**1 Corinthians series notes chapter 14**

**Well…we’ve nearly finished the whole book!**

Ok, so I will be honest with you…this week my creative brain is failing me massively. This week has been crazy. I’m hoping you will give me grace for this week (week 11). I shall be trying to pull everything together next week as well as giving you notes for chapter 15 so please bear with me.

I feel like we’ve been at this for so long now we should no only all be amazing a leading small groups, and know 1 Corinthians inside out, but we somehow should have a celebration! Maybe a quiz!

**So! What shall we do with our small groups this week?**

Chapter 14 is a strange little chapter. It seems to be Pauls effort to balance out their practice when they are assembled in light of everything he has taught them from chapter 11 onwards.

So here’s what I think might be fun – why not do an overview of the chapters 11-14?

Remind yourselves of the context of the chapters then discuss:

What do you think is key for Paul? For chapel A?

What struck you as the most important?

Is there anything you think you are getting right? Or wrong?!

Does seeing all those chapters together change anything about what you think they mean – particularly what chapter 14 is about?

OR think about chapter 14 practically:

What is unintelligible in our church practice to outsiders?

Have you ever experienced a church service where you felt outside? Why?

What was your experience of church as an ‘unbeliever’/have your non-Christian friends ever come to church and been baffled?

Should we worry about non-Christians coming in? Surely we shouldn’t have secret bits that people don’t get to see, or should we keep some spiritual practices to just gatherings of believers?

What don’t we show non-Christians that maybe we should – do we forget to show them some of the best bits of our community?

**CORINTHIANS NOTES CHAPTER 14**

I am not going to write you extensive notes on this chapter because I am hoping that by now you can make a lot of the connections with past passages for yourself.

Paul in verses 1-25 is making clear again that these ‘spiritual gifts’ should be practiced for the good of the community.

It seems, from mirror reading the passage, that they think that the gift of tongues is some form of evidence of being ‘spiritual’ or more spiritual than others and therefore he promotes prophecy instead. Prophecy speaks to everyone, where the person speaking in tongues only edifies themself.

This fits with his community centred ideals laid out in chapters 11, 12 and 13.

ORDER

Paul adds a secondary concern into the discussion however on top of the worry of what builds up the community – what is seen to be in good order when someone comes in from the outside.

I know it felt like I went on and on about hairstyles in my sermon about chapter 11, but here is where that discussion pays off – because otherwise it seems like Paul’s concern about them sticking with what is considered ‘common good behaviour’ comes from out of the blue. If we think back through the letter however, to chapter 6, the end of chapter 10, and chapter 11 we see that Paul has had the concern of how the concern about how others see the community as a secondary worry all the way through.

Here it comes to the foreground in two places: where he comments about the unbelievers coming in and hearing speaking in tongues vs hearing prophecy; and v 26 onwards where he comments on how prophets should be orderly. His reason for this ‘that God is a god of order not of chaos’ feels like one of the common sayings that he uses at times (similar to ‘everything is beneficial for me’ in ch 6 and 10).

Paul has a concern that they behave as is appropriate – that their new found freedom in Christ and spiritual gifts don’t become more important than begin people who act as Godly people are known to act.

We must remember that Paul is not setting up a new religion in these letters. Paul is not making rules or doctrine for something new. Rather he is giving them instruction on how to build one another up so that they remain ‘In Christ’ until Jesus comes back for them and everything is made new.

I point this out now because his concern for them to look normal or godly to outsiders seems odd to us if people are considering a later church that is standing against the world.

**The most contentious verses in this passage are obviously verses 33-36.**

(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.[[d](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians+14&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-28698d)] **36**Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached?)

You often see these verses in brackets. That is because there is genuine questioning about whether these verses are written by Paul. The reasons for this are varied but the main ones are that this edict seems out of character for the rest of the instructions to do with women (how to behave *when* prophecying in the assembly for example) and that it often is found in early manuscripts at v40 which indicates for some scholars that this was an explanatory gloss on the text added in later by copyists to the main body of the text.

*The argument against them being original to the letter:*

-The structure of the argument is interrupted by these two sentences and their rhetoric. His argument flows neatly from verse 32 -37 with its focus on prophecy and his turning the argument on to them that a true prophet will acknowledge his teaching as correct (nice trap for them!).

