on church unity, in four sentences disenfranchised half the congregation from ever contributing a word in public, and never saw a contradiction. In other words, he really had meant:

Now I want all you [men] to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy.

If all [the men] prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider

enters, he is convicted by all [the men], he is called to account by all [the men].

For you [men] can all prophesy one by one. . .

When you come together, each one [man] has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.

So, my [male] brethren, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid [the men] speaking in tongues, [but do forbid the women].

If this is indeed what Paul meant, then he must never even have considered women a part of the "all" that comprised the congregation, and when he wrote, "we are all baptised into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all made to drink of one Spirit" he must have excluded women as a matter of course. To accuse the apostle of such blind and irrational prejudice is both distasteful and unreasonable. After all, it was Paul himself who in Galatians 3 boldly claimed that the church transcends all boundaries of nationality, social status, and sex.⁸

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are *all* one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:27-28.)

Problems of Application

According to the traditional interpretation, Paul silenced women as a matter of obedience to divine law. His statements in I Corinthians merely reiterated what had always been the standard procedure ordained by God. But, in fact, there is not one trace of scriptural evidence that silence ever was standard. Not only does the Bible not require it, it actually records numerous examples of the very opposite! We have already seen that Paul himself implicitly permitted women to pray and prophesy in public, and explicitly encouraged "all" to prophesy and contribute "a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation" when they assembled together. Many other scriptures also affirm the right of women to speak in public and in the presence of men. Huldah instructed Israel's most powerful leaders concerning the law of Moses (II Kings 22:14-20). The prophetess Deborah used to sit under a palm tree "in the hill country of Ephraim; and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment" (Judges 4:4-5). Miriam, Noadiah, and Isaiah's wife are also described as prophetesses. In the New Testament, Luke records Mary's prophetic song (Luke 1:46-55) and mentions that Phillip had four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:8-9). He also tells of Priscilla, who with her husband Aquila instructed the great preacher and evangelist Apollos concerning the Holy Spirit (Acts 18:24-26). One might quibble as to whether these women actually spoke "in church" (although, clearly, this is quibbling, since the New Testament always speaks of "the church" as the group of believers rather than the place where they meet or the services they attend) but in at least two cases even this objection fails. The first occurred when Mary and Joseph took the baby Jesus to the temple to be circumcised, and there in the temple a prophetess named Anna "spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem" (Luke 2:36-38). The second was at Pentacost when the believers "were *all* together in one place. . . and

they were *all* filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues . . . telling the mighty works of God" (Acts 2:1-4, 11).

If the traditional interpretation is hard to reconcile with the actual ministries of women in the Bible, it is even harder to reconcile with the activities of women today. Rhetoric notwithstanding, nobody really accepts the demands of I Corinthians 14:34-35. People cling to the traditional interpretation not because they believe it (the demand for total silence outdoes even the most uncompromising traditionalist) but rather because it helps to justify traditional sex roles and male dominance in the church.

Consider the most militant supporters of the traditional interpretation. Typically they are fundamentalists who steadfastly affirm that "the Bible must be taken literally." Yet, in practice they refuse to apply their own standards of interpretation to the passage. While insisting that Paul decreed total silence, they themselves use the text only to limit certain forms of speech in certain situations. They introduce numerous distinctions that have nothing to do with Corinthians 14.

For example, in many churches a woman may pray or testify from a pew but not from the pulpit, whereas she may sing or read from either location. In many she may teach children and teenagers, but only until they grow up. Among adults she is permitted to comment and ask questions but not to "lead"—that is, unless no adult males are present, in which case she again becomes qualified to teach. In some churches a woman may lead "discussions" but not "studies"; in others she may lead Bible studies but only in the presence of a male "co-director"; and in still others she may "teach" but not "preach."

