

# 1 Corinthians 14:20–40

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[ 0 : 00 ] That's 1 Corinthians 14, 20 through 40. Please stand for the reading of God's word.!

All things are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. If therefore the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds?

But if all prophesy and an unbeliever or an outsider enters, he's convicted by all. He's called out to account by all. 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.

What then, brothers? 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.

If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church, and speak to himself and to God.

[ 1 : 32 ] Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what he has said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent.

For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged. And the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.

God is not a God of confusion, but of peace. As in the churches of the saints, 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, 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. Or was it from you that the word of God came?

Or are you the only ones it has reached? If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or spiritual, he should acknowledge that all things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.

[ 2 : 31 ] If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But all things should be done decently and in order.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Dinner was the one time on any given day that our family, I'm thinking especially of the time when our children were little, would come together.

In the same way, the worship service is the one time in any given week that the church family comes together.

My dinner table functioned almost like sacred space. It was the time when we ensured that every one of our children was both seen and heard.

[ 3 : 46 ] Just as in a worship service, the scriptures tell us even in this chapter, everyone is to be encouraged and consoled and brought up.

Now, I don't know about your dinner table, but on occasion, especially when the kids were little, the verbal cues seeking affirmation and attention all seem to be rising at the same time.

There were moments when every verse was heard, where everything by tone and degree was an increased volume.

volume and by disposition and this did change depending on the age of our children there might be one child especially who felt the need to say everything that had gone through their mind as soon as it did eventually I would interrupt with a fatherly call from the end of the table all right everyone silent a moment of quiet do I have to remind you that this gathering of our family at this table brings greater gains when fewer words are spoken yeah that's the sentiment of my title less is sometimes more you can almost envision Paul can't you at the head of the Corinthian table on a Sunday casting that fatherly banner over the church family it is in each movement of this passage as though



people on account of their unbelief they had rejected the prophetic word of Isaiah and in rejecting Isaiah's prophetic word they were in a sense although God's people unbelievers nevertheless and as a consequence of their unbelief God sent the Assyrians the Assyrians were the people of strange tongues they spoke a different language they had a foreign dialect and suddenly God brought them into Israel overrunning Israel in judgment through their strange tongues which were of no value to the Israelites so in the text Paul is picking up a verse from Isaiah to say that just as the foreign tongues of the Assyrian speech weren't capable of bringing any positive outcome to the Israelites so too the men and women who overrun the corporate worship service in Corinth with a gift of tongues they are of no service to the unbelievers in attendance what unbelieving Israel needed and what Paul's arguing here what the church in Corinth needed was a prophetic word spoken in the language of those in attendance because only that kind of word can lead somebody from unbelief to belief so what's happening here is Paul is requesting some men and women who are gifted with tongues to refrain from their use in the service because their silence would afford the unbelievers present a chance to hear the gospel and respond in a language that they understood that then makes complete sense of verses 24 and 25 doesn't it take a look at it but if all prophecy in an unbeliever or outsider enters he's convicted by all he's called to account by all the secrets of his heart are disclosed and the so falling on his face he will worship God and declare that God is really among you what's the outcome simply this non-Christians are brought in people are saved what an outcome what a reason to demonstrate self-control even of praise

I love the way he puts it falling on his face he or she will worship God and declare that God is really among you Paul's use of language here is intentional as much as it is ironic it's intentional in this way because the issue here is tongues some of you might recall that when tongues came at Pentecost the Bible says Luke records divided tongues of fire appeared on them and they rested on each one of them and they were all filled with the Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance but it's ironic did you know that there's an Old Testament story involving strange fire that falls from heaven resulting in people coming to know God first Kings 18 Elijah is encountering the Canaanite prophets of Baal speaking in their own foreign tongue to their gods and no fire was falling but when Elijah spoke a prophetic word clearly stated in the language that those who were present could understand the scripture says that fire fell from heaven consume the offering and here it is here's the response in the first Kings when all the people saw it they fell on their faces and said the Lord he is God the Lord he is God the same thing mirrored now here in the New Testament church falling on his face or her face they will worship God and declare that God is really among you now you start thinking about what that might mean for our own life in the coming years the following years a voluntary restraint on simply coming here to get your personal praise on as expressed in the tongues of men and angels is reserved so that others will hear the gospel in their own language and come to know Jesus the church is coming together for edification and evangelism and evangelism is happening it makes perfect sense of what's happening earlier in Acts when the people are coming together and devoting themselves to the apostles teaching and there were being added to their number day by day can you envision it many of you don't think that if you believe in don't think that if you invite a non-believer here they've got any chance of being saved brought in but Paul is indicating that is the way people are brought in when the church is exercising self-controlled speech and others come in they begin to think what is happening here it's an hour unlike anything I've seen and so you have every incentive every incentive to invite your neighbor to church to invite your neighbor to church you have every reason to call upon your family members and your friends and say you've got to come where I'm going think of it think of the hundreds of people that are seated here before me today and ask this question collectively not by show of hands just in your mind how many of us took advantage of this understanding and made it a point to to repeatedly continually ongoing invite people to come not because we'll offer them something unintelligible but rather intelligible and they might come to know Jesus as Savior well you want to be on fire for Jesus you want to see the church on fire for the souls of men and women in Woodlawn you want to see people saved well then let us know the value of the restraint of words let us speak and praise and pray and preach with words we all understand and I believe that people in the coming year who have been invited to will actually come to faith will actually come to faith will actually come to faith and that is the reason why there is no extended Latin song here but Paul does not he not done here not only are non-Christians brought in and saved when fewer words are spoken but I told you Christians present will be built up and strengthened now just wait until you see

