

Title: Three Rules for Worship – pt.2

Text: 1 Corinthians 14.33b-35

Theme: Order in God's Court

Series: 1 Corinthians #85

Prop Stmt. The presence and exercise of a gift is never an excuse or opportunity for disobedience.

Read Text:

If I were randomly looking through the Bible for a verse or two to preach on, I doubt that I would select these. One of the benefits of studying and preaching through a book from the beginning in a verse by verse format is that it forces you to deal with portions you might otherwise not care to touch. As you can imagine this passage is the focus of a great deal of debate, at least for some. There are so many suggested interpretations, many of which not worth mentioning, that I do not have the time nor the interest in addressing each one. But, in a general way I will categorize them into five main groups:

1) The Bible is wrong group.

Some simply say that Paul was wrong. He was a Jew, you can't trust Jews, or he was a chauvinist and here his woman-bashing comes through again, or some other absurd argument is posited. Others try to argue that these verses were never in the original letter that Paul wrote and do not belong here and actually say that there is some question about the validity of these verses. There have been times when people have attempted to tamper with the Bible and add things that were never in the original writings, but that is not the case here. The earliest manuscript evidence is very clear that there is no textual problem at all.

2) Let's ignore it group.

This group says I have no idea what to do with this, so I will shrug my shoulders and pretend it isn't there. Or it is probably some local problem, some cultural issue that was limited to their specific situation and we cannot figure it out. So, let's ignore it and move on. And that works for many people, since many who read these verses are not really sure what to think. But, what do you do with 33b? If that statement is taken as being applied to what follows, then you cannot argue that verses 34-35 are dealing with just a local problem. Hmmm, now that does merit discussion. Does that phrase, "As in all the congregations of the saints" belong to what has just been said or is it referring to what is about to be said? Obviously, for those who want to downplay the significance of verses 34-35, they would take verse 33b as belonging to 33a. But, quite honestly, that really does not fit. (read) And, the language in v.37 and 38 makes it very clear that you cannot take the Word of God seriously and ignore this passage.

3) The Bible means different things to different people group.

Be careful with this one. Since the Bible means different things to different people, we can all interpret it how we want, and if your truth is not the same as my truth, that's okay as long as your truth works for you ...blah, blah, blah. Does anyone have a problem with this? You should! This nonsense is used as a convenient excuse to be wishy washy where the Bible is dogmatic. When someone says, "The history of Christianity indicates that there have always been different ways of approaching the Bible."<sup>1</sup> The message that is implied is that since different people have different opinions, no one can know for sure. In many ways, that was the religious climate in Christ's day. The religious leaders spent much of their words quoting the different opinions of others. So, when Christ spoke, "the crowds were amazed at this teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law." (Matthew 7.28-29) It is true that there are different opinions, but (listen carefully) different opinions does not mean equal validity. There are many different interpretations that are wrong! The presence of different interpretations does not mean that there is no such thing as the true one.

4) Let's get creative group.

At least, in this group they acknowledge that these verses are in the Bible and they have to be addressed. But, after reading these verses, people assume that there is no way Paul really meant to say this, so, we have to come up with something else. Under the "creative group" banner, there is a position that suggests that in these verses Paul is quoting someone's view in the Corinthian church. In other words, the church was having problems with maintaining order in its worship services and someone in the church at Corinth suggested that the solution to this chaos was for all the women to be quiet. That would solve the problem. Presumably it is a man who has made this suggestion. (who is now sleeping on the couch in the barn) Paul, according to this interpretation, now addresses this position by re-stating it and then basically goes ballistic in v.36 in response to it.

5) Let's deal with it straight up group.

If you just read these verses, ignoring what has preceded them, they do sound a bit shocking. Read like that, it sounds as if Paul is saying that if you want to have peace in your church, then don't let the women talk. But, it also sounds as if Paul does not really care if the women learn anything in church or not, and if they really do insist on learning something, then they need to ask their husbands when they get home.

