

“Oneness”

Spring Series 1

Lesson 5

“1 Corinthians 14:33b-36”

Objective: To examine the Scriptures in order to seek understanding and guidance on how we are to work together as the people of God using all the gifts and resources that God has bestowed upon the Church. Through the centuries the relationship of men and women and their service to God has been hotly debated and continually examined. We consider what we are undertaking here to be a continuation of that debate and dialogue as we carefully and prayerfully seek the guidance of God through His Word and His Spirit. We are people of the Book and it is to the book that we look for answers to our questions, not to traditions, to science, or to society.

Materials: The Bible, Ancient translations, Commentaries, both ancient and modern, Books, journal articles, dictionaries, the internet, inscriptions, Ancient letters, Ancient Documents, lectures and other resources as may be appropriate.

Procedures

1. To explore the message of God in the hope of understanding more fully its meaning first as it was understood by the original audiences of Scripture and what they will have understood as God’s will for their lives in community.
2. To understand how Scripture has inspired, challenged, and educated people down through the centuries guiding them not only in their personal lives, but in their vocation as image-bearers of God.
3. We will seek to find out how beliefs have played a role in the history of Christianity and how they continue to impact our existence and service to Jesus Christ in the world today.
4. We will provide a sheet to take home as a reminder of what has been examined and to provide additional opportunities for consideration of these matters and their application in order to live out daily our eternal destiny. This sheet can be used as a discussion guide for small group discussion.

As we begin this lesson we need to be reminded of the lessons that have come before. In Genesis 1 and 2 the focus of God creating the man and the woman was for them to be His image-bearers in the world. They were to rule this world as His representative together bearing His image as a unified partnership, created distinct and different, but in those differences representing the unity of God. They failed to trust God and ate of the forbidden fruit and so they were ejected from the Garden, from fellowship with God, and their unity was broken with God and with each other. In 1 Timothy 2 we have problems being addressed by Paul at the Church in Ephesus that were bringing the church into disrepute because men and women were not standing in proper unity with one another and reflecting morality and oneness in ways that were indicative of their differences as male and female. In Corinthians 11, Paul addresses problems of a similar nature where both men and women were stepping beyond proper boundaries. Men were introducing pagan practices in the church by covering their head and women were dishonoring men and the church by failing to follow customs that gave the impression of immorality and rebelliousness. They were



not expressing the unity that God called them to as His people as His servants. The focus comes back again and again to bringing glory to God in reflecting Him in unity.

As we come to the text of 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36 we come once again to verses that have proven to be controversial and especially in recent years have become a battleground. One of the main issues that seems to make these verses such a battleground is the failure of people to consider the immediate context. Careful exegesis of a text is always critical. This means the normal rules for interpreting a text must be followed. Osburn points out that, “Considerable clarification of these verses in their context is required if appropriate use is to be made of this admonition in current practice.”¹ The tendency is for people to read the text in a simplistic manner that only looks at the immediate words without examining the wider context. Proof texting, using a concordance, or choosing texts from memory and then just examining a few verses, or words without carefully considering the overall context leads to many fallacious interpretive issues.

¹ Carroll D. Osburn, *Women in the Church* (Abilene TX: ACU Press, 2001), p. 189.

One of the pressing issues that we have with this section of Scripture is that verses 34-35 in most Greek manuscripts have these two verses in the text between verse 33 and verse 36, as would be expected. In a handful of Western manuscripts these verses are found following verse 40.² For some scholars, this leads them to the conclusion that these verses are not original with Paul, but were added later by another writer.³ Apart from the manuscript evidence, the principal reason for denying the Pauline authorship of verses 34-35 is the invocation of the authority of the Law used to found a moral attitude. Some scholars have come to the conclusion that “Paul never appeals to the Law in this manner.”⁴

² D F G 88* it^{d.g} Ambrosiaster Sedulius Scottus Fuldensis. The earliest of these manuscripts is from the 6th century (D). F and G are from the 9th century, 88* is from the 5th/6th century. The it^{d.g} is in Italian. Ambrosiaster is a 4th century commentary that provides valuable information on the Latin text. Sedulius Scottus was a 9th Irish teacher who wrote a commentary on the Epistles of Paul. Fuldensis is a 6th century codex based on the Latin Vulgate.

³ C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968), pp. 330-332. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies Greek New Testament* (third edition) Corrected Edition (London: United Bible Societies, 1975) pp. 565-567. Barbara and Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th Revised Edition (Münster/Westphalia: Deutsche BibelGesellschaft, 2012), pp. 547-548. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, “Interpolations in 1 Corinthians,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48:1 (1986), pp. 81-94. Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2009), pp. 217-267.

