

*“The Role of Silence”*  
ROAD MAP TO A HEALTHY CHURCH, Pt. #49  
1 Corinthians 14:26-40

CHILDREN ARE DISMISSED TO SUNDAY SCHOOL

PRAY

OPEN YOUR BIBLES PLEASE TO: 1 Corinthians 14:26

ILLUSTRATION

Silence can be uncomfortable. We don't usually like it. When a conversation lags and the silence grows, we seek to fill it with a laugh, a joke, a segue into small-talk about things we often don't even care about, things like the weather, things like sports, *anything* but silence.

Silence can be so uncomfortable it's even been used as a spiritual discipline. In college, one of the ways our outreach teams would prepare for missions trips was by doing what was called a 'Solo Day.' We were told to sit, not just alone, *but also in total silence* for about 8 hours. It was horrific! It's why some monks take vows of silence— not because it's easy, but because it's so *hard*.

I was reading something last week about people who have to intentionally surround themselves with 'white' noise, with constant background sounds, because they have some form of affliction, I think it's called '*misophonia*,' that makes them hyper-aware of little sounds in the silence. And so in the silence they can hear things so quiet it drives them crazy— things like the ticking of a wrist-watch. Or the sound of a cat giving itself a bath. Or someone simply *breathing*. Silence can be uncomfortable.

And yet silence is vital as well.

I heard R.C. Sproul point out once the importance of silence in public speaking. He spoke of the power of the pause in dramatic delivery. He himself was a master of it. The same thing, Sproul pointed out, is true of music— you cannot have music without silence. The notes cannot play *all* the time, or else it becomes nothing but a monstrous cacophony of noise and notes that slide one into the other without distinction— there must be *rests* between the notes to make the sound sound sweet. And today, Paul will tell us that the same thing is true in public worship.

## INTRO/REVIEW

We've been working our way through Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, what we call 'the book' of 1 Corinthians, and we've been progressing chapter by chapter, verse by verse. And today we come to the last half of chapter 14 where we're told by Paul that silence has a place, it has a vital role when Christian brothers and sisters assemble together to glorify God in worship. In fact, our **BIG IDEA** today is that *the role of this silence is to maintain order*. And so today we'll be talking about three forms of order that silence maintains in public worship: **1) The order of service, 2) the order of creation, and 3) the order of authority.**

Now, at this point, Paul has been talking about guidelines for public worship since about chapter 11. He's walked the Corinthian church through different protocols for men and women in worship, he's walked them through how to administer and receive the Lord's Supper in worship, and he's brought up spiritual gifts and put them back in their proper place beneath the guiding principle of love in worship—a love that is best personified in Jesus Christ.

And then, as we covered the last couple weeks, Paul has talked about the importance of the *mind* in worship, and that it is only through clear, intelligible communication that other Christians in church can experience *edification*, and that non-Christians in church can experience *salvation*.

But now today we'll see Paul speak about something unexpected and completely overlooked at Corinth, and it's this— the role of silence in worship. And he begins this way, by first laying out the common elements of a first century worship service. It's a snapshot of ingredients, of parts that make up the whole. Look at [V.26](#)— “What then, brothers? (BTW, 'brothers' was a general term including both sexes) When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.”

## ILLUSTRATION

This verse reminds me of our oldest son Nathan when he was younger. We'd buy him those Lego sets, but before he put *anything* together, he'd dump out all the parts and separate them and arrange them into like piles on the floor just exactly like they were laid out in the directions.

Or it's like a buddy I have who does something similar whenever he goes on backpacking trips. Before he puts anything in that backpack, he'll clear a space on the floor and neatly lay out all the different things he's going to put into that pack, and then take a picture of them, so when he goes through his check-list later on he can easily look to confirm that everything's there.

And so here, as well, we have a picture of what went into the 'backpack' of a Sunday assembly for worship. And again, Paul doesn't mention a church building, he just speaks about the regular 'coming together' of the Corinthian Christians for worship. "[When you come together,](#)" he says. You'll also notice he doesn't say 'if'—and that's because the normal, unapologetic expectation of Paul (and by extension, Christ) is that to 'be built up,' Christians must regularly 'be together.' "[Let all things be done for building up.](#)"

And these are the elements of an assembly for public worship listed by Paul—"[When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.](#)"

Now quickly, it needs to be pointed out here that just because these are all proper ingredients for public worship, just because they're all present here, doesn't mean the Corinthian church is necessarily using them in the right ways. I can take all those separate, organized items for my backpack and I can *hurl* them all in there at random and shove them down, and force the zippers closed, and they'll all be in the backpack— but they won't be in there in an organized way. They won't be *orderly*.

