

## PROPHECY—YES, BUT TEACHING—NO: PAUL'S CONSISTENT ADVOCACY OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION WITHOUT GOVERNING AUTHORITY

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In 1 Cor 11:5 Paul apparently assumes that women may pray and prophesy freely in the public assemblies of the church, for he does not forbid these activities but merely regulates them by stipulating the necessity of a head-covering. And in Acts 21:9 Philip's four unmarried daughters prophesy.

But in 1 Cor 14:33-35 Paul enjoins women to be silent with respect to some kinds of speech in the assembled church. And in 1 Tim 2:11-14 he prohibits women from teaching or having authority over men.

Are these passages consistent with one another? If "prophecy" and "teaching" are different words for the same activity, then the passages would seem contradictory. And even on the basis of some contemporary understandings of the English words "prophecy" and "teaching," these passages seem irreconcilable.

But I shall attempt to demonstrate that if we derive our definitions of "prophecy" and "teaching" inductively from the NT text itself, these two functions are found to be distinct activities, different in the kind of authority possessed by those who exercise them.<sup>1</sup> Once these NT definitions of "prophecy" and "teaching" are used, Paul's statements about women speaking in church can be seen to be consistent with each other and with indications about women's role in the Church that are found in the rest of the NT.

### I. THE NATURE OF PROPHECY IN NT CHURCHES

1. *The gift of prophecy in the NT Church had less authority than Scripture or apostolic teaching.* Most evangelicals will readily agree that the OT prophets were able to speak and write with absolute divine authority. Their words were the very words of God, and they were able to be written down as God's word in Scripture for all time (Deut 18:18-20; Jer 1:9; Num 22:38; Ezek 2:7; etc.). Therefore to disbelieve or disobey a prophet's words was to disbelieve or disobey God (Deut 18:19; 1 Sam 8:7; 1 Kgs 20:26; etc.).

In the NT there are also men who can speak and write God's very words in Scripture, but we are surprised to find that Jesus no longer calls them "prophets" but uses a new term: "apostles." The apostles are the NT counterpart to

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<sup>1</sup>I have argued this in greater detail in *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* (Washington: University Press of America, 1982).

the OT prophets (Gal 1:8–9, 11–12; 1 Cor 2:13; 2 Cor 13:3; 1 Thess 2:13; 4:8, 15; 2 Pet 3:2; etc.). Distinguishing himself from those who claim to be prophets at the time of the NT, Paul says, “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord” (1 Cor 14:27).

Why did Jesus choose the new term *apostolos* (“apostle”) to designate those who had the authority to write Scripture? It was probably because *prophētēs* (“prophet”) at the time of the NT had a very broad range of meanings. In the Greek-speaking world generally it did not have the sense “one who speaks God’s very words” but merely “one who speaks as the result of an external spiritual influence” (Titus 1:12 and probably Luke 22:64 seem to use the term in this broader sense, as do many extra-Biblical passages).<sup>2</sup>

But in the NT was the term *prophētēs* ever applied to the apostles? There are a few instances in which this is the case, always in contexts where there is emphasis on an external spiritual influence (from the Holy Spirit) under which the apostles spoke. So Paul can speak of the apostles as prophets in Eph 2:20; 3:5. Here he cannot be speaking of all the prophets in local congregations at that time, for here prophets are said to be the “foundation” of the Church—not just individual churches but the Church generally—and they are said to be the group to whom the “mystery” was revealed that Gentiles should be included with equal standing in the Church (3:5–6). These things were not true of all the believers who had the gift of prophecy in local congregations in Corinth, Thessalonica, Rome, Tyre, Ephesus, etc. Certainly we cannot say that all of the believers who were converted and began to prophesy in local congregations decades after the Church had begun were the “foundation” of the Church universal, nor can we say that they were the ones to whom God had revealed the fact of Gentile inclusion in the Church. But these things were true of the apostles in their foundational role in the Church, as God revealed to them the mystery of the Gentile inclusion.

This identification of the apostles as prophets in Eph 2:20; 3:5 is made more clear by the grammatically legitimate translation “the apostles who are also prophets.”<sup>3</sup> But in 4:11, in a different context (where he is talking about gifts

<sup>2</sup>See H. Krämer, “*prophētēs*,” *TDNT* 6 (1968) 793–795, with many examples from Greek literature. The word could refer to the advocates of a particular philosophy, the “specialist” in botany, the members of an upper priestly caste in Egypt, the heralds who declared the victor at games, or (ironically) the “quack” in medicine. Krämer concludes that the word “simply expresses the formal function of declaring, proclaiming, making known” (p. 795). Cf. Grudem, *Gift* 33–43.