-The subject matter has been manifestations of the spirit and the gender of those gifted has not been an issue at all. In fact in chapter 11 women are assumed to be praying and prophesying, and this seems so obvious a thing to be happening, that Paul needs to talk to them about doing so in an appropriate fashion.

- the language of ‘as the Law says’: in other places in the Corinthian correspondence when Paul makes a plea to the ‘law’ he cites the text (9:18; 14:21). The Corinthians are unlikely to be very familiar with Hebrew texts so he makes it clear when he is using that tradition, and does not use ‘the Law’ as a reason anywhere else.

- the Law is a problem because the Law says no such thing. Nothing in the Torah talks about women not speaking in the assembly. If he is appealing to the Law it must be a later rabbinic Judaism (Fee, 1 Corinthians, p708).

- The writer seems intent on keeping women silent in the assembly which does not seem to fit with other Pauline context, especially those of the 7 definite letters of Paul (Romans, 1&2 Cor,, 1 Thess, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon).

- The placement of the verses is different across different extant early versions of the text of 1 Corinthians (remember we have no copies of this letter from the first century though it is thought to be composed in the later first century). These verses either exist here at verse 33 or after verse 40. This means that scribes were unsure where they went. There is no great reason for them being here at 33 or at 40. They stick out wherever they are placed. One argument is that they are a scribal gloss that was added to the final form of the letter in later editions as the church gathered the canon as they fit with later Pauline literature, or to make them fit with later Pauline literature (1 Timothy for example).

*How do they make sense if they are original and in the right place?*

There are many scholars who believe they are original and in the right place. Including those who fixed the canon. And, as churches use the canon we still have to wrestle with their content.

The argument of those who think they do fit usually then tries to understand a context in which Paul would write such bold lines, if he didn’t mean to undermine the rest of the letter which does not differentiate by gender in terms of gifting and practice within the church.

* Only certain types of speech are prohibited. Paul here cannot be outlawing all speech by women in the assembly, rather he is asking for control of women who speak out of turn (like the prophets speaking out of turn in the previous verses) and who are abusing their new found freedom. This puts the verses in to the context of chapter 14 and views them through that lens.
* The submission is to the assembly. Again, seeing the women who do not know how to behave in public because until now their religious practice would have kept them quiet they may have been acting out of turn. Or it may be about shouting and asking questions of their husbands when they should be listening.
* Verse 36 therefore indicates that these verses are not about speaking from the front or prophesying, but rather are about women learning, and not keeping proper order. It is posited that women and men sat separately and so a woman who had a question would shout to her husband. In this case it could be that Paul is speaking about order once again, and that these verses do fit with the current discussion – how to behave in an orderly manner in the assembly.

If the verses are in the right place then the only way to have them make sense, as far as I can see, and not make Paul a hypocrite, is to interpret them as Paul indicating, as in 1 Timothy, that women who until now have been prevented from learning and leading religious groups need to do the learning in the same submission as men who learn – that is in submission to the group, and in submission to proper order.

If Paul is saying every woman should be silent then one wonders why he wrote most of the letter without being specific that he was only speaking to the men. As there is no indication or other evidence that these letters were only for men (in fact all our evidence about early Christian groups is to the contrary) to read these verses as anything other than an edict *for* the teaching of women, and *for* the orderly behaviour of the assembly within cultural norms, seems strange to me.

In this case the very strange rhetorical questions ‘Or did the word of God originate with you?’ are similar to Paul’s statements at the end of 11:16 – he is appealing to the traditions of religious assembly, in effect saying: Why are you starting new traditions? Why are you behaving against the grain?

*Its up to you to decide how you want to deal with these verses. They have genuinely been debated in some of the earliest letters in Christendom, so confusion over them is nothing new. My request would be this – view them in light of the rest of the letter. What are the key features of the arguments Paul makes? What positive statements does he make that are clear about what anyone (male or female) can do in the assembly? What gaps are you having to fill in to make this either pro or anti women speaking (as it causes problems either way)? What is the larger picture that Paul is creating?*