⁴ Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, “Interpolations in 1 Corinthians,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48:1 (1986), pp. 81-94.

Many scholars accept the authenticity of these verses and see these verses as an integral part of the letter. Flanagan and Snyder put forward this view, as a creative solution, to what they perceive to be a problem: and they propose that in verses 34-35 Paul is quoting what some are saying at Corinth before he then repudiates it in verse 36. This position is bolstered by Paul's usage of the masculine adjective *monous* (μόνους - literally - "only men") in verse 36 which could be seen as indicating the slogan of verses 34-35 as something being put forward by a group of men that Paul then rebukes in verse 36.⁵ Such a translation and understanding takes into consideration the strange and unexpected masculinity of verse 36. One would have expected this verse to be addressed to the women since Paul has been speaking primarily to the women in verses 34 and 35.⁶

Certainly it is the case that if we isolate these verses from their wider context this conclusion sounds convincing, but to accept this solution is to fail in the effort to conduct good exegesis. It must be remembered that this passage is indeed part of a larger

⁵ The translation would then be, **Or did the word of God come out of you? Or are you the only men it has reached?**

⁶ Neal M. Flanagan, and Edwina H. Snyder, "Did Paul Put Down Women in 1 Corinthians 14:34-36," *Foundations* 24:3 (1981), pp. 216-220.

section that is concerned with disruptions in the public worship assembly. It must be remembered that the focus of Paul's argument in chapter 14 is focused upon the maintenance of order when the church assembles together for corporate worship. At 14:26 Paul states a general principal that should provide guidance for everything that occurs in worship ("Let all things be done for building up"), Paul then gives specific guidance with regard to tongues, prophecy, and the conduct of women. He will then close out this section with the admonition that "all things should be done decently and in an orderly fashion (14:40)."⁷

It is important to recognize the wider context of this section that includes 1 Corinthians 11, that we studied last week, and includes chapter 13 that speaks so eloquently of love. The focus throughout is upon edification, building unity. That which builds up the body and all of its parts into a unified whole. Anything that does not do this, or detracts from this in any way is to be curbed and brought into line with this general principle. If the implication of this passage is taken to indicate "total silence" then this would silence the praying and prophesying of the women in

⁷ Robert Scott Nash, *1 Corinthians*, in the Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary series (Macon GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Incorporated, 2009), pp. 378-379.



the assembly spoken of in 11:2-16. It would then be really hard for women to minister if they must be silent at all times. We have other passages of Scripture written by Paul where he speaks positively of his female coworkers (1 Corinthians 16:19; Romans 16; Philippians 4:2-3; Colossians 4:15), which would certainly counter such a view.⁸

The best way of taking this passage is to take these verses to be Paul's own words, that are original to the text, in this place, and not contradicting 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 nor the other parts of Scripture. All these things being true, the best way to understand what Paul is addressing here is to understand a situation where wives are speaking in a way that is considered shameful and disrespectful to their husbands and is bringing disunity and disrepute into the church.⁹ Kenneth Bailey takes these verses in 14:33b-36 to be indicative of a situation that is also common in the Middle East, in his experience. The situation is that the language of the worship service is the language of trade and commerce of the community, but this is not the language that many of these people use at home. Corinth was the largest city in

⁸ Robert Scott Nash, *1 Corinthians*, p. 381.

⁹ Robert Scott Nash, *1 Corinthians*, p. 381.

Greece in the time of Paul. It had a very diverse population, with a large workforce and extensive manufacturing industry. It was a hub of transport using the 3.5 mile stone road that spanned the isthmus of Corinth for trade. A great deal of labor was required and much of it will have been slave labor. In addition, the biennial Isthmian Games would have brought a further influx of people from many nations. Greek was the only language that this diverse group would have shared in common. For the lower classes, enough Greek to function in their job will have been vital.¹⁰

The question is what about women? Women were expected to spend most of their time at home and this was the case whether the families involved were slaves, traders, day laborers, or skilled craftsmen. The languages that would have been spoken in these homes would have been numerous and diverse. One can add to this difficulty the problem of accent. It is often the case that when a public speaker, functioning in a second language speaks, even when the speaker is quite fluent, it is difficult for the audience to comprehend what is being said due to their accent. We have all experienced this. It can be the case that when a speaker's words

¹⁰ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes* (Downers Grove IL: IVP Academic, 2011), pp. 412-413.

