

PREFACE

As I pointed out near the end of our study last week, some are of the opinion that vv34-35 should not even be in our Bibles. Gordon Fee, in particular, omits them entirely in his commentary. We *will*, however, include these verses in our study, for the following reasons:

1. These verses are included in all of our common versions—even without explanatory footnote, except that the NIV2011 points out that in some manuscripts these two verses follow our v40, which would have no effect on their meaning and purpose. In fact, it is my opinion that these verses work even better after v40, so that would be no reason to discard them.
2. All ancient manuscripts include them.

We will endeavor to examine what the apostle says here with unbiased detachment. The reason Paul must address this at all is that the church was allowing too much of this fallen world to invade and corrupt their way of doing things; we will make every effort to not make the same mistake. Our context will be the text itself, and the situation at the time it was written—*not* the context of *our* time. That means that our overall context will be that of Chapter Fourteen—the worship service conducted in a proper and orderly manner—with the immediate context being the orderly use of prophecy and its evaluation or “judgment.”

The more I read and digest this letter to the Corinth church, the more I realize that that church had some really big problems with their meetings or “assemblies”—what we would call their worship services, which would include their “love feasts” and observance of the Lord’s Supper (Communion). At least from the beginning of Chapter Eight Paul has been addressing topics pertinent to, or at least tangentially related to, that setting. And now we come upon one more disruptive element that may have been hindering orderly worship in Corinth.

Read 1 Corinthians 14:33-36

This is an issue mostly separate from the role of women in church *leadership*. For example, in his first letter to Timothy, Paul writes that “...I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet” (1 Timothy 2:12). Further in the letter and in his letter to Titus he outlines the qualifications for those in church leadership, all of which are to be “men” and “husband of one wife.” Our current passage has more to do with order and decorum in the assembly of the church, and holding to a God-honoring relationship between husband and wife.

That is, to understand this passage we look less to the definition of hierarchy of leadership in the church, and more to what Paul wrote in Chapter Eleven about the hierarchy of *preeminence* or *priority* between God the Father and Christ, Christ and man/husband, and man/husband and woman/wife.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:3-7.

We cannot take the time to revisit everything of our study of Chapter Eleven, but it will be helpful to revisit a few key points. The word translated “head” (*kephale*) means “that which is most prominent, foremost, uppermost, preeminent.” To be preeminent—i.e., the most prominent—does not *necessarily* denote ultimate authority or leadership, although it may by extension. Because even Christ has a “head” (God the Father) the position *under* a head does not connote inferiority. Note how Paul balances the man and woman a bit later.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:11-12.

In God’s sovereign economy every individual has someone who is superior to him. In our church, for example, my immediate superior is our senior pastor; I answer to him; he is my “boss.” Along with him would be the elder board. But they, too, have a superior: Christ Jesus, who is the Head of the church. They answer to Him.

David Garland: Paul’s primary intent, then, is not to assert the supremacy of man and the subordination of woman. Instead, it is to establish that each has a head and that “what one does or doesn’t put on one’s physical head either honors or dishonors one’s spiritual head” (Blomberg) [vv4-7]. It establishes the need for loyalty to the head.

Paul’s purpose here is not to assert the supremacy of man over woman, but to establish that *each* has a head, and to point out that each has an obligation to honor that head—principally in, but also beyond, corporate worship.

Henry William Soltau: In the New Testament, the woman is directed to cover her head (1 Cor. 11:3-10) because “the head of the woman is the man,” whereas the man is to be uncovered, because he is the image and glory of God. In the assemblies therefore of the people of God, the woman, standing as a representative [or type] of the Church in subjection to Christ, covers her head; the man, being a type of Christ Himself as the Head of the Church, uncovers his head.

Sidebar: I won’t kid myself that anyone will actually *do* this, but still I must commend to you a re-reading or review of Sessions 104 to 110. Those sessions lay important groundwork for understanding vv34-35 ([go to DLAMPEL.COM](#)).

As in our study of Chapter Eleven, I conclude that a few of the specifics in vv34-35 may not pertain to the twenty-first century church, but the *principle* set forth does. For example, in Chapter Eleven Paul states that it is disgraceful for a woman to not have her head covered in the assembly, yet that disgrace, that shame simply does not exist today. The *reason* for that command from the apostle, however, does remain: to not do anything that might disgrace the woman's "head"—that is, her husband. Similarly, the man is not to do anything that might disgrace *his* head—that is, Christ.

Many commentators point to v5 in Chapter Eleven as a contradiction to vv34-35.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:4-5.

W. Harold Mare, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, claims that it is *not* a contradiction because 11:5 does not say that the woman's praying and prophesying is in the context of a worship service. With all due respect to Mr. Mare, it is clear from the entirety of Chapter Eleven that the context is one of the church "coming together" (vv17-18, 20).

Instead, v11:5 is not a contradiction to vv34-35 (or vice versa) because the former addresses the woman "praying or prophesying," but the latter addresses the women breaking the respectful decorum of the assembly by voicing an opinion or asking a question of their husbands, possibly from across the room.

In that time and culture—a time when women in the assembly would probably be sitting together in their own area—such behavior would not just be disruptive, but would actually bring disgrace and "shame" (v35) upon the woman's husband: her "head."

One reason we cannot be certain about the physical setting is that, as R. E. Oster points out, "The Roman world was anything but homogeneous in regard to its attitudes toward women." He goes on to explain that there were dramatic differences between the Roman and Greek cultures regarding what was appropriate and what was considered scandalous. Since the Corinth church included both—and others—we can't be sure of what placement and behavior of women would have been considered acceptable in the Corinth church. Most likely this clash of cultures was causing confusion, and perhaps even conflict in the church—the reason Paul addresses it here.

IN CONCLUSION

Not surprisingly, there are myriad opinions on what the apostle Paul is saying here; some are legitimate alternatives, some are laughable. It is my position, however, that it should be at the very last extreme—and even then, reluctantly—that we deem any passage in the canon counterfeit, as does Gordon Fee with these two verses.

The passage is indeed awkwardly placed. Some ancient manuscripts place vv34-35 after v33, some place it after our v40—that is, at the end of the chapter. I'm fascinated by a suggestion put forth by a number of interpreters, that

the transposition was attributable to a marginal note added by Paul after reading through a draft of the letter by the amanuensis. This view would explain the differing order and why no manuscript omits it. It could also explain its supposedly rough fit in the context if it were a marginal note added later by Paul. (Garland)

In this session I have laid the groundwork for the interpretation of this passage—specifically, vv34-35—that I believe makes the most sense. In our next session we will examine the verses in detail to determine their message: for the Corinthians, and for us today.