<sup>3</sup>Although it is not necessary from a grammatical standpoint it is certainly legitimate and, in context, probably preferable to translate Eph 2:20; 3:5 not as “apostles and prophets” (suggesting two separate groups) but as “apostles-prophets” or “apostles who are also prophets” (indicating one group); so also D. Hill, *New Testament Prophecy* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979) 139. The construction *tōn apostolōn kai prophētōn* (2:20; note the similar construction in 3:5) is grammatically the same as the phrase *tous de poimenas kai didaskalous* (“and some pastor-teachers”) in Eph 4:11. All three examples take the form definite article + noun + *kai* + noun, a construction that can refer either to the same person(s) with two different titles or to two persons (or groups of persons) viewed as a single group or unit (cf. A. T. Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament* [Nashville: Broadman, 1934] 785–788). Similar examples of plural nouns viewed as a unit include Luke 15:9; Col 2:22; 1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 4:3. Therefore even if someone does not want to translate the phrase “the apostles who are also prophets,”

given to the Church generally), Paul uses a different construction to distinguish “apostles” from “prophets” and show that he is referring in this case to two distinct groups (the phrase *tous de prophētas* in 4:11 repeats the definite article before “prophets”).

Another instance where an apostle is viewed as a prophet is the apostle John in the book of Revelation (cf. Rev 1:1–3, etc.). The term “prophecy” is appropriate to this book because of its emphasis on revelation given by God. Revelation is an example of a prophecy given through an apostle and therefore possessing absolute divine authority. It is part of Scripture.

But the terms “prophet” and “prophecy” did not in themselves imply divine authority for the speech or writing, nor were those commonly the terms used of the NT apostles. In fact, apart from these few passages where the apostles are called “prophets” or said to “prophesy” we find that much more commonly the words “prophet,” “prophecy” and “prophesy” were used of ordinary Christians scattered throughout the early churches who spoke not with absolute divine authority<sup>4</sup> but simply to report something that God had laid on their hearts or brought to their minds. Thus there are many indications in the NT that this ordinary gift of prophecy had authority less than that of the Bible and even less than that of recognized Bible teaching in the early Church.

In Acts 21:4 we read of the disciples of Tyre: “Through the Spirit they told Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.” This seems to be a reference to prophecy directed toward Paul, but Paul disobeyed it. He never would have done so if this prophecy had contained God’s very words.

In 21:9 we read that Philip had “four unmarried daughters who prophesied.” Admittedly they are mentioned only in passing, but it is interesting to note that there is no record of their speaking with absolute divine authority or of any words of Scripture written by them or by any other prophets who were ordinary believers in local NT churches.

In 21:10–11 Agabus prophesies that the Jews at Jerusalem will “bind (*dēsousin*) Paul and deliver him (*paradōsousin*) into the hands of the Gentiles,” a prediction that is nearly correct but not quite: The Romans bound Paul (v 33, where Luke uses the same verb, *deō*), and the Jews, rather than delivering him voluntarily, tried to kill him and he had to be rescued by force (v 32). The prediction was not far off, but it was an inaccuracy in detail that would have called into question the validity of any OT prophet.

Paul tells the Thessalonians: “Do not despise prophesying, but test everything, hold fast to what is good” (1 Thess 5:20–21). If prophecy had equaled God’s word in authority, he would never have had to tell the Thessalonians not to despise it. They “received” and “accepted” God’s word “with joy from the Holy Spirit” (1:6; 2:13; cf. 4:15). Moreover when Paul tells them to “test every-

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the presence of only one definite article requires that “apostles and prophets” be seen here as a single group, a group much more closely connected with one another than the NT apostles were with all the ordinary prophets in all the local churches in the first-century Mediterranean world. So even on this basis it is very unlikely that ordinary church prophets in local churches could be meant in Eph 2:20; 3:5.

<sup>4</sup>Hill, *Prophecy* 93, 114–116, 118, 135–136, 169, 179, 194, makes a similar distinction in authority between the apostles as prophets and ordinary Christian prophets in local churches.

thing” the command must include at least the prophecies he mentioned in the previous phrase. He implies that prophecies contain some things that are good and some things that are not good when he encourages them to “hold fast to that which is good.” This is something that could never have been said of the words of an OT prophet or of the authoritative words of a NT apostle.