There are some obvious tensions with this. Back in 11.5, Paul has just said that it is okay for a woman to speak up and pray in the church, but it must be done within certain parameters. For Paul to say that they can speak up and pray does not fit at all if he is really saying that women must be quiet in church. In 12.11 Paul teaches that spiritual gifts (tongues and prophecy being part of them) are from the Spirit who gives them in various amounts, at various times, for various durations to a variety of people. Paul says nothing about these being limited to men only.

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<sup>1</sup> Zachary J. Hayes, professor at Catholic Theological Union, quote taken from his chapter on the Purgatorial View of Hell, in Four Views on Hell, ed. Gundry, Zondervan, 1996, p.102

One man asks very pointedly, “How can women like Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4.2-3) Prisca (Rom. 16.3); 1 Cor. 16.19), Mary (Rom. 16.6), Junia (Rom. 16.7) and Tryphaena and Tryphosa (Rom. 16.12) function as co-workers in the churches if they cannot speak in those churches? How can Phoebe fulfill her role of deacon (Rom. 16.1-2) if she cannot speak out in the assembly? How can a woman like Nympha, who is influential enough to host a house church (Co. 4.15), have been required to remain silent in her own home (cf. also Prisca, the wife of Aquila, 16.19)?”<sup>2</sup>

Rather than being a statement that is consistent with Paul’s chauvinism, as he is accused of by some, this statement on the surface appears to be completely inconsistent with how much of a valued role so many women had in his ministry.

So, how are we supposed to understand this text? Some argue that what Paul says here in these verses (14.34-35) applies to the public gathering of the church, whereas, what he says in 11.2-16 applies to more of a home meeting or a small group setting. Some of the obvious problems with that, is that the text itself makes no such distinction (11.16 argues for the opposite) and chapter 11 also deals with ordinance of the Lord’s Table, which is for the entire church family. Besides, most of the early churches met in homes anyway.

Some have also said that these verses (14.34-35) are the ideal, and that 11.2-16 is more of a concession, since it is not very likely that women are really going to go along with the rule of silence. And one other interpretation worth mentioning is that this rule only applies to married women. If you were married you could not speak in church, but if you were single; talk away. Therefore, women who got married would have a social demotion which neither makes sense, nor is that an accurate reflection of life in those days. Frankly, getting married had enormous social benefits for women and was never seen as being a step backward at all.

Here is what we dare never do with the Word. We do not start with a fear of being socially or politically incorrect, and then manipulate our interpretation of the text based on what will appease our audience. When you do that, you make people the judge of the Word, instead of the Word being the authority of the people. So, what is this text saying?

Let’s step back from these immediate verses for a minute and remind ourselves of the bigger picture. When the church at Corinth gathered for worship, it was often chaotic and out of control. People were speaking out of turn, interrupting each other and using the Spirit as an excuse to justify selfish behavior. Some were clearly using the church and Christianity as an opportunity to pursue self-centered goals. That not only happened then, that happens all the time now. Our situation is a bit different, but the heart of the problems have not changed, but, let me point out a couple of other very important points: We have social norms and Corinth had social norms, but while we both have social norms, 1) the social norms in Corinth are the not same as the social norms for us. There was a greater awareness of social distinctions then, than we have now. For example, let’s say that you are in college, and in your college it is considered to be customary and

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<sup>2</sup> Rowe, A. “Silence and the Christian Women of Corinth”, *Communio viatorum*, 33:43, 1990.