And so the context seems to suggest that Paul is saying the things on this list are being employed in a disorderly way, maybe even *all at the same time* during a typical service. Can you imagine the chaos? It's no wonder he spent so much time clarifying the importance of clear, intelligible communication. The problem is, even the clearest communication will not be beneficial if everyone is talking at once.

And so Paul says, "[...each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.](#)" Now when it says 'each one,' I don't think the expectation here was that 'order' looked like going around the room, one by one, and expecting every single person in that assembly to say something. How many of you would come back next Sunday if I told you that was our new policy in public worship? But I *do* think this indicates each person had the *opportunity* to contribute to

public worship, should they want to, in some appropriate way. And one of those ways, as we'll soon see, was with silence.

But first Paul lists the verbal options of contribution— *“a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.”* The word for ‘hymn’ here just means *‘a song sung to the accompaniment of an instrument.’* And so a normal and healthy part of public worship is music. But can you imagine several people singing their own solos out loud at the same time? What dissonance!

Next in Paul’s list is what he calls *“a lesson.”* The word is *didache*, from which we get our word ‘didactic.’ It’s the word used in Matt. 22:23 of what Jesus was doing, and the response of the crowds, *“they were astonished at his teaching.”* And so Paul’s talking about teaching something here, most specifically, Christian doctrine. But what if multiple teachers stood up and began preaching simultaneous messages in the same room? If you have kids, you know how hard it is to make sense of two voices talking to you at the same time. What confusion!

Then Paul lists *“a revelation.”* It means ‘something revealed.’ But Grudem points out that this word and its related verb *“together occur forty-four times in the New Testament, and they never refer to human activity or communication. Rather, whenever the New Testament speaks of a ‘revelation,’ it is always given by the activity of God.”* And so this is most likely listed here in reference to the *gift of prophecy* that Paul has been talking about, what we have defined as reporting with human words something God brings suddenly to mind. It’s what D.A. Carson defines as *“a Spirit-prompted utterance, but with no guarantee of divine authority in every detail.”*

But again, imagine this ingredient tossed haphazardly into the backpack of the worship service along with everything else going on— multiple songs and dueling preachers and now the prophetic utterance as well. And then add to that mix the favorite gift of the Corinthian Christians, *speaking in tongues*— Paul mentions *“a tongue.”* It’s hard enough to follow multiple conversations at once in a language you do understand, but now imagine, rising above the already overwhelming din, a host of foreign languages you can’t make heads or tails of. ‘Yes,’ you say, ‘but Paul also now mentions *“an interpretation.”* Oh goody, more noise. This is a picture of Chaos.

ILLUSTRATION

I remember visiting a really large church in Africa one Sunday, and during the service the pastor instructed us to bow our heads for a time of prayer. And I admit I expected him to pray, and for us to listen quietly, but instead, I was startled when suddenly, all around me, everyone began to pray simultaneously, and out loud. And once I got over the shock, it was actually quite a beautiful thing. But then someone began shouting over the rest of the prayers. And the praying continued while this person shouted, and as I was trying to make out what he was saying, suddenly someone else began shouting out another prayer as well, at the same time. And all the while, everyone else just on kept praying out loud. And these elements of worship no longer seemed very beautiful. Instead, they felt like chaos.

And so the point is, it seems that the fault in Corinth lay with the disorderly *application* of the elements of public worship, not with the elements of worship themselves.

But for whatever reason, Paul now circles back to two ingredients of public worship in particular that really have to do with spiritual gifts he's been talking about all throughout chapter 14— the *gift of tongues* and the *gift of prophecy*. He begins with some specific instructions about the orderly use of the *gift of tongues*, which we defined as words of prayer or praise to God spoken in syllables not understood by the speaker. Look at V.27— “If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret.”