are not understood, a low buzz can break out as the listeners ask each other what the speaker said? Or perhaps add clarification on a word?¹¹

The short attention span for simple people (like modern television addicts) was certainly also another problem. Bailey recounts that from 1957-1962 he was part of a team that engaged in teaching simple villagers in the south of Egypt how to read their own language (Arabic). The women there, through no fault of their own, had a special problem. Due to the limited nature of their social contacts they had developed a very limited attention span, thus he had to take special measures to teach them (he said their attention span was about 15 seconds). One of the side affects of their limited attention span was that they were constantly talking with one another. They could be seated twelve feet away from others and they would shout to each other making it impossible to conduct classes in the usual manner. He ended up breaking them into groups of no more than three at a time and then focusing upon each one individually for very short lessons. Having never focused their minds for an extended period on any

¹¹ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*, p. 413.

topic, their attention span was naturally short. Large groups of simple, uneducated women, presented unique challenges to educate.¹²

It is the case that ancient cultures often developed a classical language and a colloquial language. This was certainly the case during the time of Paul and in the places that he labored in proclaiming the Gospel. The way that Paul and others spoke in the churches was not the same as the way people spoke to one another in private homes. A very small number of people were literate in the Mediterranean world of the first century (scholars estimate about a 10% literacy rate). We have no record of how people spoke to one another at home because even personal letters were written by the 10% who wrote in *literary* Koine Greek. An example of this can be seen in the first four verses of Luke's Gospel that are in fact a single very polished sentence of thirty-nine words. Most of the illiterate workers and slaves in Corinth would not have been able to comprehend Luke's sentence without help.¹³

¹² Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*, p. 413.

¹³ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*, pp. 413-414.

Bailey recounts his experience of preaching in village churches in Egypt where the women were seated on one side of the church and the men on the other with a wooden partition six foot high separating the two sections. He said he preached in simple colloquial Arabic, but the women were often illiterate and the preacher was expected to speak for at least an hour. The women quickly were past their attention span. The children were also seated with them and inevitably chatting broke out between them. At times this chatting would become so loud that no one could hear the preacher. There was no electricity in these villages and therefore no power for speakers and amplifiers. When it became too loud one of the senior elders would stand up and in a very desperate voice and shout, "Let the women be silent in the church!" Then about 10 minutes later this same scene would repeat itself again.¹⁴

Preaching in the cathedral of Antioch in the latter part of the fourth century A.D. we have the following words of the great Christian preacher Chrysostom after quoting 1 Corinthians 14:34-35:¹⁵

¹⁴ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*, p. 414.

¹⁵ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*, p. 414.

Then indeed the women, from such teaching, kept silence; but now there is apt to be great noise among them, much clamor and talking, and nowhere so much as in this place [the cathedral]. They may all be seen here talking more than in the market, or at the bath. For, as if they came hither for recreation, they are all engaged in conversing upon unprofitable subjects. Thus all is confusion, and they seem not to understand, that unless they are quiet, they cannot learn anything that is useful. For when our discourse strains against the talking, and no one minds what is said, what can it do for them?"¹⁶

The scenario that stands as the background for the issues at Corinth likely is that in societies where women are expected to engage less in commerce and trade they are far less familiar with such language. In light of this, they are likely unable to

¹⁶ Chrysostom, "Homily IX [1 Timothy ii. 11-15]," in Philip Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, In A Select Library of the Christian Church series, Vol. 13 (Peabody MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), p. 435.

understand all that is being said. They then begin to talk with one another and to ask questions in a manner that gets louder and louder until it disrupts the service. If this was the situation at Corinth, and likely it was, Paul is telling the women to be quiet during the assembly and ask their husbands for clarification at home.¹⁷

Chapter 14:26-36 in fact lists three groups of people who were disturbing worship. These are:

1. The (male and female) *prophets* are told:
 - Don't all talk at once.
 - Be *silent* in church.
2. The (male and female) *speakers in tongues* are told:
 - If there is no interpreter,
 - *be silent* in church.
3. Married women *with Christian husbands* (who attend) are told:

¹⁷ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*, pp.407-418. Kenneth E. Bailey, "Women in the New Testament: A Middle Eastern Cultural View," *Theology Matters* 6:1 (2000), p. 1-11. N. T. Wright Video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSZPyZFWQ10>.

- Don't ask questions during the worship and don't chat.
- Ask your husbands at home and *be silent* in church.