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If there is biblical basis to any of these distinctions it certainly is not I Corinthians, and any attempt to rationalize such regulations with appeals to it rests solely on sophistry and prejudice. Apart from private conversations with one's husband, the Corinthian demand for silence knows no exceptions. Many will object that requiring women to be truly silent in church is carrying things too far, but that is just the point. If the interpretation leads to conclusions that are absurd and unchristian, then the appropriate response is not to gloss over that fact but to question the interpretation in the light of it. The fundamentalist must endure the logic of his position. He must either totally silence women or

else abandon the traditional interpretation and until he has found an acceptable alternative refuse to apply the passage at all. He is not free simply to pick and choose; he cannot require others to accept "the law" that he himself only obeys in part. Otherwise he engages in the kind of hypocrisy that Paul denounced in Romans 2:1-3.

Therefore you have no excuse, O man, whoever you are, when you judge another; for in passing judgment upon him you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. . . . Do you suppose, O man, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God?

Conclusion

What can be said for the traditional interpretation? Very little. Had it not been so useful for keeping women in "their place" it would have died out long ago. It implies that in I Corinthians 14:34-36 Paul made a series of statements which were out of context, out of character, unsubstantiated, inconsistent with the rest of his epistle, contradicted by the actual ministries of women in the Bible, and impossible to apply to today's churches. Perhaps any one of these problems could be dismissed or ignored if it stood alone, but together they leave us no rational alternative but to reject the traditional interpretation and search for a more reasonable explanation.

Alternative Interpretations

Finding an acceptable alternative to the traditional interpretation is easier said than done. The standard suggestions rely on tenuous assumptions and often create more problems than they solve.

As already indicated, it is difficult to defend the contention that Paul never intended to literally "silence" women, only to keep them quiet and submissive. The passage in fact demands "silence," using a Greek word which denotes complete silence and applies not only to sermons and prophecy but also to ordinary conversations.

What about the theory that Paul meant only to silence the women in Corinth, that verses 34-36 applied to a special problem unique to the Corinthian church?⁹ In a sense this solves the problems of application, but the problems of context, authority, and consistency still remain. (Why does the command appear in chapter 14? What is "the law?" Why require "silence" after permitting prayer and prophecy in chapter 11?) Moreover, there is not the slightest indication that Paul was discussing a special case. On the contrary, the language and logic of the passage are universal. "The law" should apply equally to all, and indeed the command is directed toward "the churches," not just the one in Corinth.

Some commentators have suggested that Paul did not write verses 34-36, that they were added as a marginal note in a time when male dominance was thought more important than the freedom of the Spirit and were accidentally incorporated into the main text by some overly zealous copyist anxious to keep women in their place. But this is pure speculation, an unsubstantiated theory that solves problems only by ignoring them. The textual evidence all points toward the authenticity of verses 34-36; they appear in every existing manuscript of the epistle, and there are not even significant

variations in wording among them.¹⁰ Challenging the authenticity of verses 34-36 is a desperation tactic that substitutes wishful thinking for scholarly evidence.

There are, of course, other interpretations of the passage that have been suggested by scholars, but most are merely variations on the ones above.¹¹

PAUL'S OPPOSITION TO SEX DISCRIMINATION IS CONSISTENT WITH HIS COMMITMENT TO CHRISTIAN UNITY AND HIS OTHER STATEMENTS CONCERNING WOMEN.

A New Approach

We seem to be caught on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, there is strong evidence that Paul would never have silenced his sisters in Christ. And yet, on the other hand, there is no doubt that such a command appears in his epistle. The apparent paradox can be resolved only by interpreting verses 34 and 35 as a quotation, a statement which first appeared in a letter the Corinthians sent Paul. In his reply (the epistle we call I Corinthians), Paul quoted the Corinthian statement and then sharply criticized it in the verses which followed. Thus, the command to silence women neither originated with Paul nor received his approval. On the contrary, it rested on rabbinic tradition and exemplified the kind of Pharisaic legalism that he always opposed.¹²