Now, don't miss how carefully Paul works to re-pack the backpack of public worship here, starting with the regulating of this gift. He first sets a limit on *the number* of those who can employ this gift during a given service— “let there be only two or at most three...” — then he limits *the way* those few can employ their gift during a service, only one at a time— “...and each in turn...” — and finally, he limits *how many are permitted to interpret what was spoken*, in order to prevent the confusion of competing interpretations— “...and let someone (let one) interpret.”

Why does Paul insist on all this? Because maximum edification comes through clear communication— and if these believers are all talking at once, no one will be *built-up*— no one will be edified. And so first, Paul *builds-in* intentional silence— for there to be a building-up, there first must be an intentional building-in of

silence, of rests between the notes. While each one with this gift speaks, the other two are not to speak—**silence**.

After two or three speak, no more with this gift are permitted to speak during the service—**silence**.

And after one with the gift of interpretation speaks, none other is permitted to interpret—**silence**.

But notice, all these guidelines presuppose the presence of someone in that service with the *gift of interpretation*. Which now begs the question— what should those with the gift of tongues do if **no one** was present in the public worship service who could interpret? Look at V.28— “But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God.” There is our answer: keep silent. It means to ‘hold one’s peace.’ You used to hear a similar line at traditional weddings, “Speak now, or forever hold your peace.” It means, keep silent.

Silence plays a vital role, we said, not just in public speaking, not just in music, but in worship as well— And *the role of silence in worship is to maintain order*. And the first form of order it maintains is **1) the order of service**. The way that ‘backpack’ of public worship is organized.

Listen as Paul continues to use silence to order their worship as he turns now to the *gift of prophecy* in the public assembly. Look at V.29— “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.”

There are two parts to this verse, and it’s been pointed out that the first half is fleshed-out in V.30-33a, while the second half is expanded upon in V.33b-36 of our text today. So let’s start with the first half of V.29, and the verses that help explain it, and then we’ll come back to the second half of V.29.

And so, says Paul in the first half of V.29— “Let two or three prophets speak...” According to Paul, what should that look like on a typical Sunday morning assembly in Corinth? Well first of all, he’s again limited *the number* of those who can employ this gift during a given service— “Let two or three prophets speak...” What else? Look at V.30— “If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent.” Just as before, with tongues, Paul now limits *the way* those few with the gift of prophecy can employ their gift during a service.

Let's say someone with the gift of prophecy suddenly had something brought to their mind by the Holy Spirit. Assuming no one else was currently speaking— for instance, someone with the gift of tongues, or someone teaching— this person would stand and share what they believed the Holy Spirit was revealing to them. But what if suddenly someone *else* known to have the gift of prophecy had something brought to mind by God— what should they do— wait? Burst out and interrupt the first person? Well, apparently neither of these things. It seems they would maybe make some sort of signal to the first person who was still speaking, and that first person, *even if they hadn't finished speaking*, would be silent and sit back down so the second person could speak— “If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent.” Again, we see that *the role of silence is to maintain order*.

But this reveals something very important, and you don't want to miss it, Paul is taking away what was probably a common excuse— 'I can't help it; the Holy Spirit overpowers me and I can't control myself.' And Paul says, 'No. That is not how the Holy Spirit works.' Look at V.31— “For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged...”

#### ILLUSTRATION

You've probably all heard the story of the boy who raised his hand in class and asked the teacher, “Can I go to the bathroom?” And the teacher smiled sweetly and said, “Well I'm sure you *can* go the bathroom, but the real question is, ‘*May I go to the bathroom?*’”

And so what's the difference between 'can' and 'may?' Well, one has to do with ability, and the other has to do with permission. And which does Paul use with the Corinthians here?— “For you can all prophesy one by one...”! Paul says *they can*, they're *able*, they *have the power* to prophesy one at a time, to control their actions, to exercise their gift without talking over each other. And then, as if to make sure they didn't miss his point, he adds in V.32— “and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.”

There's that word 'spirit' again from last week, and it's a lower case 's,' which means Paul is talking about their *human* spirit. If N.T. prophecy is a **Holy Spirit-prompted utterance**, that means it's the Holy Spirit that communes and communicates with the human spirit to manifest this gift when that person speaks.