how that outcome is attained.

Look next, then Christians are built up the outcome of verses 26 through 33. It's the next paragraph. And again, there's a call to desist from speaking. But it isn't given to men and women who have the gift of tongues, but to another group instead, the men and women in the congregation who possess the gift of prophecy.

[ 20 : 30 ] You can see that clearly there in verses 29 to 32. Let two or three prophets speak and let the others weigh what is said.

If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one so that all may learn and be encouraged. And don't forget the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets.

Now the unique contribution that those verses make to the understanding of prophecy is important. And it's yet the first time we've come to it in our summer series.

Evidently, there is more at play in the early church worship service than the spontaneous person-to-person interactions that take place before or after the corporate service where you offer a gift of consolation.

Under the spontaneous activity of the Holy Spirit for somebody else's good. There's something more formal going on in Corinth. Before the formation of the Bible as the sole rule of faith and practices, at a time when the offices of the apostle and the prophet were still in play, two or three people might have risen in a normal course of a church service.

[ 21 : 50 ] They might speak to the entire congregation and always notice with a weight that was less than that of the Old Testament prophets and with words that needed to be weighed or considered by others in regard to their applicability in this place.

Now, while I don't think that the office of the apostle, because nobody alive today saw the resurrected Christ, nor the office of the prophet as it was in the Old Testament or the New Testament before the church was established completely is in play today, the gift of prophecy certainly exists and continues.

Men and women declare in the assembly God's word spontaneously given under the direction of the spirit, even in the context of the church when it is gathered.

So, how might we actually see that outcome then? The outcome is clear. Look at verse 31. For you can all prophesy one by one so that all may learn and be encouraged.

Men and women both. The church service exists where we are built up through the spontaneous speech of another in this sense, even in the course of the worship service.

[ 23 : 22 ] How might that look here? Well, let me just say, if I've been studying this again this week, I'm going to reinstitute over the coming year and you'll see it. I'm going to reinstitute something we did once, with some degree of regularity, but we haven't done recently.

I am going to see that we put a couple of microphones up in the auditorium, and on particular Sundays, we will say to you, even ahead of time, if you have come this morning, men and women alike, and the Spirit of the Lord, and the Spirit of the Lord, would give to you a verse or a word, an encouragement, a consolation, and you feel that it is a contribution to be made to our mutual edification, then there will be an opportunity to you to speak that word.

And as those words come, I believe the church will be built up, that God will use you to impart strength to this family.

Wow. Stay with me. We've only been through two of the three paragraphs, but we've seen two instances of men and women restricting their speech.

But in both instances, it's resulted in positive outcomes. Paul's not done. Not only are non-Christians saved and brought in, not only are Christians built up and strengthened when fewer words are spoken, but the church service mysteriously holds up God's design and Christ's command for all to see.

[ 25 : 09 ] Christ's command, God's design, upheld, verses 33 to 38. Here, a surprising group is asked to refrain from speech.

And notice, not on account of spiritual gifts. Rather, their silence is requested by Paul based on their gender. You can see it there in 33, the latter half, and verse 34, the women are to keep silent. Now, this is surprising, as surprising as it is difficult. It's problematic even to embrace. It warrants qualification, given what we already know of this letter, and it warrants explanation in regard to how it might be applied.

By way of qualification, what is meant here? In other words, what's the semantic range of silence that he's talking about? I mean, I mean, the wider literary context is helpful.

By asking women to be silent, Paul is not here at odds with his own words in chapter 11, where women are encouraged to participate, and in prayer.

[ 26 : 48 ] He actually commends women and gives instruction on the women and the wives as they would pray or prophesy. It's not as though Paul got to chapter 14 and forgot what he wrote in chapter 11.

So then, what is he referring to here? What kind of silence is he wanting? And when are they to refrain from speaking, or singing, or praising, or praying in the service?