The quotation would naturally have originated among the Judaizers, Pharisaic Christians who insisted that salvation required obedience to "the law of Moses" (Acts 15:1, 5). The Pharisees taught that only part of the Mosaic law had been recorded in the scriptures; the rest was embodied in traditions known as the "oral" law. Since women were required to maintain total silence in Jewish synagogues, the Judaizers naturally extended this custom to Christian circles as a matter of obedience to "the law." But Paul was not about to accede to their demands (any more than he was about to revert to circumcision). He replied, "What! Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached? [How dare you take God's words into your own hands, quoting oral law as though it carried the weight of scripture or revelation?] If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing you [namely, that "all may prophesy"] is a command of the Lord. If any one does not recognize this he is not recognized." And he concluded with a plea to let God's gifts flow freely: "So, my brethren, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues." Thus, an amplified version of the text might read as follows:

What then, brethren? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. . . . For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn

and all be encouraged. . . . [Now, some of you claim that,] The women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

[But I reply,] What! Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached? If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing you [that "all may prophesy"] is a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. So, my brethren, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. (I Cor. 14:26, 31, 34-39.)

This reading resolves all major problems of the text. Paul's opposition to sex discrimination is completely consistent with his previous commitment to Christian unity. It is also consistent with his other statements concerning women¹³ and the actual ministries of women recorded in the Bible. Previously, verses 34-36 seemed out of context, but now one may appreciate Paul's choice of background. He deliberately placed the Corinthian quotation where its perversity would be most evident. Having devoted nearly three chapters to the theme of Christian unity, it was perfectly natural for him to cite and attack their restriction on women. By placing the quotation after chapters 12-14, Paul effectively said, "Look, discriminating against our sisters contradicts everything I've been saying about unity and cooperation within the church."

Evident that 34-35 is a Quotation

Ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament contain none of the punctuation or quotation marks that appear in our English Bibles; the marks have been added by translators in order to facilitate readings and interpretation. They reflect the judgment of the translators but not necessarily the intent of the original author. Usually, the appropriate marks are evident from the context, but some cases are less obvious. Identifying quotations that are not introduced by the formula "So and so said" is especially difficult. A quotation is likely whenever (a) other quotations are found in the document, (b) the probable identity of the speaker is easily determined, and (c) the statement in question makes more sense coming from that speaker than from the author of the document. It turns out that verses 34 and 35 of I Corinthians 14 satisfy all of these conditions.

1. I Corinthians is a response to the problems of the Corinthian church, problems which had been "reported" to Paul and written to him in an official church letter. For example, his "appeal. . . that there be no dissention" in the church is a response to the fact that "it has been reported . . . that there is quarreling" (I Cor. 1:10-11). Chapter five responds to the fact that "it is actually reported that there is immorality among you. . ." (I Cor. 5:1). And chapter fifteen concerns the resurrection because "some of you say there is no resurrection from the dead" (I Cor. 15:12). Since most of the issues Paul addressed had been first raised by the Corinthians, it would be perfectly natural for him to preface many of his remarks with references to theirs.

2. The letter which the Corinthian church sent Paul

must have included questions about male-female relationships, since Paul's discussion of marriage in chapter 7 begins with the statement, "Now concerning the matters about which you wrote," and his discussion

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about women veiling begins with the admonition, "I commend you because you . . . maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you" (I Cor. 11:2). Indeed, no other epistle devotes so much attention to women. Whatever else the Corinthians may have asked, we know that the issue of women was one of their main concerns.

3. There is little doubt that Paul quoted portions of the Corinthians' letter in his epistle. At least eight passages have been identified as quotations by many scholars, and the Revised Standard Version distinguishes quotations in each of the passages below.¹⁴

"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be enslaved by anything. "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"—and God will destroy both one and the other. (I Cor. 6:12, 13.)

Now concerning food offered to idols, we know that "all of us possess knowledge." "Knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up. (I Cor. 8:1).

Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one." (I Cor. 8:4.)