But Paul is saying that a person with this gift, ‘a prophet,’ is not controlled by his spirit, or his gift, but rather, that his own spirit is always under his control—“[the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.](#)” Our human spirit has been put under our control and must submit to us. “[In the New Testament,](#)” writes W. Robertson Smith, “[Paul lays down the principle that, in true prophecy, self-consciousness and self-command are never lost.](#)”

And so what does all this mean for those with the prophetic gift in Corinth? It means they have no excuse to not control themselves and maintain order in worship. *The role of silence is to maintain order*, and God has given them the ability to be silent when another prophet signals them, or to be silent until they can signal a prophet who’s already speaking. Why? Look at the first part of [V.33](#)—“[For \(because\) God is not a God of confusion but of peace.](#)”

Now, let’s look back at the second half of [V.29](#). The first half says— “[Let two or three prophets speak,](#)” and now the second half continues, “[and let the others weigh what is said.](#)” So, Paul has re-organized the use of this gift by first limiting *the number* of those who can use it during a given service, just two or three. Then he’s limited *the way* those few can employ their gift during a service, just one at a time. And now he introduces a vital safeguard to keep this gift from contradicting established O.T. revelation and the N.T. apostolic teachings in the church. He does this by having their words ‘weighed,’ evaluated in some way by a group he calls “[the others.](#)”

## **The Others**

### ILLUSTRATION

In 2001 a movie starring Nichole Kidman came out called “The Others” about a woman and her two children who lived in a creepy mansion that turns out to be haunted. You spend the movie trying, with these three characters, to figure out who these ‘others’ are who are haunting them, only to discover at the end of the movie that it’s actually the mother and kids themselves who are the ghosts, and that ‘the others’ are nothing more than the living people just trying to go about normal life in this creepy mansion they’ve just bought, that turns out to be... haunted.

In the hit TV show “LOST,” there was a mysterious group of island-dwellers known as ‘the Others’ who tormented and terrified the survivors of a crashed airplane



and kept viewers guessing as to their identity for several seasons. Eventually it was revealed that they had somehow existed on the island since at least the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, brought there by two even more mysterious figures who'd inhabited the island for even longer, possibly even for thousands of years...

And so, although not quite as intriguing as their TV and big screen counterparts, “the others” mentioned here by Paul have likewise kept a lot of people guessing when it comes to their identity. “Let two or three prophets speak, and let *the others weigh what is said.*”

Some say Paul is referring only to those in the church with the gift of distinguishing between spirits. If you remember, we defined that spiritual gift as the ability to distinguish between the true and the false in spiritual matters. It's “the ability to recognize the influence of the Holy Spirit or of demonic spirits in a person [or situation]” (Grudem). And so certainly we'd expect someone with that gift to be part of “the others” mentioned here, they'd certainly be helpful and included in the important task of ‘weighing what was said’ by the prophets— but we have no reason to think they'd be the *only* ones.

Another view is that “the others” is a specific reference to ‘the other prophets,’ or ‘the others in the assembly with the *gift of prophecy.*’ But there were much better ways of specifying that exclusive meaning if it's what Paul meant, rather than just using such a general term for ‘the others’ as he does.

Besides, in a context of public worship, what does this do for everyone else? It's a bit ridiculous to think everyone else in the assembly without the *gift of prophecy* or the *gift of distinguishing between spirits* would be expected to just sit around neutrally, suspending judgment on the things being said. After all, Paul has just talked about the importance of using your mind in worship— why would he now instruct everyone else in the congregation without these specific gifts to suddenly stop using their minds to evaluate words being spoken in the service? This view doesn't make sense either. The conclusion is that “the others” simply refers to the entire congregation.

Now of course, not everyone in the congregation would play an equal role in this process of ‘weighing,’ even though all could evaluate what was being said. Clearly some— those with certain gifts and experience and maturity— would be looked to for guidance and leadership more than others. But all could play *some* part. What would that look like? What does Paul mean, exactly, by “*weigh* what is

said?” — “and let the others *weigh* what is said.” What does this ‘weighing’ mean and include?

### **Weigh what is said**

Wayne Grudem describes the scene this way— “As a prophet was speaking, each member of the congregation would listen carefully, evaluating the prophecy in the light of the Scripture and the authoritative teaching that he or she already knew to be true. Soon there would be an opportunity to speak in response, with the wise and mature no doubt making the most contribution. But no member of the body would have needed to feel useless, for every member at least silently would weigh and evaluate what was said.”