In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul says, “Let two or three prophets speak and let the others weigh what is said” (v 29). Here he suggests that they should listen carefully and sift the good from the bad, accepting some and rejecting the rest (for this is the implication of the Greek word *diakrinō*, here translated “weigh what is said”).<sup>5</sup> If Paul had meant that the Corinthians were to judge whether each speaker was a true or a false prophet he probably would have used not *diakrinō* but *krinō*, the term the NT uses when speaking of judgments where there are only two possibilities, such as “true” or “false,” “guilty” or “not guilty” (cf. Matt 7:1; 19:28; John 7:51; 18:31; Acts 16:15; 25:10; Rom 2:1; 14:3, 4, 10, 13; 1 Cor 4:5; 5:3, 12; 6:1–3; 10:15; 11:13; Col 2:16; Heb 10:30; 13:4; Jas 4:11 etc.).

Therefore 1 Cor 14:29 is another indication of the lack of absolute divine authority in NT prophecy. We cannot imagine that an OT prophet like Isaiah would have said, “Listen to what I say and weigh what is said—sort the good from the bad, what you accept from what you should not accept.” If prophecy had absolute divine authority, it would be sin to do this. But here Paul commands that it be done, suggesting that NT prophecy did not have the authority of God’s very words.

In v 30 Paul allows one prophet to interrupt another one: “If a revelation is made to another sitting by, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one.” Again, if prophets had been speaking God’s very words, equal in value to Scripture, it is hard to imagine that Paul would say they should be interrupted and not allowed to finish their message. But that is what Paul commands.

Paul suggests that no one at Corinth, a church that had much prophecy was able to speak God’s very words. He says in v 36, “What! Did the word of God come forth from you, or are you the only ones it has reached?” He implies therefore that the word of God has not come forth from them—and therefore that they should be subject to his apostolic directions, not think that some of their prophets could give directions of equal authority: The word of God came forth from Paul and the other apostles, not from any prophets in local churches such as Corinth.

<sup>5</sup>Although *diakrinō* has a wide range of meanings, it frequently takes the sense “make distinctions carefully, evaluate, sort, sift, separate” among closely related things or ideas. It can be used, for instance, of sifting wheat (Philo *Mut.* 249; *Jos.* 113), of distinguishing clean from unclean animal (Josephus *Ant.* 3.259), or of separating persons who were guilty of wrongdoing from the rest of the crowd (Josephus *J.W.* 4.118, 543). It is used of distinguishing good from evil (*T. Asher* 1:5; cf. the cognate noun *diakrisis* in Heb 5:14) and of sorting true words from false (Philo *Congr.* 18; cf. LX) Job 12:11). In the NT *diakrinō* can be used of distinguishing between Jewish and Gentile believer (Acts 15:9; probably also 11:12), or among different atmospheric conditions indicated by the appearance of the sky (Matt 16:3), or of making difficult decisions regarding disputes between Christians (1 Cor 6:5). (This sense of *diakrinō* gains some confirmation also from the fact that in the middle voice it takes a distinctive sense, “to doubt,” a related idea that carries an intensified nuance of weighing, closely competing ideas in one’s mind.)

Again in vv 37–38 he claims authority greater than any prophet at Corinth: “If anyone things that he is a prophet or spiritual, then he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.” No prophet in the church at Corinth could claim authority equal to Paul’s or expect to challenge Paul’s directions even on matters such as the conduct of the local worship service. The suggestion is that NT prophecy had authority less than apostolic speech and less than Scripture.

So prophecies given in local NT churches should be considered merely human words, not God’s words and not equal to God’s words in authority. It is certainly a mistake to equate NT church prophets with the divinely authoritative prophets of the OT.

At this point it is appropriate to make a parenthetical comment regarding the charismatic movement today. Although most charismatics would agree that prophecy today is not equal to Scripture in authority, it must be said that in practice much confusion results from the habit of prefacing prophecies with the common OT phrase “Thus says the Lord” (a phrase not used by any prophets in NT churches).<sup>6</sup> The modern use of this phrase is unfortunate because it gives the impression that the words that follow are God’s very words, whereas the NT does not justify that position and, when pressed, most responsible charismatic spokesmen would not want to claim it for every part of their prophecies anyway. So there would be much gain and no loss if that introductory phrase were dropped.

2. A *spontaneous “revelation” made prophecy different from teaching.* If prophecy does not contain God’s very words, then what is it? In what sense is it from God?

Paul indicates that God could bring something spontaneously to mind so that the person prophesying would report it in his or her own words. Paul calls this a “revelation” (*apokalypsis, apokalyptō*): “If a revelation is made (*apokalypthē*) to another sitting by, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be encouraged” (1 Cor 14:30–31). Here he uses the word “revelation” in a broader sense than the technical sense in which it has been used in systematic theology (to speak of words equal to Scripture in authority).<sup>7</sup> Paul is referring simply to something that God may bring to mind or impress on someone’s heart or thoughts in such a way that it is distinct from one’s own train of thought or that results in one’s having a clear sense that it is from the Lord.