But some will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" You foolish man, what you sow does not come to life unless it dies. (I Cor. 15:35-36.)

Notice that in most cases the quotations are not introduced by the formula "So and so says." Moreover, Paul only quotes statements that he wishes to criticize or modify and often follows them with an attack on the positions they reflect. Verses 34 and 35 thus conform to the pattern of the other quotations in the epistle.

4. The command to silence women almost certainly derived from Jewish oral law, traditions that were passed down by Pharisaic rabbis and ultimately committed to writing in the Talmud. The majority of Talmudic sayings concerning male-female relationships clearly favored male dominance and male superiority. Rabbi Eliezer, a contemporary of Paul, claimed that only males should be instructed in the law, and that "whoever teaches his daughter the law teaches her obscenity." He also claimed that there was no wisdom in a woman beyond her spinning and decreed, "Let the words of the

law be burned rather than committed to women."¹⁵ Philo, another contemporary of Paul, wrote at length concerning the inferiority of women, whom he described as "imperfect and depraved by nature."¹⁶ In the temple, women could go no farther than the court of the women, which was located only five steps below the court of the Gentiles and fifteen steps below the court of the men. In the synagogues they were likewise segregated—kept behind screens and in separate chambers. A prayer to be recited daily by orthodox males stated, "Praise be to God . . . that he has not created me a woman."¹⁷ Moreover, a number of Talmudic sayings explicitly denied women the right to speak in public: "Out of respect to the congregation, a woman should not herself read law." "It is a shame for a woman to let her voice be heard among men." "The voice of a woman is filthy nakedness."¹⁸ Verses 34-35 of I Corinthians 14 virtually recite these sayings verbatim. Thus, the command to "keep silence . . . as even the law says" almost certainly refers to rabbinic oral law. Given Paul's consistent opposition to Pharisaic legalism, it is much more likely to have come from his Judaizing opponents than from Paul himself.

VIEWED AS A QUOTATION WHICH PAUL CONDEMNED, THE DEMAND FOR SILENCE NO LONGER SEEMS INCONSISTENT AND OUT OF CONTEXT.

5. Although Paul did not explicitly refer to Judaizers in Corinth, they probably were present in the church by the time he wrote his first epistle to them. We know that "dissensions" and "quarreling" and led to "divisions" and "factions" within the church (I Cor. 1:10-13; 11:17-19). The group who claimed, "I belong to Cephas," probably were Judaizers. Paul had opposed Cephas (Peter) in Galatia in a dispute over Jewish tradition (Gal. 2:11-15), so it should be no surprise if those opposing Paul's liberal, Gentile orientation chose Peter, "the apostle to the Jews," as their figurehead. The opposition to eating foods offered to idols (chapters 8-10) and the insistence that women wear veils (chapter 11) also seem to reflect the concerns of Jewish Christians, and it is unlikely that Judaizers could have become Paul's major concern by the time he wrote his second epistle (see II Cor. 3:1-4:4) had they not been present when he wrote his first.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion provides a radically different perspective on the biblical ministries of women. The very text which seemed to condone sex discrimination may really have condemned it. In this view, the traditional interpretation has been entirely transformed: what was heralded as God's law has been

exposed as an infuriating heresy, and a classic proof of male superiority has given way to a case for sexual equality.

It is both ironic and tragic that rather than "all may prophesy" and that "there is neither male nor female in Christ," Christians traditionally have demanded that "the women should keep silence." In restricting the ministries of their sisters they have sided with the very people Paul denounced and adopted the very slogans he abhorred. It was unintentional, of course. Yet the fact remains that when it comes to women, Christians may have more readily accepted the attitude of Paul's opponents than that of Paul himself. Rabbinic sexism has permeated the church. This is not the sort of sin that can be atoned for merely by saying, "Sorry. We were wrong." Christians must go beyond apologies and purge their churches of the sexist institutions that grew up around the traditional interpret I Corinthians; for if the interpretation is wrong then certainly the regulations derived from it are no better. Rather than being the sacred guardians of male supremacy, Christians must accept the biblical imperative to counter any form of discrimination with the words, "What! Did the word of God originate in you, or are you the only ones it has reached?" The Church is one body—no member may be disenfranchised, no minority may be muzzled. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free; there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