And so the word Paul uses for ‘weigh’ is a word that also has the sense of ‘making distinctions,’ it’s a word that means ‘carefully evaluating.’ And evaluating the prophetic messages how? Again, the ‘standard’ by which such weighing would be made was a conformity with Scripture and apostolic teaching. And then, as Grudem says, “*there would be an opportunity to speak in response.*” But this is where we come to the problem.

Look with me now at V.33b-35— “As in all the churches of the saints, <sup>34</sup> the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. <sup>35</sup> If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.”

### **The Problems**

There are two basic problems we encounter today when we read these verses.

- 1) The first problem is obviously a cultural one. Our 21<sup>st</sup>-century sensibilities of fairness and equality recoil at these words. For many, many people there’s an emotional, knee-jerk, gut-level reaction to these words that seem so foreign to us now, and I get that— but the main problem with that reaction is that it can completely derail us. That reaction can keep us from going any further in the text. It can keep us from hearing what God would say because it has a tendency to hijack our hearts at the expense of our heads.

And so I would ask you this morning to push through the initial shock of such foreign-sounding restrictions if you're wanting to understand what Paul is saying. But this brings us to our second problem.

- 2) And our second problem is the presence of an apparent contradiction. I say 'apparent' because there really is no contradiction in the end, but you'll have to stick with me to see what I mean. What am I talking about?

Well, after reading this tough passage, many people quickly remember that just a few chapters back, in chapter 11:5, Paul already seems to have given women permission to speak in church, so long as they are wearing the culturally appropriate sign of submission to male leadership, a head covering— *“But every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven.”*

The point is, back in chapter 11, when Paul talked about women prophesying in the assembly, he did so without flinching, their right to do this was 'assumed without reproof.' Apparently, women prophesying as part of public worship was completely normal. As D.A. Carson puts it, *“the praying and prophesying exercised by women in chapter 11 is not cast as a concession.*

In other words, Paul wasn't grudgingly granting some unique privileges there in chapter 11 and then capriciously denying them here in chapter 14. Paul's rebuke in chapter 11 didn't have anything to do with the impropriety of women speaking prophecy during public worship, *it had to do with the impropriety of women prophesying without a head covering* in public worship. The implication being, so long as they were wearing a head covering as an acknowledgment of male headship in the church, there would be no rebuke for women speaking and using their gift of prophecy in public worship.

And so, in our text today, by saying 'women are not permitted to speak,' Paul is either contradicting what he has already said about prophecy back in chapter 11— *or he's now talking about a different kind of speaking— he's talking about the use of a different gift.*

And so let's return to the context of Paul's words. He's been talking first about guidelines for those prophesying, which we've just acknowledged could include the women of the church. But then he shifts to 'weighing what is said.' This is now

something different. Not only would this involve the congregation evaluating the prophecy in light of the Scriptures, which everyone in the congregation was able and expected to do, at least silently— *but soon there would be an opportunity to speak in response.*

Silently evaluating what was being said while the prophets were speaking maintained order, but so now did another kind of silence when the time came to orally respond to that prophecy in the light of the Scriptures— Look at [V.33b-35](#)— “As in all the churches of the saints, <sup>34</sup> *the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. <sup>35</sup> If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.*”

What was a permission in regards to *prophecy* in chapter 11 now shifts to a restriction in regards to *teaching and governing* functions in chapter 14. What do I mean?

We’ve consistently pointed out over the past few weeks that the *gift of prophecy*— reporting with human words something God brings suddenly to mind, seems to have been defined and treated differently from the *gift of teaching*, which was always closely associated with roles of authority and governance in the church.

Both are speaking gifts, but only one of those gifts is restricted in its scope of application by Paul, and that ‘restriction of scope’ is consistently directed towards women throughout Scripture. It’s not that women can’t *have* the gift of teaching— certainly they do, there are many well-known women speakers and teachers out there we could mention historically and in more contemporary times as well. Even in our own congregation we can think of several women with remarkable teaching gifts. And so the restriction isn’t in regards to who is *given* the gift of teaching, but in who can use this gift in the context of church governance, and in the context of public, corporate worship, when we all assemble as men and women together to worship God.