Thus if a stranger comes in and all prophesy, “the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you” (14:25). Once again it is implied that prophecy depends

<sup>6</sup>Agabus does use a similar phrase (“Thus says the Holy Spirit”) in Acts 21:11, but it is not clear that this one instance is intended as a pattern for all Christian prophecy, and in contexts where it would be misleading today it is certainly not required.

<sup>7</sup>The NT uses the terms “reveal” and “revelation” in this broader sense (of communication from God that does not result in written Scripture or words equal to written Scripture in authority) in Phil 3:15; Rom 1:18; Eph 1:17; Matt 11:27.

on a "revelation": The newcomer discovers that the church is speaking things that he thought were secrets hidden in his heart. Such a "revelation," he concludes, must have come from God.

Many of us have experienced or heard of similar events today. For example, an unplanned but urgent request may have been given to pray for certain missionaries in Japan. Then much later those who prayed discovered that just at that time the missionaries had been in an awful accident or at a point of intense spiritual conflict and had needed those prayers. Paul would call the sense or intuition of those things a "revelation," and the report to the assembled church of that prompting from God would be called a "prophecy." It may have elements of the speaker's own understanding or interpretation in it and it certainly needs evaluation and testing, yet it has a valuable function in the church nonetheless.

As far as we can tell, all NT "prophecy" was based on this kind of spontaneous prompting from the Holy Spirit. Agabus' prophecy of a famine had to be based on such a revelation (Acts 11:28), and so did his prediction of Paul's imprisonment in Jerusalem (21:10–11). The disciples at Tyre apparently had some kind of indication from God about the dangers Paul would encounter in Jerusalem (21:4).<sup>8</sup>

Moreover there are other references to prophecies in the NT narratives—not prophecies in NT churches specifically, but prophecies mentioned in passing in such a way that we are led to think that a commonly understood meaning of "prophecy" at the time of the NT was "speech based on something learned by a 'revelation' from God": Luke 7:39 (the Pharisee assumes a "prophet" will have special knowledge); 22:63–64 (the soldiers assume that someone able to prophesy will know who struck him even when blindfolded); John 4:19 (the woman at the well calls the man who has knowledge about her past life—apparently from a "revelation" of some kind—a "prophet"); 11:51 (Caiaphas, when he spoke unknowingly of Jesus' death for the people, is said to have "prophesied").

By contrast, no prophecy in NT churches is ever said to consist of the interpretation and application of texts of OT Scripture. Although E. Earle Ellis and a few others have claimed that midrashic interpretation of Scripture was the task of NT church prophets, his arguments have not been persuasive to many, primarily because it is hard to find in the NT any convincing examples where the *prophētēs* word group is used to refer to someone doing this kind of activity.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup>The fact that people "learn" from prophecy (1 Cor 14:31) does not make it equal to Bible teaching, for people can learn from many things: someone's prayer, someone's kind behavior, someone's encouraging smile. These activities may be called teaching in a broad sense, but they are not teaching in the sense in which Paul uses the word in the NT to refer to the explanation and application of Bible passages to the Church.

<sup>9</sup>For Ellis' position see *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity: New Testament Essays* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978). Two persuasive responses to Ellis are found in Hill, *Prophecy* 103–106, and D. E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 339–346. Regarding "charismatic exegesis" of Scripture, Aune rightly concludes: "There is virtually no evidence . . . that this activity was carried out by those who were labeled 'prophets' in early Christianity" (p. 345).

Prophecy in local NT churches at the time of the NT had less authority than the words of Scripture, of OT prophets, and of NT apostles. But prophecies were nonetheless based on something that God had brought to mind or “revealed,” something that was then reported in the prophet’s own words. Prophecies did not consist of the interpretation and application of Scripture.

## II. THE NATURE OF NT TEACHING

In contrast to the gift of prophecy we find that no human speech act that is called a “teaching” (*didaskalia*, *didachē*), or done by a “teacher” (*didaskalos*), or described by the verb “teach” (*didaskō*), is ever said in the NT to be based on a “revelation.” Rather, “teaching” is often simply an explanation or application of Scripture. In Acts 15:35 Paul and Barnabas and “many others” are in Antioch “teaching and preaching the word of the Lord.” At Corinth, Paul stayed a year and a half “teaching the word of God among them” (18:11). And the readers of the epistle to the Hebrews, though they ought to have been teachers, needed rather to have someone to teach them again the first principles of God’s word (Heb 5:12). Paul tells the Romans that the words of the OT Scriptures “were written for our instruction (or ‘teaching,’ *didaskalia*)” (Rom 15:4) and writes to Timothy that “all Scripture” is “profitable for teaching (*didaskalia*)” (2 Tim 3:16).

