



Hard Passages in the Bible

Gaining confidence for engaging the
biblical story

1 Corinthians 14:26-40

²⁶ What should be done then, my friends? 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. ²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. ²⁸ But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God. ²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. ³⁰ If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent. 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 the prophets, ³³ for God is a God not of disorder but of peace.

(As in all the churches of the saints, ³⁴ women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached?)

³⁷ Anyone who claims to be a prophet, or to have spiritual powers, must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. ³⁸ Anyone who does not recognize this is not to be recognized. ³⁹ So, my friends, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues; ⁴⁰ but all things should be done decently and in order.

Reaction to the readings

- What words or phrases stand out to you?
- What emotions does this bring up for you?
- Does this passage present a difficulty for you? If so what?
- What are you confused or unclear about?

1 Corinthians 14:26-40

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(As in all the churches of the saints, ³⁴ women should be **silent** in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be **subordinate**, as the law also says. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached?)

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Ways to approach this passage

- This passage means what it says: women are to **be silent** in churches, as God has given different roles to men and women
 - At issue is the idea of male headship (1 Cor 11:3), which means that women are not to have *authority* over men. Women can pray or prophesy (be conduits of God's Word), but not giving authoritative teaching.
- Paul *did* mean to say that women should be silent, but this was written with a **specific situation** in mind, rather than a universal principle for all time.
 - NIV 2011 has “as in all the congregations of the Lord's people” with preceding verse (hence v.34-35 not universal).
 - The situation could be that women claimed new-found freedom to the point of being disruptive, before they had a chance to be sufficiently educated

Ways to approach this passage (continued)

- **Verses 34-35 were added** (not part of original letter)
 - Present in *all* manuscripts, but placed after v. 40 in a several; could have been a marginal note later incorporated into the body of the text.
- Verses 34-35 are **Paul quoting the Corinthians**; Paul's sarcastic reply: "Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached?"
- This roles of men and women was something the early church was figuring out. Many women felt empowered by the Gospel message. Yet some in the first century church wanted to revert back to traditional gender hierarchy in order for the Christian movement to not be misunderstood by the broader society.

Passages to compare to – Women quiet

¹¹ A woman ^[or wife] should learn in quietness and full submission. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; ^[or her husband] she must be quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴ And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. ¹⁵ But women ^[or Eve] will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

~ 1 Timothy 2:11-15

Passages to compare to – Women with voices

²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ~ Gal. 3:28

² I plead with **Euodia** and I plead with **Syntyche** to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³ Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. ~ Philippians 4:2-3

For it has been reported to me by **Chloe's** people... ~1 Cor. 1:11

Women leaders listed in Romans 16:

- Phoebe – deacon
- Priscilla – hosts house church with husband
- Junia – apostle with Adronicus
- Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis – women who “work hard in the Lord”
- Mother of Rufus (like mother to Paul)
- Julia and sister of Nereus

Questions

- Where does this passage fit in the story of the beginnings of the church?
- Which of the possible theories about the verses about women being silent seems the most probable to you?
- What wisdom, insights, or call can we take from this passage, as followers of Jesus, reading it in light of the witness of Jesus ?