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Notes

1. Some translations add the last portion of verse 33 to the beginning of verse 34 so as to emphasize the universal scope of the command: "As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. . . ." But, it is more likely that "as in all the churches of the saints" is the conclusion to the first part of verse 33. See Barrett, p. 330, and Robertson and Plummer, p. 324.

2. Romans 7, II Corinthians 3, Galatians 3, etc.

3. For a detailed discussion, this verse and other aspects of Genesis 1-3 that relate to marriage and sex roles, see Iannaccone, pp. 29-57.

4. I have quoted from the Septuagint in this case, since it was the version most common in Paul's day and the one from which he usually quoted.

5. Bushnell, par. 105-106.

6. Barclay, p. 151.

7. Barrett, p. 331.

8. Galatians 3:27-28, I Corinthians 12:13, and the "alls" in I Corinthians 14 clearly refer to the same corporate entity: the church, to which all baptised Christians belong.

9. Barrett, p. 331.

10. The Western Text places verses 34-36 after verse 40, but most commentators conclude that this variation represents a scribal attempt to smooth out the passage by moving the command to a less conspicuous location, and in any case even this family of manuscripts does not omit it completely. See Barrett, p. 332, Schmithals, p. 327, *The Interpreter's Bible*, p. 213.

11. The most popular explanation not covered in the text is a variation on the traditional interpretation that might be called the "male chauvinist" theory. It accepts that Paul did indeed mean to silence women but views this as the consequence of his rabbinic upbringing and personal prejudice. Thus, the command is ignored because it is tainted with sexism. In the words of William Barclay, "Paul, in his conception of the place of women within the church, was unable to rise above the ideas which he had known all his life." But this conclusion is contradicted by the many times Paul clearly did rise above those ideas, particularly in Galatians 3:28. Moreover, it does not resolve the problems of context, authority, or consistency which plague the traditional interpretation; it just excuses them with apologies for Paul's irrationality. See Barclay, p. 151-152, Andrews p. 95-98, *The Interpreter's Bible*, p. 125-129, 212-213.

12. Katherine C. Bushnell, in her book, *God's Word to Women*, was the first Bible scholar in modern times to argue that I Corinthians 14:34-35 is a quotation. Helen B. Montgomery, an eminent missionary and president of the American Baptist denomination from 1921 to 1922, designated the text as a quotation in her *Centenary Translation of the New Testament*, and Lee A. Starr, Jessie Penn-Lewis, and Dorothy Pape also refer to Bushnell's interpretation. Apart from these five, however, virtually no other commentators discuss the possibility of verses 34 and 35 being a quotation. They seem to be entirely unaware of that interpretation.

13. It is important to recognize that I Timothy 2:11-12, the text most often quoted in conjunction with I Corinthians 14:34-36, concerns marital relationships, not church sex roles, and encourages wives merely to be "quiet," not silent. Like the submission passages in Ephesians, Colossians, and I Peter, the Timothy text is concerned solely with domestic relationships. See Iannaccone, pp. 89-141.

14. See Hurd, p. 68, for a list of over fifteen commentators who each think at least five of the following are quotations: 6:12; 6: 13; 7:1; 8:1; 8:4; 8:5f; 8:8; 11:2. In 15:35 Paul quotes a question which he anticipates and which was implicit in the position taken by some of the Corinthians.

15. See Bushnell, p. 202, Swidler, p. 154-157, and *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, p. 776-789, for complete citations and extensive discussion of women in the Talmud and Jewish traditions.

16. Andrews, p. 97.

17. Swidler, p. 155.

18. Bushnell, p. 202.

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