Again, the context has to be key. Having looked at the wider context in 11, all you've got to do is look at the immediate context in our own chapter.

Verse 29, when some speech was taking place, others were there to weigh, oversee, judge, adjudicate, hold, suppress, agree, disagree, allow to be the word of Christ for the body that week, all by weighing what was said.

That is, when it comes to declaring and guarding the authoritative word of God in the worship service, Paul is asking women to voluntarily remain in submission and leave that to those who have been charged with the oversight of that church family.

[ 28 : 16 ] That word is difficult, but that's actually the word he uses in verse 34. He says, for they're not permitted to speak, but should be in submission.

In other words, women left the responsibility for the declaration of God's authoritative word in the corporate gathering of worship to the men who were charged with oversight.

And yet we are right to ask, why would that be the case? After all, men and women are created equal.

After all, I've been in ministry 40 years, and I can tell you many times where women in the congregation would have pulled me aside privately and more thoroughly instructed me on the meaning of scripture, like Priscilla did of Apollos of old.

Well, if these things are true and there's no sense of inferiority or inequality, then what is this mandate?

[ 29 : 24 ] And why would it be the case? The text answers it for us. I'm not answering it. The text does again, verse 34.

He makes this, he says, as the law also says, that's his grounding. He's saying the basis for this voluntary act of submission on the part of women to refrain from functioning as the preacher in the church worship service is grounded somehow in Old Testament law.

So then the next question is, well, what law is he referring to? Well, he's already told us in chapter 11, and you might want to take a look at it in verses 3 and 9 and 10, which is, as we've already seen, another section where he's addressing the relationship of men and women respectively in worship.

But in chapter 11, verse 3, he does make an appeal to the law on this distinction of a woman, even when she prophesies, not doing so outside of a sense of authority.

This is what he writes. But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ. The head of the wife is her husband. The head of Christ is God. Or verse 9, neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.

[ 30 : 53 ] Or verse 11, nevertheless, in the Lord, woman is not independent of man, nor man of woman. woman. The passage then concerns an appeal to the law that deals with created order.

When was the man made? When was the woman made? To whom was the word given? Who was responsible to articulate the word for God's family? Even all the way back to creation.

And in Genesis 2, God gave to the man, Adam, the distinction, the humbled, insane privilege of proclaiming God's word, even before the first woman had been created.

Which in chapter 11 accounts for Paul's request that women, when praying or prophesying, exercising the gift of prophecy in the church, would have some kind of authority on her head.

In our chapter, the same principle applies. She refrains from speech that weighs judges, proclaims the word in the worship service.

[ 32 : 06 ] And this stands perfectly in accord with his teachings elsewhere. In 1 Timothy 2, for instance, where the only limitation set down by Paul for women in the church, where that of teaching men and being placed in the authoritarian, the creative office of elder, where in the family

would be overseen and run.

For Paul, then the worship service, it is not a place for men or women to be independent actors. He seems to be saying that when men and women participate in the church, they give evidence that they're at peace with the created order. That redemption, as it was, was supposed to restore us to our original design and nature, and not further obscure or confuse who we are in God's family.

Now, I am fully aware that many reject this notion. many would make an appeal that all restrictions, even like this momentary time in a church service, that it should be placed on a woman, should be done away with.

My own New Testament professor many years ago, Dr. Gordon Fee, an esteemed textual critic, nonetheless, would flat out reject any limitation, such as I have outlined it here.

[ 33 : 40 ] According to him, he writes, this verse, these verses are not authentic. That's his quotation, not mine.

Not authentic, and certainly not binding on Christians. In other words, he holds that these words were added into manuscripts by way of evidence.

Some centuries later, by some scribe who was perversely patriarchal and wanted to bring the hammer down in his own context.

That said, you need to know there isn't any textual evidence to support my professor's view. And he doesn't put forward any, manuscript textual evidence to do so, because it doesn't exist.

In fact, the complete and total manuscript evidence that we have for 1 Corinthians, and we have quite a bit, holds to the authenticity of these verses.

[ 34 : 43 ] The oldest manuscripts coming from some or all of this text, let me just list a few. They'll be familiar to a few of you, brand new to most of you. Papyrus 46, one of the earliest and most significant manuscripts containing parts of Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, and Hebrews, which dates to the second or early third century.

These restrictions are there. The Codex Vaticanus, a complete Greek manuscript of the Bible, including 1 Corinthians, dating to the fourth century. These restrictions are there.

Codex Sinaiticus, another complete manuscript of the Bible, including 1 Corinthians, dating to the fourth century. This restriction is there. Papyrus 123, fourth century, there.

Codex Alexandrius, Epiphrymi, Freonis, 5th century, all there. And I could go on. All of them.

All of them. It's there as authentic. And none of them, not one, fragment over 2,000 plus years of collecting these manuscripts, is it not there.