Of course if “teaching” in the early Church was so often based on Scripture it is not surprising that it could also be based on something equal to Scripture in authority—namely, a received body of apostolic instructions. So Timothy was to take the teaching he had received from Paul and commit it to faithful men who would be able to “teach others also” (2:2). And the Thessalonians were to “hold firm to the traditions” they were “taught” by Paul (2 Thess 2:15). Far from being based on a spontaneous revelation that came during the worship service of the church (as prophecy was), this kind of “teaching” was the repetition and explanation of authentic apostolic teaching. To teach contrary to Paul’s instructions was to teach different or heretical doctrine (*heterodidaskalō*) and to fail to give heed to “the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness” (1 Tim 6:3). In fact Paul said that Timothy was to remind the Corinthians of Paul’s ways “as I teach them everywhere in every church” (1 Cor 4:17). Similarly Timothy was to “command and teach” (1 Tim 4:11) and to “teach and urge” (6:2) Paul’s instructions to the Ephesian church.

The difference with prophecy is quite clear here: Timothy was not to prophesy Paul’s instructions; he was to teach them. Paul did not prophesy his ways in every church; he taught them. The Thessalonians were not told to hold firm to the traditions that were “prophesied” to them but to the traditions they were “taught.”

Thus it was not prophecy but teaching that in a primary sense (from the apostles) first provided the doctrinal and ethical norms by which the Church was regulated. And as those who learned from the apostles also taught, their teaching guided and directed the local churches. Among the elders were “those who labor (*kopiaō*) in the word and teaching” (1 Tim 5:17), and an elder was to be “an apt teacher” (3:2; cf. Titus 1:9). But nothing is said about any elders

whose work was prophesying, nor is it ever said that an elder has to be “an apt prophet” or that elders should be “holding firm to sound prophecies.” In his leadership function Timothy was to take heed to himself and to his “teaching” (1 Tim 4:16), but he is never told to take heed to his prophesying. James warned that those who teach, not those who prophesy, will be judged with greater strictness (Jas 3:1).

So teaching in terms of the NT epistles consisted of repeating and explaining the words of Scripture (or the equally authoritative teachings of Jesus and of the apostles) and applying them to the hearers. In the NT epistles “teaching” is something very much like what is described by our phrase “Bible teaching” today.

### III. PROPHECY—YES, BUT TEACHING—NO

Once we have understood “prophecy” and “teaching” not according to twentieth-century English language definitions but according to the way they are spoken of in the NT itself, we can see how it was entirely consistent for Paul to permit women to prophecy (1 Cor 11:5) but not to teach (1 Tim 2:12) in the public assemblies of the NT churches. Teaching provided normative doctrinal and ethical guidance for the Church. Those who publicly taught in churches spoke not with authority equal to Scripture itself but with authority that, in practical terms, provided the doctrinal and ethical summaries of Scriptural teachings and the practical applications of Scripture by which the Church was directed. Scripture was the final authority, but teachers—more than prophets or evangelists or those with any other gift—were the ones who regularly had the responsibility to show how Scripture (the Church’s absolute authority) was to be interpreted and applied in each local congregation. To teach in the Church was to exercise at least a *de facto* leadership and authority (and often a publicly recognized and acknowledged leadership and authority) that strongly influenced the doctrinal and ethical convictions of the Church.

Whether many or most teachers were also elders, or whether all teachers were also elders, I am not now able to decide with any certainty. But it is clear that there is a very close connection between the role of elder and the role of teacher, a connection made appropriate by the leadership that teachers in fact exercised in the congregation.<sup>10</sup>

But NT Church prophecy had no such authority. Those who prophesied did not tell the Church how to interpret and apply Scripture to life. They did not proclaim the doctrinal and ethical standards by which the Church was guided, nor did they exercise governing authority in the Church. There is no convincing evidence in the NT that the early Church was governed by “charismatic lead-

<sup>10</sup>Col 3:16 does speak of “teaching (*didaskontes*) and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with thanks in your hearts to the Lord.” But this certainly does not mean that every Christian was expected to stand before the assembled congregation and function as a Bible teacher; there were many men as well as women who did not have a gift of teaching and who would not do that. The verse must rather be using the word “teach” in a broader, more general sense than the sense in which it is used in 1 Tim 2:12 and the many other passages mentioned above where it refers to Biblical and/or doctrinal instruction given to the assembled church.