considerate to address the professor as either “professor” or “doctor”. In order to show respect and humility as a student, you do not call the instructor by her or his first name. Let’s also say that you and one of your professors are members of the same local church. Are you and your professor on equal ground in Christ? Yes! So, in light of that how do you address your professor at church? The answer is: it depends on what are the social norms for that. In some settings, it is entirely fine for you to call the professor by a first name, and in other settings it is not. If you are in a setting where it is not, and you decide to use the occasion of being in the same church as an opportunity to get away with calling the professor by her first name at school just to flaunt your relationship a bit, then you are abusing your position, and the uneasiness of that distracts from the gospel instead of adorning it. In our culture, we are a bit more relaxed about these sorts of things. There are both benefits and problems that come with it. But, in Corinth, the social structure was much more clearly defined in terms of ethnicity, gender, slave or free status, Roman citizenship, and rich vs. poor. Most of the people who were born into one circle did not venture outside of that circle. The church introduced a radical concept for its day. In Christ, the ground is level. There is no slave or free, rich or poor, male or female, Jew or Gentile. The point being, we are one in Christ and the truths apply equally to all and we are all under the same Word. However, that does not eliminate all distinctions. A child who comes to faith in Christ is not permitted to use his status in the church as an excuse to disobey his parents. There were problems in Corinth with the rich abusing their positions and with others who were using their freedom in Christ as an opportunity to disrespect some of the social norms, which would not adorn the gospel. Paul is very concerned that their manner of worship did not bring discredit upon the gospel. If, God’s order of authority for families and society was being rejected in the name of Christianity, then something was clearly wrong with the style of Christianity that was being portrayed.

The other factor that we need to keep in mind is that: 2) the Bible was not yet completed, for the NT had barely begun. Mark’s gospel may have been written, James letter was probably done and Paul’s letter to the Galatians was complete by the time this letter was written, but they were probably not copied and distributed to all of the churches yet. And these churches likely did not have copies of the OT Scriptures either. Therefore, I believe that while most of the operation of the gift of prophesy in our church is expressed in the preaching and teaching ministries because we have the completed, sufficient Scriptures for the church, that there was very likely more revelatory gifts in operation then in the church of Corinth simply because they lived in a time while the NT scriptures were being written. We study the revealed, written and objective Word of God that we call the Scriptures. They did not have the NT form of that yet, and probably limited access to the OT. Therefore, they relied more on a subjective process which naturally had more of a spontaneous element to it, but that necessitated in the church sifting and weighing what was said to determine if it was even a word from the Lord. That process of sifting and weighing what was the occasion for problems. This demanded (as Paul says) the involvement of the church to guard what was being stated so that false teaching and self-centeredness did not hijack the church’s agenda. In this text, Paul is dealing with that exact situation. We do not rely on prophecies now, like they did then, simply because we live after the Scriptures have been completed. When we study, teach, and preach, we do not have to determine whether or not the Scriptures are the Word of God,

we already have that established. We are able to move on to what do they mean and what are we supposed to do about it. The specific problem that Paul is addressing is something that we do not face in exactly the same way, but, Paul's concern for the unity of the body and the unity of marriage is a concern that we have to share and guard.

Recognizing Paul's concern for the church gathering to accurately reflect God in a fitting and orderly way since God is not a God of disorder we saw last week that:

1. **Everything must Edify the church.** (26)

Whatever happens in the church, it must build up the believers and help them become more like the person of Christ. Speaking up in church is never to be used to advance your own agenda and get your way. You must always seek to advance the health of the church body.

2. **Everything must be Orderly.** (27-33a)

We saw this pattern as it applied to the gift of tongues and the gift of prophesy. The exercise of these gifts can only take place within these Spirit-given parameters.

- a. Tongues
  - i. Rule
  - ii. Condition
- b. Prophesy
  - i. Rule
  - ii. Condition
  - iii. Explanation

I think that what Paul then addresses here in verses 34-35 (and expands a bit on it in 36-38) is the importance of staying under control in a way that reflects your submission to your God-given authority. In these verses we have a similar pattern; rule, condition and then explanation. All that Paul is doing is responding to a problem that has come up in the church, when after a person prophesies, the church then attempts to interpret whether or not what he or she has just said is valid, or how it should be understood. The way you do something in church is just as important as the something that you do in church. What Paul is saying here is actually rather simple.

