

SOME NOTES ON 1 CORINTHIANS 14:34,35
FOR THE COMMISSION ON THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN IN THE PASTORAL
MINISTRY OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

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As I understand it, my responsibility is to present to the Commission a brief paper which responds to two questions.

(1) Does 1 Cor. 14:34,35 make any contribution to the current discussion about the ordination of women in the pastoral ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist church?

(2) If it does, what is the substance of that contribution?

I have studied much of the extensive literature written by a host of scholars representing the entire spectrum of ideological leanings -- liberal, conservative, and fundamentalist -- on the short paragraph, 1 Cor. 14:34,35.

As a result of that study, I have reached the conclusion that it makes no positive contribution to the discussion about the ordination of women in the pastoral ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist church.

My conclusion is based on two rather simple but basic, valid, time-honored, and universally-held principles of Biblical interpretation. They are:

Principle One: We should not use any text of Scripture either to affirm or negate a position the church should or should not take, on any matter, unless it either explicitly or implicitly speaks to the proposed position.

If that principle is sound, and I believe it is, and if it is applicable here, and I am persuaded it is, then the paragraph, 1 Cor. 14:34,35, should not be used either to affirm or negate the proposed ordination of women in the pastoral ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist church.

1 Cor. 14:34,35 does not speak, either explicitly or implicitly, to the question of the ordination of anyone to any office, let alone the ordination of women to the office of pastor. Nor does the context in which it occurs (whether one considers only the immediate context [1 Cor. 14:1-40], the larger context [1 Cor. 12:1-14:40], the entire epistle [1 Cor. 1:1-16:24], or, for that matter, the complete collected correspondence between Paul and the church at Corinth [1 Cor. 1:1- 2 Cor. 13:13])).

(a) Paul's concern in chapter 14 (the immediate context) and in chapters 12 through 14 (the larger context) is proper conduct in the worship experience of the church. This concern comes to particular focus in (a) the passage, vv.26-33 (especially v.33: "For God is not a God of disorder, but of peace."), which immediately precedes the

paragraph on which we are focussing, and in (b) the passage, vv.36-40 (especially v.40: "Everything is to be done respectably and orderly."), which immediately follows.

In the process of arguing his case, Paul does make reference to various callings -- to those of apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, healers, helpers, and administrators (1 Cor. 12:28-30). At no point, however, does he even hint at the question of the ordination of any person, male or female, in any of these, or any other, categories of servants of the church.

(b) The concern of the paragraph itself is with the rights (or, non-rights!) of women "to speak" during the worship service. It says nothing about either their rights (or, again, non-rights!) to leadership roles in the assembly or their ordination as full-time professional pastors. Only a manipulated eisegesis (note that I did not say exegesis!) can construe the text as speaking to those questions.

Principle Two: A "particular first-century application" of a "basic Christian principle" should not be turned into a "general and timeless prescription" to be applied in "all places, times, and circumstances" in the continuing experience of the universal church. While it may have "paradigmatic" significance, "prescriptive" significance should not be imposed upon it.

Jesus took a strong stand on this principle in his many debates with "the scribes and Pharisees" over the interpretation and relevance of particular scriptural passages.

One illustration should suffice. The scribes and Pharisees set before Jesus a woman, whom they claimed they had caught "in the very act of adultery." At the same time, they set before him the "particular Mosaic application," Deut. 22:22 ("If a man is found sleeping with another man's wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die."), of a "basic Biblical principle," Deut. 5:18 ("You shall not commit adultery."). Their intention was to turn that "particular Mosaic application" into a "general and timeless prescription" designed for "all places, times, and circumstances," including their own.

Jesus, in response, clearly upheld the "basic Biblical principle" (Deut. 5:18). That is surely the implication of his advice: "Go, and sin no more" (Jn. 8:11). And he just as clearly refused to turn the "particular Mosaic application" (Deut. 22:22) into a "general and timeless prescription" for his own, or any other, time. That is undoubtedly the implication of his invitation: "If anyone of you is without sin, let him cast the first stone" (Jn. 8:7).