ership” for a period before the (alleged) later development of formally recognized elders in the churches. Paul “appointed elders . . . in every church” on his first missionary journey, if we are to believe Acts 14:23 rather than the speculations of Ernst Käsemann.<sup>11</sup>

Prophets in NT churches rather reported in their own words something that, it seemed to them, God had forcefully brought to mind. So teaching based on the written Word of God had far greater authority than occasional prophecies that the speaker thought were from God. Prophecies were subordinate to the authoritative teaching of Scripture and, to be accepted, would have had to be in conformity to the received teaching of the Church. But the reverse was not true: Teachings did not have to conform to any collection of or summary of prophecies that had been spoken in the Church.<sup>12</sup>

Now whatever we may think about the appropriate role of women in churches today it should still be possible to see consistency, not contradiction in Paul’s instructions. 1 Timothy 2 indicates that Paul is concerned to preserve male leadership, headship, governing authority in the Church. He therefore prohibits women from teaching or having authority over men. But praying and prophesying in church do not involve the speaker—male or female—in assuming functions of leadership or governing authority. There is therefore no reason to keep them from these activities. Rather, they should be encouraged.

In fact, if the understanding of the gift of prophecy that I am here proposing is correct, it will do much to overcome the problem of “spectator Christianity” in contemporary evangelicalism. This is because all Christians are given permission to prophesy in church if God so prompts them (cf. 1 Cor 14:31), and we should therefore expect, if opportunity for such prophesying were given, that our worship services would include much broader participation by women—and men—“in order that all may learn and all may be encouraged” (14:31).

#### IV. WHAT ABOUT 1 COR 14:33–35?

This passage has long seemed baffling to commentators, but close attention to the structure of the larger context yields some hopeful results. Before ad

<sup>11</sup>In support of the “charismatic leadership” function of early Christian prophets see H. von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries* (London: Black, 1969), and E. Käsemann, “Sentences of Holy Law in the New Testament,” in *New Testament Questions of Today* (London: SCM, 1964) 66–81. A detailed response is found in Grudem, *Gifts* 207–210.

<sup>12</sup>Someone may object that the list in 1 Cor 12:28, “first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, indicates that prophets had greater authority than teachers in the Church (cf. also Eph 4:11). However the list in 1 Cor 12:28 is not an ordering according to authority. Note that later in the list “administrators” are put next to last, and “helpers” come before “administrators.” Rather, Paul goes on to explain the meaning of “first . . . second . . . third . . . then . . . then” in the following verses: At the end of the list he encourages the Corinthians to “earnestly desire the greater gifts” (12:31) and, after explaining the crucial importance of love in chap. 13, he returns to the idea of “greater” gifts in 14:1–5, showing that prophecy is “greater” (*meizōn*, the same word used in 12:31) than uninterpreted tongues (14:5) because in prophecy the Church is “edified.” Therefore “greater” in this context means “contributing more to the edifying of the Church,” and the list in 12:28 should be understood (at least in the first four kinds of persons mentioned) as a listing according to value in edifying the Church. This understanding is consistent with Paul’s overall concern in chaps. 12–14: “Let all things be done for edification” (14:26).

vocating a solution, however, I will examine two views that seem to be unpersuasive.

1. *Does the passage forbid speech by noisy women?* Some explain this passage by saying that noisy or disorderly women were disrupting the worship service at Corinth, perhaps by rudely shouting questions to their husbands seated across the room or by giving loud shouts characteristic of near-ecstatic worship. Advocates of this interpretation would say that Paul wanted to stop these disruptions and restore order to the service.

We must remember first, however, that there simply is no evidence in vv 33b–35, or in the rest of the letter, or in any writing inside or outside the Bible, that indicates that disorder among women was a problem specifically in the Corinthian church. Some people assume there were noisy women in the church, but no evidence has turned up to prove this assumption.<sup>13</sup> Of course one can find evidence of wild behavior by women in pagan religious rites at the time. But there is also evidence of wild behavior by men. Therefore it is illegitimate to use such evidence onesidedly to claim that noisy women were a special problem at Corinth.