And so, for instance, in 1 Timothy 2:11-14 Paul speaks about the restriction of the gift of teaching this way. He says, “*Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.*” And you’ll notice this sounds remarkably similar to what we find here in our text today in [V.34](#)— “*...the women should*

keep silent in the churches, For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says.” This similarity should be a strong clue that the issue Paul is honing-in on in our text today is not some ‘blanket ban’ on women talking during a church service, but on a certain *kind* of talking, a kind that is specified by the context of the passage. And it’s Paul’s reference to “the Law” that gives our text the final support for this understanding.

### **The Law**

Despite chapter 14 being a discussion about completely different functions in public worship, this is the connection that ties chapter 14 back to chapter 11—“The Law.” By referencing ‘the Law,’ Paul is appealing to Scripture to reinforce Scripture. “For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says.” But what part of ‘the Law’ is Paul referring to here?

There are some who dismiss as unimportant this reference to ‘the Law’ because Paul didn’t bother to be specific about which part he’s talking about. But many commentators agree that the very reason Paul didn’t bother citing a specific O.T. text here is because he had just referenced a text only minutes before back in chapter 11:8, which says, “For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.”

And what part of ‘the Law’ did that reference? It was a clear reference to Genesis 2:20-24, which talks about the order of creation. *The role of silence is to maintain order*, and the second form of order Paul is using it to maintain in our text is **2)**

**The order of creation.**

### **The Creation Principle**

There’s a good rule of thumb that says the best place to find the definition of ‘normal,’ or ‘natural’ or ‘good’ is to look back at what the Bible says about the state of something before the Fall, before sin changed and twisted it. What this reveals should then be applicable to all peoples at all times and in all cultures, because it was ‘normative’ and ‘natural’ and declared ‘good’ by God for Adam and Eve, the progenitors of every people on earth.

I bring this up because it’s what Paul does in our text today, just as he did when discussing female roles in both 1 Tim. 2 and 1 Corinthians 11. Paul clearly, intentionally, purposefully reaches back each time to Genesis 2 to reference the

pre-Fall norms about the God-ordained order of creation as the model for the roles of men and women in family and church life for all cultures, and in all times. And what does Genesis 2 tell him?

Well, it tells him that man was made first by God out of the dust of the earth in Gen. 2:7, and that it isn't until Gen. 2:21 that God then puts Adam to sleep and makes the first woman, Eve, out of one of Adam's ribs. And so, not only is Adam made first, but he's made a different way— the first Woman is actually made from the first Man. And so why is there this sense of primacy, why is one reason man has been given headship over woman? Because he was made first by God.

Why else does man have headship? Because Genesis 2:18 and 20b say Eve was made to be a 'helper' for Adam. Is it somehow degrading for a woman to be called a 'helper?' Only if it's somehow degrading for the Holy Spirit to be called a 'helper,' which He is called in Jn.14 by Jesus.

And so wives are not told to be subordinate to their husbands in the home, and women are not told to be under the governing authority of men in the church because husbands and men are somehow superior or smarter or stronger or wiser or more spiritually mature, or *even more gifted* than women— they're to do so simply because it reflects the original order and purpose of creation, in the good and perfect way God chose to do it. That's what Paul appeals to here. *And it glorifies God to accept our place in His plan.*

And so it was 'disgraceful' and 'shameful' when the women threw off their head coverings back in chapter 11 because it signified both a throwing off of God's authority, as well as a forfeiting of God-intended dignity. And now this same word for 'disgraceful,' or 'shameful' is used here in [V.35](#) of our text today— "[For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.](#)" Why is it shameful, in the context we've laid out? Because once again, to do so signaled both a throwing off of God-ordained authority and of God-intended dignity. Women were not to have a church-recognized teaching and governing authority over men.

It's for this reason that I believe Paul here commands women to be silent in our text— not so there would be no part for them to play in prophesying out loud in public worship as he had earlier permitted them to do— but for the sake of maintaining both the order of service as well as the *order of creation*, the order of

headship established before the Fall. It is a headship that has never been abrogated or annulled, and therefore maintains that women should not take part in teaching or governing functions over the whole church. And in the context of our passage, Paul seems to indicate that those teaching and governing functions extend to this practice of oral weighing and evaluating of prophecies during public worship.