We who follow Jesus must have the same courage. We must resist those "scribes and pharisees" who would take a "particular first-century application" of a "basic Christian

principle" and make of it a "general and timeless prescription" for "all places, times, and circumstances."

To fail to resist such attempts would be tantamount to denying a principle of Biblical interpretation that has been rightly honored amongst us throughout our history.

When I was a young Timothy, still cutting my evangelistic teeth, we often had 1 Cor. 14:34,35 hurled at us by our opponents as evidence that we could not possibly be a true Bible-believing church because we allowed a woman to preach to, to teach, and even to question and challenge men (indeed men in authority!) "in church."

Against such attacks, to argue, as I have above, was considered by the "brethren" of those "good old days" gold-leafed orthodoxy.

I am even more persuaded, today, that the hermeneutical principle we employed then was, and remains, valid. The notion that every "particular first-century application" of a "general Christian principle" must have "prescriptive value" (and not simply "paradigmatic value") for "all places, times, and circumstances," including our own, has its roots in, and derives its nourishment from, Fundamentalism -- not Adventism. I suggest that for Seventh-day Adventists that is heresy. To submit to the demands of a fundamentalist hermeneutic is a denial of our historic stand on the nature and purpose of Scripture.

1 Cor. 14:34,35 is a "particular first-century application" of the "basic Christian principle," that, in worship, "everything is to be done respectably and orderly" (1 Cor. 14:40). It should not be turned into a "general and timeless prescription" for our time. The "basic principle" itself is most certainly applicable. Not so its "particular first-century application."

We have not heretofore transformed this passage into a "general and timeless prescription" applicable to our time (although we have not ignored its "paradigmatic value"). We should not begin to do so now.

SUMMARY

The paragraph, 1 Cor. 14:34,35, makes no positive contribution to the current discussion about the ordination of women in the pastoral ministry of the Seventh-day Church. It does not speak, either explicitly or implicitly, to the question of the ordination of anyone, let alone the ordination of women, to the pastoral ministry of the church. (See Principle One above.)

Furthermore, even if we were to allow, just for the sake of the argument, that it did, in some oblique way, speak to the question of the ordination of women to the pastoral ministry of the church, it would be a misuse, indeed an

abuse, of the paragraph to turn it into a "general and timeless prescription" to be applied in "all places, times, and circumstances," our own included. The paragraph, 1 Cor. 14:34,35, is a "particular first-century application" of a "general and timeless principle." (See Principle Two above.)

Consequently, it is the "general timeless principle," namely, that, "in church," "everything should be done respectably and orderly" (1 Cor. 14:40) -- not its "particular first-century application (1 Cor. 14:34,35) -- that is relevant to the present discussion.

Finally, it is my judgement that that principle would only be enhanced by the ordination of women in the pastoral ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist church. My experience has persuaded me that men behave a great deal more "respectably and orderly" in their dealings with the members of the church and with one another when women are present as colleagues and equals.

ADDENDA

ADDENDUM 1: CONCERNING 1 COR. 11: 2-16

Much of what is said above, concerning 1 Cor. 14:34,35, must also be said about 1 Cor. 11:2-16, another passage that is often used (indeed, misused, even abused) in the

discussion about the proposed ordination of women in the pastoral ministry of the church.

ADDENDUM 2: CONCERNING THE TOPIC AS A WHOLE

There is in fact no requirement anywhere in the New Testament that anyone, male or female, should be ordained to a full-time paid professional pastoral ministry. The precedents for the modern practice of ordaining full-time paid professional clergy are to be found in the post-New Testament church -- not in the New Testament church.

The most important contribution the New Testament can make (and it is an exceedingly important, in fact, vital contribution) lies in providing the necessary theological and ethical presuppositions for the construction of an adequate Christological and ecclesiological basis on which the church might make a mature and courageous decision.