3. **Everyone must be in Submission.** (33b-38)

Here is the scene. The church has gathered together, and after a song or two, someone stands up to speak. This person gives, what he thinks is a revelation, and now it is up to the congregation to sift through this and "weigh carefully" what has just been said. Let's say the person says, "I believe the Lord wants us to start a new ministry to the sailors." Someone else says, "I believe the Lord wants us to go on a missions trip to Athens." A third one says, "I believe the Lord wants all of the business owners in the church to double the pay of their workers." (Assuming this person is not a business owner) Or,

let's say a person says, "I was thinking about the story of David and Goliath and I think that David and Goliath is a picture of the battle between the Jews and the Gentiles here in the church." Do you think that all discussions stayed calm and cool? Have you ever known for meetings with open mics in church to get a little hot under the collar and tense? What do you think would happen in church if a husband gave a prophecy and his wife publicly disagreed with part or all of what he just said? Would that be a problem? Absolutely! I think that is exactly what is going on. It is not wrong for a wife to disagree with her husband. What is wrong is to do it in a way that shames him.

a. **Rule** (34)

When prophecies are being debated and sifted, the women should not get involved in the public debate. The task of "speaking out and judging prophecies before the assembled congregation is a governing role over the assembled church" and the Bible reserves governing roles in the church for men. That is what an elder does. It is not that women don't have anything to add, they do. But, the problems that came in Corinth was with the process which completely overshadowed the content of the discussion itself. The appeal to the "Law" should be seen as being the same as what Paul did in 11.8-9 and 1 Tim. 2.13. In both of those passages, Paul refers to God's order of creation as being the basis for God's order of authority in the home.

b. **Condition** (35a)

If she wants to get engaged in the issue, then she needs to do that with her husband in private, but not in public where she could appear to be challenging or usurping his position as the leader in the relationship. The process of asking questions of her husband's prophecy in public could be very problematic as well. (roleplay)

c. **Explanation** (35b)

The explanation for this rule is for a wife and husband to be pitted against each other would be disgraceful. I do not think therefore, that this final clause in v.35 is a general rule for church, but is a specific explanation of the law that governs how prophecies are to be weighed, sifted and debated by the church.

Two points of application:

1. Positions and ministries in church are never to be exercised in a way that violates God's established structure of authority, or God's desired spirit for relationships.

The order of the home is husband, wife, children. That is why the office of pastor and elder is limited to men. 1 Timothy 3 is extremely clear on this issue. The office of pastor and elder brings authority with it. A woman pastor is an oxymoron. She is attempting to occupy a position that defies God's order. Christianity is full of examples where that God-given rule is being violated. The result is, gender distinctions are blurred by the very people who are commanded to keep them clear. Historically, denominations that

treat the gender issue as being neutral for pastoral leadership pave the way for same sex marriage.

The order of the home and the church is a reflection of the order of the Trinity. In addition to that, the relationships in the home and the church are to be a reflection of the relationships within the Trinity. Therefore, the husband is to love, care, provide, protect, defend, serve, work, and communicate with his wife because within the Godhead, there is a shared loyalty, an infinite love, a satisfying joy, a shared happiness, a perfect unity, a completely harmonious function and pursuit of the same goal. So, even though the husband is the leader, he can never use his God-given position to abuse, demean or hurt his wife.

2. Spiritual giftedness is not spiritual if it operates in violation of the Spirit's directives.

The presence of a gift/ability does not mean that you are now free to use it in any way that you want. Being gifted does not mean that you are privileged and exempt from the rules that apply to everyone else. That is the view of the world, but it is not God's view. We may appear to be crazy when we don't follow the world's thinking on this, but that is fine. Spiritual giftedness does not bring privilege, as much as it brings responsibility.

Spiritual gifts are an opportunity to promote the health of the church, not an excuse to get attention, disrupt the gathering or violate God's Word.