[ 36 : 04 ] To say that it's not authentic reveals the prejudices of one's mind, the predilections of one's practice, and is defective from the text itself.

There are others. I'll be quick, because there are a million arguments on it. William Webb came out with a book some years ago, received quite a bit of press on lifting the restrictions, but he didn't do so on fees framework, because he knew that would not hold.

But he held something called, what he called, the Bible's redemptive movement. That is, he held that the church is either released from certain prohibitions earlier, or to retain certain prohibitions that were set down earlier, based upon the trajectory of what the gospel does with Jesus.

Great. It's actually a very well-founded argument to trace. But given that, one would think that this is the perfect text for Webb to apply his argument.

For here we have a restriction. It's on the backside of redemption's movement. It has the added benefit of teaching something that Paul says here in our verses comes from the command of Christ.

[ 37 : 37 ] So this is from the command of Christ, he says. And it's to be practiced, he says, in all the churches. I can't think of a better text to apply his argument. And yet, when you read the 301-page book, as I have, he fails to deal with this passage at all.

Not a single paragraph. Two citations of it in the footnote where he claims that some passages in scripture that restrict the activities of women compared to men generally reflect the cultural norms of the day.

That's his quote, not mine. He goes on to say, the patriarch of Old Testament tradition seems to control the apostolic writers while one might have hoped otherwise.

In other words, this is a hanging chad. This is a leftover that they didn't quite get through all the things they needed to get through. But it's Christ's command for all the churches.

There are others attempts to discard the meaning of the text by various appeals to cultural norms. Every one of those attempts fails to account for Paul's appeal not to culture but to creation order instead.

[ 38 : 55 ] There are others who would circumvent any restriction by chalking it up to a problem confined to a situation in Corinth. But these attempts fail on account for Paul's very words that this word comes from Christ and is to be applied in all the churches everywhere.

So evidently what I'm humbly trying to set before our church family is this that God was after something significant by way what marriage was to display and by way of what the church service was to display and he held that mysterious plan in his mind when he created the first man and the first woman.

He wanted to prefigure both in marriage and in the church. He wanted to showcase something on the basis of created order that the church itself just as the family would be a three-dimensional picture of equality and distinction wherein both people husband wife overseers congregation mysteriously contribute to who Christ is in relationship to the church.

And so here it is just as the man or the preacher fallen fallen and stained though he is stands in the humbled place of proclaiming the word of Christ to the congregation so too the women strong and valiant though they are display showcase put before the world the picture that the bride comes to behold the Savior that the women through picturesque beauty exemplify that the church itself in all of its fullness is to live in quietness to the word of Christ so when we come together something mysterious is on display something that is only made possible by humble men and strong women who voluntarily hold the command of Christ for the purpose of showcasing his design and our willingness to live under his word

I know that this too is difficult for some just as a voluntary restraint on praise means non-Christians are brought in just as a voluntary restraint on too many words that would exhort and comfort even when good mean that Christians are built up so too in this case God's design is on display and Christ's command is showcased for all to see so there's a young girl here today and I'm closing there's a young girl here today who goes home and wonders aloud beautifully to her mother mommy why did a woman not preach today the response of a godly woman who receives the text in all of its mystery and brilliance says oh dear child the women of Christ Church

[ 42 : 41 ] Chicago preach today they they they preach a picture a sermon that's louder than words they they exemplified for all the world what Jesus saw in Mary when he says this is why I came I came to hear God's word in one sense she could say we sang that Christmas carol today dear let all mortal flesh keep silent and with fear and trembling stand we could say this church gave the world a foretaste a down payment on what heaven will be like when we all sit under him a foretaste of Habakkuk 2 20 where the Lord is in his temple and let all the earth keep silence and so we see in this text that less can be at times more that when the church gathers for corporate worship something completely mysterious is taking place that as we speak

God's word to God's people non-Christians are brought in and saved as we refrain from speaking at times even things that are good or might have been helpful nevertheless all people are encouraged built up and strengthened as we give ourselves week by week to the study of his word and to the humble explication of it as a family we speak of God's design Christ's command we hold it up for all to see and so in this church women must continue to lead us in public prayer women must continue to lead us in praise women must continually be encouraged to admonish any pastor any elder when they feel they have not rightly taught God's word fully women must continue to be involved in the teaching and admonishment of one another in every respect which we are able all while protecting the intentionality of this text we must provide for women the full exercise of their gifts and that includes teaching in accordance with our understanding of Titus 2 3 and 8 we must model it for all and as our men and as our women joyfully embrace this may men and women be saved may your family be strengthened may this church speak to a world something of the mystery of Christ and his bride our heavenly father we give ourselves to our ongoing need to love you well in accordance with our best understanding in Jesus name amen well