Each of these groups is instructed to be silent (σιγάτω - sigato) when it disturbs worship. "Paul is not telling the female prophets discussed in chapter 11 to stop prophesying."¹⁸

There is however another reality that needs to be considered. The society of Paul was a predominantly oral culture. In an oral culture people process information by talking more than by sitting quietly and reflecting. Middle Eastern society is still a predominantly oral society today (this is where Kenneth Bailey spent most of his life working). In such a society one can observe how this works when say a university professor will have the attention of the class and then turn to write something on the blackboard. The moment the professor pauses to write on the blackboard the entire class will break out in talking. The people in the class are not intending to be inattentive or rude, they are simply turning to a fellow student and chatting about the subject.

¹⁸ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*, p. 415.

This social style is even more predominate among women in the Middle East. They will take advantage of any pause - often talking out loud and sometimes to themselves. They are verbalizing information they have heard in order to better absorb and retain it.¹⁹

Multiple factors need to be considered in understanding the culture of Corinth in the first century: Attention-span, limited knowledge of Greek, accents, differing language levels, lack of amplification, and chatting as a methodology of learning.

The women at Corinth are included in the list given by Paul along with the tongues speakers and prophets, because each group is disrupting worship, and each group is instructed to be silent using the same verb. Paul asked each to be “silent in the church.” Paul tells the married women to stop chatting so that they can listen to the women and men who are trying to bring them a word through prophesy or speaking in tongues. No one in the assembly can hear because of the chatting.²⁰

One further issue needs to be addressed before we conclude: in verse 34 Paul wrote that women, “... should be

¹⁹ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*, pp. 415-416.

²⁰ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*, p. 416.

submissive (ὑποτασσεσθωσαν - *hypotassesthosan*), as the law (ὁ νόμος - *ho nomos*) says.” In 1 Corinthians Paul uses this expression (The Law) not just to refer to the Torah alone, but to the Old Testament in general.²¹ To be honest, there is no consensus as to what Paul is alluding to in this instance, there are variety of views and none of them seem convincing. One of these given by Witherington links Paul’s usage of the Greek expression ὑποτάσσω (*hypotasso* - *submission*) with “the Law” suggesting that Paul is addressing here not a disorder in family relations, but disorder in the corporate worship assembly. This would explain why Paul uses the *absolute form*²² of *hypotasso* (ὑποτάσσω) here. Women are not here being commanded to submit to their husbands as is stated in some part of the Law which no one has been thus far able to definitively identify, but to the principle of order in the worship service, which involves silence and respect that should be exercised when another is speaking. The Corinthians would perhaps know that the Old Testament admonishes a respectful silence when a word of wise counsel is

²¹ 1 Corinthians 14:21 refers to Isaiah 28:11-12 using this expression.

²² Hans Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, in the *Hermeneia - A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* series (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 246, Note 53.

spoken (Job 29:21²³).²⁴ The main thing to note here is that the issue is not that they submit to their husbands, but that they respect others by submitting to being quiet while others are speaking. That subject is addressed elsewhere.

In summary, the issue in this section, as it is in the previous sections of 1 Corinthians in this larger section (1 Corinthians 11-14), is to deal with disruptions in the worship assembly. In each of those sections Paul tells the different disrupting groups to “be silent.” Paul here, as he does in the other sections, calls for order and quiet so that the service may be conducted in a manner that allows people to hear what is being said. He is not proclaiming a general and total silence of women in all instances. What is said here must align with what we know of the rest of Scripture, including 1 Corinthians 11 where Paul is fine with men and women praying and prophesying as long as they do so in line with certain contingencies that continue to distinguish the differences between men and women. This passage does not prohibit women speaking in the public worship assembly. Rather,

²³ **People listened to me and waited, were silent for my advice.** CEB.

²⁴ Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, in the Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, Vol 59 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988/2000) pp. 102-103.

the admonition is that in all things there is a building up of the church for service to the mission of God and this means listening to others who are speaking rather than talking and being disruptive. The call is once again for unity and order in the church as a reflection of the nature and image of God.

Dynamic Equivalence Translation with Running Commentary

1 Corinthians 14:33b As in all the churches of the holy ones ³⁴ The wives in the churches should be silent; for it is not permitted for them to speak in a disrupting manner, but they must be quiet and attentive, just as the law says. ³⁵ If they desire to understand anything, let them ask their own husbands in the house, for it is shameful for wives to speak in church in a disrupting manner. ³⁶ Or did the word of God come out of you, or are you the only ones it has reached?