I do hope that the church has asked, or will ask, some of its most able and committed theologians and ethicists to propose such a construction. When the church has finally decided what is the appropriate and adequate Christological and ecclesiological basis, then, and only then, will it be in a position to make a mature decision on this exceedingly important matter.

SOME RELEVANT NOTES

NOTE 1: CONCERNING THE STRUCTURE OF THE PARAGRAPH

In the outline of the paragraph, 1 Cor. 14:34,35, which follows one should note the following.

(1) That the "position taken" in part 1 (a), "women are to remain silent in church," is paralleled by the "position taken" in part 2 (a), "they are to ask their husbands at home."

(2) That the "reason for the position taken" in part 1 (b), "they are not permitted to speak [in church]," is paralleled by the "reason for the position taken" in part 2 (b), "it is a shameful thing for a woman to speak in church."

(3) That, consequently, the statement, "they are to be submissive," (in part 1 [b]) is only a secondary "reason" intended to support the primary "reason," "they are not permitted to speak [in church]." This should not be overlooked.

OUTLINE OF THE PARAGRAPH

Part 1. (a) Position taken.

"Women are to remain silent in church."

(b) Reason for the position taken.

[Note the logical particle "for (gar)."]

"For (gar) they are not permitted to speak [in church]. On the contrary, they are to be submissive (as the law says)."

Part 2. (a) Position taken.

"If they want to be informed about a given matter, they are to ask their husbands at home."

(b) Reason for the position taken.

[Note, again, the logical particle "for (gar)."]

"For [gar] it is a shameful thing for a woman to speak in church."

NOTE 2: CONCERNING THE CONTENTS OF THE PARAGRAPH

A. The key to an accurate understanding of the intention of the paragraph is found in its two basic propositions:

(1) the "position taken" in part 1 (a) ("Women are to remain silent in church."), and

(2) the "position taken' in part 2 (a) ("If they want to be informed about a given matter, they are to ask their husbands at home.").

We need to be clear on what is actually said. The clause, "to remain silent in church," means exactly that -- to remain silent in church. Consequently, in the supporting clauses of part 1 (b) ("For (gar) they are not permitted to speak [in church].") and of part 2 (b) ("For (gar) it is a shameful thing for a woman to speak in church."), the notion, "not ... to speak in church," means "not ... to speak in church," that is, "to remain silent in church."

The various attempts to make the negative clause, "not ... to speak in church," mean something other than it obviously means are misguided. For example, the attempts to make it mean "not ... to speak in an ecstatic tongue in church," or "not ... to speak in such a way as to challenge or embarrass the role of the head elder or the pastor in church" run counter to the obvious argument of the text, namely, that "women are to remain silent in church."

B. Some have attempted, against the hard and irrefutable evidence, to construe the secondary "reason" given in part 1 (b), "[Women] are to be submissive," as if it were the primary and controlling "reason" for the entire paragraph.

Such an undertaking is misdirected. When the text is allowed to speak for itself, that attempt is patently without support. The structure of the paragraph, as set out above, is decidedly against it.

Futhermore, some have undertaken, once more in spite of the clear and compelling evidence to the contrary, to interpret the term nomos ("law"), in the expression, "as the law says," as a reference to the written Torah (defined precisely as the writings of Moses) and to find a particular reference in Genesis, chapters 2 and 3.

Again, such an enterprise is misinformed.

1. In the Corinthian correspondence, Paul, when he has a specific passage in the written Torah in mind, regularly quotes it, introducing it with the formula, en to(i) nomo(i) gegraptai ("in the law, it is written"). See 1 Cor. 9:8 (where he introduces and quotes Deut. 25:4) and 1 Cor. 14:21 (where he introduces and quotes Isa. 28:11,12). No such quotation with comparable introductory formula appears in 1 Cor. 14:34.

2. Also, in the same correspondence, Paul, when he has a specific text in the written Torah in mind, does not limit his use of the term nomos ("law") to the writings of Moses. See 1 Cor. 14:21 where he uses the term to include the writings of the Prophets.