This interpretation also fails to explain v 33b, which makes Paul's rule of silence applicable to all churches in Paul's time, not just the church at Corinth. The apostle says, "As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence."<sup>14</sup>

This is very significant. It means that any explanation of this passage that limits its application to the particular situation at Corinth is unconvincing. But that is just what this "noisy Corinthian women" interpretation would have us believe: that noisy women at Corinth prompted Paul's directives. By contrast, Paul explicitly tells the Corinthians that in all the congregations of Christians in the first century (both Jewish and Gentile in origin) the women

<sup>13</sup>It should not be argued that *laleō*, "to speak," in 1 Cor 14:34 means "it is not permitted to women to babble in disorderly utterance," for *laleō* is simply a very common word (60 times in Paul, 298 times in the NT) meaning "to speak," and Paul uses it frequently to refer to ordinary, intelligible speech: "to the mature we speak wisdom" (1 Cor 2:6); "he who prophesies speaks to men for their upbuilding" (14:3); "let two or three prophets speak" (14:29); "to your shame I am speaking" (15:34); etc. Of course Paul does use it in reference to "speaking in tongues" in 1 Corinthians 14—it was the most ordinary word available to him to refer to any act of "speaking"—but that does not mean that *laleō* itself meant "to speak in tongues" any more than the fact that the English word "speak" as used in the phrase "speaking in tongues" implies that the English word "speak" when used by itself means "to speak in tongues." Such an argument is overgeneralization from one specific use without paying attention to the range of meanings the word takes in other contexts.

<sup>14</sup>Grammatically it is possible to make "as in all the churches of the saints" modify the preceding clause, "for God is not a God of confusion but of peace" (so *KJV*, following the *Textus Receptus*, and *NASB*). However, this reading does not fit the sense of the passage. After saying something about the character of God, which is always the same, it would be pointless for Paul to add "as in all the churches of the saints," as if the Corinthians would have imagined that God would be a God of peace in some churches but not in others. But if "as in all the churches of the saints" modifies the following instructions about behavior in worship it makes very good sense. The Corinthians should not deviate from the standards for worship followed by all churches everywhere. This is the reading of the *NIV*, *RSV*, *ASV*, *NEB* and *UBSGNT*. (Verse divisions, of course, are all the work of later editors and were not part of what Paul wrote.) Paul opens a sentence with a similar *hōs*-clause in Eph 5:24; Phil 2:22.

maintain the type of silence here commanded. He directs the Corinthians to conform to a practice that was universal in the early Church.

This “noisy women” view is unconvincing for another reason: It is inconsistent with Paul’s solution. Where there are problems of disorder, the apostle simply prescribes order (as with tongues or prophecy in vv 27, 29, 31 and as with the Lord’s supper in 11:33–34). If noise had been the problem in Corinth he would have explicitly forbidden disorderly speech, not all speech.

Then too this view would force us to see Paul’s remedy as inequitable, for he would be punishing all women for the deeds of some. He does not say, “The disorderly women should keep silence.” It is unlike Paul, or any other NT writer, to make unfair rules of this sort.

2. *Does the passage forbid women to speak in tongues?* Another position that has gained some followers in recent years is the view that 14:33b–35 forbids women to speak in tongues in the church service. The primary argument in favor of this position is the claim that the main subject of chaps. 12–14 (or at least chap. 14) is speaking in tongues.

However, Paul has finished discussing tongues in v 28 and has gone on to the subject of prophecy. He has been discussing prophecy for the last four or five verses. No reader in Corinth would think that Paul had gone back to the subject of tongues unless he had reintroduced this subject in v 33b.

Moreover prophecy is every bit as much Paul’s concern as tongues in these chapters. In chaps. 12–14 Paul mentions prophecy in 18 verses and tongues-speaking in 18. In chap. 14 alone the count is 12 verses having to do with prophecy and 13 having to do with tongues. Furthermore the immediate context of the verses about women being silent (vv 29–33a) does not refer to tongues, but it does contain a discussion of prophecy.

3. *Does the passage forbid women to judge prophecies in the church service?* There is another interpretation that avoids these objections by seeing this passage not as relating to the first half of v 29 (“Let two or three prophets speak”) but as relating to the second half (“and let the others weigh what is said”). Paul would then be saying, “Let the others (that is, the rest of the congregation, *hoi alloi*, not just *hoi loipoi*, “the rest,” which Paul would have said if he had meant the rest of the prophets) weigh what is said (by the prophets) . . . [but] the women should keep silence in the churches.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, women could not give spoken criticisms of the prophecies made during a church service. This rule would not prevent them from silently evaluating the prophecies in their own minds (in fact, v 29 implies that they should do so), but it would mean that they would not voice those evaluations in the assembled congregation.

Structurally this is in fact the most attractive solution available. It means that Paul followed a very logical procedure. First he gave a general statement: “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said” (v 29).

<sup>15</sup>This section follows J. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 188–194.

Then in vv 30–33a he gave additional instructions about the first half of v 29, and then in vv 33b–35 he gave additional instructions about the second half of the verse.

This structure for the passage is not clear at first glance because the comments in vv 30–33a grew quite long as Paul wrote. But the comments on v 29a are a unified whole, no part of which can be removed. So there was no earlier opportunity for Paul to have introduced this section about women. If this interpretation is correct, then “the women should keep silence” meant to Paul and his readers: “Let them be silent when you are evaluating a prophecy.”