But the church in Corinth has not been paying attention to the order of Creation. They couldn't care less. They're making their own rules. Listen to Paul's rebuke in [V.36](#) in the *Revised Standard Version* — “What! Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached?” It's not accidental that Paul brings up Scriptural *origins* here— “Did the word of God originate with you?” Remember, he's just appealed to Genesis as the grounds to back up his authoritative claim about roles. And so he's essentially accusing them of thinking they have authoritative grounds in themselves to make up new rules! They haven't been paying attention to the order of Creation. And so now the third form of order Paul seeks to reinstate is **3) The order of authority**.

And here is the order of authority: What God says comes before what I want. *And what God says has come to Corinth through Paul*. That is the emphasis of his point. Look at [V.37](#)— “If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.” Friends, there is no higher claim of authority Paul could make here—God gets the final say, and “the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.” He's saying his words are on the same level as the O.T. Scriptures. And if they don't like it?—Look at [V.38](#)— “If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.”

Listen, if someone wants to insist that women should be elders and pastors of churches, that they should “enjoy a church-recognized teaching and governing authority over men,” that's fine, let them make their case— but let them at least have the courtesy to do so from Scripture, *not* from culture or from feelings or from personal opinions.

Because “if this interpretation is correct,” points out D.A. Carson, “it is essential to recognize that this teaching is for our good, not for our enslavement.” Remember, He is the God of *peace*. The word doesn't just mean quietness and good order, it also means ‘wholeness,’ like its Hebrew counterpart, ‘shalom.’

And so, to call this “oppression” of women, as even many Christians do, to call this “misogyny,” to call this a ‘patriarchal good- ‘ol boys club mentality’ is insulting, it’s an indirect jab at those who would continue to teach what has historically been taught, and to do so out of a simple desire to honor the authority of Scripture over culture and personal preference.

And if you disagree with my conclusions here, that’s fine, only please make sure it is because you feel you can back it up with ‘the command of God,’ and not because it offends 21<sup>st</sup> century sensibilities. And if you really have searched the Scriptures and come to a different conclusion on this point, that’s fine—this is not a deal-breaker for friendship or fellowship. But know that it is the conviction of this pastor, with as much gentleness as I can say it, that based on my study— and on that of many much wiser before me— the Scriptures seem consistently clear that *women are not to have a church-recognized teaching and governing authority over men.*

And “*So my brothers,*” Paul concludes in V.39,40, “*earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But all things should be done decently and in order.*”

### **Closing**

As we close today, let me ask you a question: Are you willing to trust God’s good purposes for you even when you don’t understand them? Because I can guarantee you that even if you think God is saying something differently here than I do this morning, you will soon enough encounter other places in the Bible where God says things you wouldn’t say, and thinks things you wouldn’t think. “*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord*” in Isa. 55:8-9—

*<sup>9</sup>“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*

**And so this is my caution:** If you notice that God agrees with everything you think and feel all the time, it’s possible you have made your ways and your thoughts higher than God’s. *That you’ve made yourself into God.* And it doesn’t take a lot of trust to follow a God you always agree with.



But following the God of the Bible always takes trust. And so, are you willing to trust His good purposes for you, even when you don't understand them? Even when the rest of the world is calling it foolishness? Even when a part of you thinks you might know better? Are you willing to trust God's good character when what He says isn't what you want Him to say? When it isn't what you'd say? Are you willing to give Him the last word and then *hold your peace*?

In silence, the Son of God faced an unjust trial. He brought His desires to His Father in a tear-drenched garden, but the Father's will was clear. And so once more in willing submission, having humbled Himself to be born as one of us, having humbled Himself to a life like ours, Jesus now humbled himself to the point of death in our place, even death on a cross. What God said came before what Jesus wanted in that moment, and so He shut His mouth, He held His peace and went to the cross in obedient trust, so that we could be forgiven of our sins. *Aren't you glad Jesus trusted His Father?*

Friends, we are not 'oppressed' by God when we obey the Word of God. *"If this interpretation is correct... it is essential to recognize that this teaching is for our good, not for our enslavement."* But Jesus *"...was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth"* (Isa.53:7). And His silence maintained an order of obedience that brought glory to His Father, and that won for us our salvation.

LET'S PRAY.