3. You may search the written Torah from cover to cover, as many have done, with the intention of finding even

one passage that requires that women are to be submissive in the presence of men in public worship and you will have to confess, with those who have done so before you, that it is not to be found. There is no such reference.

The term nomos ("law"), in 1 Cor. 14:34, does not refer to the written Torah (whether defined as the writings of Moses or the writings of Moses and the Prophets). It refers to the current oral interpretation of the written Torah (defined in its larger sense). Such a usage occurs in the relevant contemporary literature. For example, Josephus referred to the oral Torah when he wrote, "The woman, says the law, is in all things inferior to the man. Let her accordingly be submissive." See Contra Apion 2. 200,201.

NOTE 3: CONCERNING THE BOUNDARIES OF THE PARAGRAPH

There are two relevant considerations.

First. That the paragraph originally began with the imperatival sentence, "women are to remain silent in church," (v.34a) -- not with the summary phrase, "as in all the churches" (v.33b) -- is highly probable.

Second. That it originally ended with the supporting statement, "for it is a shameful thing for a woman to speak in church" (v.34b) -- not with the sarcastic questions, "Did the word of God begin with you? Or, did it come to you alone?" (v.36) -- is also highly probable.

There are several factors that support these two considerations.

First. There is the history of the text itself. In those witnesses that place the paragraph after v.40, it only consists of vv.34 and 35. The summary phrase, "as in all the churches" (v.33b), concludes the prior paragraph, vv.26-33, and the questions which introduce the final paragraph (vv.36-40) link logically and immediately with vv.26-33, especially v.33b.

By the way, the Western church knew no other logical connection for at least the first 300 years of the Christian era. And there is no evidence that the Eastern church understood the logical linkage any differently.

Second. There is the structure of the paragraph. As we have already made clear, this is a carefully wrought paragraph consisting of two meticulously balanced parts. To add the summary phrase, "as in all the churches" (v.33b), to the beginning of the paragraph, and the sarcastic questions, "Did the word of God begin with you? Or, did it come to you alone?" (v.36) to the end of the same would spoil the tidy balance.

Third. There is Pauline usage. On two other occasions, Paul concludes a major argument with language comparable to v.33b: (a) 1 Cor. 4:17; and (b) 1 Cor. 11:16.

Fourth. If the summary expression, "as in all the churches" (v.33b), is added to the beginning of the

paragraph, it creates an almost intolerable tautology. The opening sentence of the paragraph then would read: "As in all the churches of the saints, the women are to remain silent in the churches."

NOTE 4: CONCERNING THE LOCATION OF THE PARAGRAPH

The empirical data are as follows:

a. The paragraph, 1 Cor. 14:34,35, occurs between the summary observation ("God is not the God of disorder, but the God of peace. This is the way it is in all the churches of the saints." [vv. 33]), which wraps up the prior paragraph (vv. 26-33), and the inferential questions ("Did the word of God proceed from you? Or did it come to you alone?" [v. 36]) which introduce the succeeding paragraph (vv.36-40), in the following witnesses: p⁴⁶ Ɱ A B K Ψ 0243 33 81 88^{mg} 104 181 326 330 436 451 614 629 630 1241 1739 1877 1881 1962 1984 1985 2127 2492 2495 Byz Lect it^{dem,x,z} vg syr^{p,h,pal} cop^{sa,bo,fay} arm.

b. And it occurs, almost as an addendum, after the final statement ("All things should be done respectably and orderly." [v. 40]) of the concluding paragraph of the long passage on the question of the gift of prophesy, the gift of tongues, and decorum during the worship service of the church (chps. 12-14), in the following witnesses: D F G 88* it^{ar,d,e,f,g} Ambrosiaster Sedulius-Scotus.

Most scholars who understand textual analysis agree that there are three possible options.

(a) Paul wrote (or dictated to his amanuensis) the paragraph under consideration and included it between vv. 33 and 36, and someone else (perhaps an assistant, an editor, or a copyist) relocated it after v.40.

(b) Paul wrote (or dictated) it and added it after v. 40, and some other person (possibly an assistant, an editor, or a copyist) relocated it between vv.33 and 36.