Kenneth Bailey's interpretive translation of 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36

"I know your Greek is limited. But your husbands have learned a bit more Greek than you have managed to absorb. They have to in order to function on the job. You have not had this chance and it is not your fault. But things have gotten out of hand on a number of levels. Please be helpful and put your questions to your husbands after you return home. I have just told other speakers when to be quiet. This is a situation in which you also need to listen quietly even if you can't follow what is said.

Synopsis

The focus of each of the previous lessons we have studied up to this point is upon unity and expressing the image of God in unity. This is seen in the creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2 and then that unity is broken by sin in chapter 3 between God and humans and between the male and the female. In Christ, we are called to restore the unity God always intended. Humanity is to reflect His image as diverse and different beings connected by a common Lord and by His common goals.

As we come to the 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36 we come to an area that has become a battleground. This text has been used by many to indicate that women are to be silent. For some this is seen as silence in the assembly, for others this is seen as silence except when women are at home. In each of these interpretations there is a failure to acknowledge the larger context of these verses within 1 Corinthians and in the larger corpus of Scripture. We also must recognize that this was a letter written to a specific audience in a specific location for a specific set of purposes. We are required to make assumptions as to the nature of these circumstances, hopefully from clues that we have from the

writings themselves and from our understandings of history and archaeology we make these assumptions.

The observations from Kenneth Bailey provide a very viable scenario for these writings and seem to consider the history and archaeology of the region in a manner that makes good sense of what Paul has written here. When we consider this background, these verses do not contradict the rest of Scripture, or indeed the internal unity of 1 Corinthians itself. These verses align well with the unity and orderliness that we are called to elsewhere in Scripture as God's image bearers, male and female that in our diversity and differences both reflect God's image.

Questions

1. As you read through the Bible how important do you think the concept of “unity” is?
2. As you look at the world in which we live today, how important do you think “unity” is?
3. Where are some places in our world where you see “unity” most powerfully displayed?
4. What languages were used to write the oldest forms of the Bible that we use today?
5. When you find something in life that you disagree with how likely are you to ignore that thing? Why?
6. How important is understanding the context of a writing, or a conversation in avoiding misunderstanding?
7. Have you ever experienced a setting where it was difficult to understand the speaker because of their accent, or their vocabulary? What was your response?
8. How important do you think understanding culture is to understanding something written by someone in a particular culture to someone in that culture; a culture that is different from your own?
9. What do you think it means that in 1 Corinthians 14 Paul tells three separate groups of people to “be silent?”
10. If a society were illiterate would that change the manner in which you would communicate to people in that society? What would you change? Why would you change that?
11. How hard is it for you to continue to give your attention to a speaker when you cannot understand what they are saying?

12.How do people develop a greater attention span?

13.Why do you think Scripture can be challenging to understand?

14.What do you think the main purpose of the Christian worship is meant to be? Why?

15.How willing are you to give up what you prefer in order to express the unity of God?

To Take Home

What is Important to know?

It is important to know that context is critical in understanding others. This is something that is crucial whether the communication form is verbal or written. When we are missing part of the context of a conversation, or the context for a piece of literature misunderstanding becomes much more likely. In such instances extra care and attention must be given to any contextual clues that are given. When is a time when you misunderstood someone because you did not understand the context?

Where is God in these words?

God is in these words guiding people to learn more about His nature and helping people to be true disciples of Jesus. For disciples of Jesus personal preference and personal opinions are not the focus. What is important is what God wants and we are called to reflect obedience to His will and His plan. At times that will be very uncomfortable and certainly there will be times when we do not fully understand all that we are called to do. To be a disciple of Jesus means that we trust God and follow especially when we do not understand everything. Do you always understand things before you do them? Why, or why not?

What does any of this mean for how I live my life?

Each person is given choices about how they will live their life and what their focus will be. Each day our priorities and our goals are reflected in the choices that we make. The world as a whole often has very different priorities than followers of Christ. Often the focus of the world is more upon the individual and what I as an individual find fulfilling, or enjoy. The call of discipleship is to focus upon what God wants and what others need. How will such perspectives be demonstrated especially in the assembly times of the church?

What is the word of God calling us to do?

The word of God is calling us to not only understand that God is a God of order, but to reflect that in our lives and especially in our times of assembly. It is calling upon each one of us to participate in expressing this order and unity in all areas of our lives and faith. It is so easy to shift our focus from Jesus to other priorities and to shift our course. Over and over Paul will remind his readers that they need to retain their focus upon unity; unity with each other as a reflection of the nature of God. What are some ways that you can individually be a better reflection of the unity of God?