In addition to the way this interpretation gives an orderly and reasonable structure to the passage, two other facts about the text support this view.

First, this interpretation is consistent with the strong contrast in v 34: “For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate.” “But” represents *alla*, indicating a strong contrast between speaking and being subordinate. Thus the kind of speaking Paul has in mind is specifically speaking that involves insubordination. Not every type of speech would fit this description, but evaluating prophecies aloud certainly would. It would involve assuming the possession of superior authority in matters of doctrinal or ethical instruction especially when it included criticism of the prophecy.

If this is the correct meaning of v 34, then v 35 is understandable. Suppose that some women in Corinth had wanted to evade the force of Paul’s directive. The easy way to do this would be to say, “We’ll do just as Paul says. We won’t speak up and criticize prophecies. But surely no one would mind if we asked a few questions. We just want to learn more about what these prophets are saying.” Then such questioning could be used as a platform for expressing in none too-veiled form the very criticisms Paul forbids. Paul anticipates this possible evasion and writes: “If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak [that is, question prophecies] in church.”<sup>16</sup>

Second, this interpretation is consistent with Paul’s appeal to the OT. Paul adds in v 34 “as even the law says.” The probable source (for this is not a direct quotation from any OT passage) is in Genesis 2, where Adam is the “firstborn” (with the concomitant headship in the family that that status implied), where he also has the authority from God to name Eve and where Eve is made as a helper suitable for Adam.<sup>17</sup> Paul elsewhere appeals to the OT to establish the idea of male headship and female submission to male leadership (see 1 Cor 11:8–9; 1 Tim 2:13), and it is therefore certainly possible to see him as appealing to the OT to support a distinction in authority in judging prophecies as well. But it would be difficult to derive from the OT any prohibition against noise.

<sup>16</sup>Of course some women were unmarried and would not have had a “husband” to ask. But there would have been other men within their family circles, or within the fellowship of the church, with whom they could discuss the content of the prophecies. Paul’s general guideline is clear, even though he did not make pedantic qualifications to deal with every specific case.

<sup>17</sup>Some have also suggested that Paul is quoting a first-century rabbinic law, or a Roman law, in this verse. But this suggestion is unconvincing because Paul uses the word “law” (*nomos*) 119 times, and never once does it unambiguously refer to rabbinic law or Roman law. When Paul uses “the law” to support an argument he generally refers to the OT (cf. e.g. 1 Cor 14:21, a few verses before our text).

women in church or against women speaking in tongues.

But in spite of the substantial considerations in favor of this interpretation, one final objection may be raised: Why did Paul not make himself more clear and say, "Let the women be silent during the judging of prophecies" if that is what he meant?

The answer is that the NT writers often talk about silence in general unrestricted terms while expecting the readers to know from the context which kind of silence is in view. 1 Cor 14:28, just a few verses away, is a good example. Paul says of the tongues-speaker: "If there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silence in church and speak to himself and to God." Now this does not mean the tongues-speaker had to maintain total silence throughout the worship service. He could no doubt participate in the singing, in praying, in reading Scripture and in discussing concerns for prayer and thanksgiving. The command to be silent just meant to be silent with respect to the particular type of speech under discussion—namely, speaking in tongues.

So in 14:33b–35, once we see that the matter under discussion is prophecy and, more specifically, the evaluation of prophecies in church, it is natural to understand that "the women should keep silence" means "the women should keep silence during the evaluation of prophecies."

But this passage, then, does not merely tell us about judging prophecies. Paul here affirms an abiding distinction between the roles appropriate to males and those appropriate to females in the Christian Church. As in 1 Tim 2:11–15 this distinction comes to focus in the prohibition of women from exercising doctrinal and ethical governance, even from time to time, over the congregation. Therefore 1 Cor 14:33b–35 fits well with a consistent Pauline advocacy of women's participation without governing authority in the assembled church.

## V. CONCLUSION

Paul affirms abiding distinctions between roles appropriate to women and those appropriate to men in the assembled meetings of the church. It is important to recognize that the passages in 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14 are not isolated texts that fit poorly with the rest of the NT. Rather, they are consistent with the pattern of teaching in the entire NT—a pattern that, while it certainly affirms for women a higher status than they were accorded in much of first-century culture, and while it certainly affirms for women full equality with men in value, personhood, and reflection of the image of God, nevertheless repeatedly and throughout insists on distinct roles of men and women in marriage and in the Church, a NT teaching that still today requires male headship both in marriage and in the Church.



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