(c) It was not part of the original text. Rather, it entered the text as a very early marginal gloss (written either by Paul himself, or an assistant, or an editor, or a copyist) and was subsequently included in the text between vv. 33 and 36 by one copyist and his successors (so most witnesses), and after v. 40 by another copyist and his successors (so the Western tradition for at least 300 years).

Many interpreters of the text assume that option one is the most probable.

It is possible that Paul (or an assistant, or even an editor) originally included this paragraph between vv. 33 and 36. Then, on rereading the epistle, he felt that it not only breaks the clear logical sequence of thought between vv. 33 and 36 but also that it is essentially irrelevant to the particular discussion (the discussion about speaking in tongues and prophesying) at hand. Thereupon, he decided to

relocate the passage at the end of the discussion as an addendum related to the overarching concern of "respectability and orderliness," but not to the immediate and particular application of that concern, that is, its application to speaking in tongues and prophesying.

It is also possible, and for similar reasons, that a copyist, sometime before the Corinthian correspondence was included in a developing pauline corpus, effected this relocation.

One must not overlook the fact, however, that this kind of transposition is exceedingly rare in the history of the writing and transmission of the New Testament text.

The most remarkable example is the pericope on the "woman taken in adultery" (Jn. 7:53-8:11) which occurs in five different places in the gospel texts ([i] between Jn. 7:52 and 8:12; [ii] after Jn. 21.25; [iii] following Lk. 21.38; [iv] following Lk. 24:53; and [v] following Jn. 7:36.

NOTE 5: CONCERNING THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE PARAGRAPH

Given the present discussion, the question as to whether or not 1 Cor.14:34,35 was written by Paul or an assistant, or editor, or copyist is irrelevant. Under the supervision of the Holy Spirit, the paragraph is part of Scripture. Consequently, we must take it seriously. And that means we must interpret and apply it responsibly.

First. We must interpret it literally. That is, we must interpret it according to what it actually says and implies. We may not interpret it according to what we might like it to say and imply to satisfy our own ideological biases.

Second. We must apply it paradigmatically. It is, in fact, a paradigm of how we might apply the principle involved (namely, in Christian worship, "everything is to be done respectably and orderly" [1 Cor. 14:40]) in our own "place, time, and circumstances." We may not apply it prescriptively. It is not a prescription for how we must apply that principle in our own "place, time, and circumstances."

AN APOLOGY

I have deliberately refrained from cluttering the pages of this brief paper with a thousand critical footnotes and I have purposely resisted the temptation to splatter its paragraphs with an equal number of the names of the so-called scholars, respected and otherwise, whose writings I have studied.

This is not because I have taken my assignment lightly. Quite the contrary. It is precisely because I have taken it seriously. In my judgment, the Church should not make its major decisions by counting and measuring "notes and noses."

Rather, what is right and proper for the faith and practice of the Church should be determined by the intrinsic value and the persuasive validity of the arguments presented. It is merely of academic interest to know "who and how many" have held, or hold, "this or that opinion."

I am well aware of the view of some that it is an evidence of erudition to burden every page with the names of prestigious (and some not so prestigious) scholars and profound (and some no so profound) footnotes. I don't happen to be of that persuasion. If it is necessary, I can compete with the best. (See my many essays written for the scholars.) I do not think it is either necessary or helpful to do so in this important discussion. However, if the Commission thinks otherwise, I will provide all the relevant details of all the informed authors and all their valuable writings and opinions which I have read and analyzed in preparation for the writing of this paper.

A DEEP CONCERN

As far as we have been able to ascertain, though many of us have been asked to write for the Commission on the relevance and possible contribution of certain isolated passages of scripture, not one of us has been asked to set out on paper our understanding of the larger theological and ethical considerations.

I am personally frustrated by the fact that I have spent so much time and effort on a paragraph that makes no positive contribution to the discussion when there are so many larger and more significant Biblical considerations that do -- considerations which seem to be left untreated.