

## Paul's Missing Double Bunk

By Don Johnson

The pericope (teaching unit) is 1 Cor 14:26-40.

ESV 1Co 14:26 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.

1Co 14:27 If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret.

1Co 14:28 But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God.

1Co 14:29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.

1Co 14:30 If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent.

1Co 14:31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged,

1Co 14:32 and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.

1Co 14:33 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints,

1Co 14:34 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.

1Co 14:35 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.

1Co 14:36 Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached?

1Co 14:37 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.

1Co 14:38 If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

1Co 14:39 So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.

1Co 14:40 But all things should be done decently and in order.

Questions with the above text:

1. In 1 Cor 14:26 each one (the Greek word hekastos is inclusive and not specific to gender) has some verbal offering, so why

- are women later told to keep silent? This is a key insight as it *seems* to be a contradiction.
2. Given that 1 Cor 11 talks about women praying and prophesying in church, how can women speaking in church be shameful? This *seems* to be another contradiction.
  3. Regarding implementing 1 Cor 14:34-35, what is an unmarried woman to do? The instructions *seem* incomplete.
  4. What is the law in 1 Cor 14:34? This is the key question.

1 Cor 14 Chiasm (Inverted parallelism structure, key part is in center)

A 26 **All** believers can have a verbal contribution

B 27-28 Tongues – **be silent** if no interpreter

C 29-33a Prophecy – **be silent** if another speaks

D 33b-35 Legalists: “Women **be silent**”

D’ 36-38 Paul: “Bunk! Bunk! Women can speak”

C’ 39a Prophecy – desire to prophesy

B’ 39b Tongues – do not forbid

A’ 40 **All** things done decently and in order

By reverse engineering the whole pericope, one can hopefully see that the problem was chaos in the Corinthian church as too many speaking at the same time. Some legalists proposed doing what the synagogues did, namely keep women quiet; this reduces the potential speakers by half. Paul will have none of that, but he does give guidelines so things will be done in order.

The underlined **be silent** shows the same Greek word *sigao*, so it should be interpreted to mean the same thing in all 3 places, namely be silent as in shut up. Some translations do not show this.

Note that Paul uses the same word (*sigao*/silence) as the legalists are using, but in an appropriate way. The underlined **All** in the A-A’ pairing shows the paired concept. As there are no quote marks in koine Greek (they were not invented yet), quotes are determined by the translator based on context. The people at Corinth would recognize the quote, but it is more challenging for us today, which is why recognizing the 2 eta’s in 1 Cor 14:36 as expletives of repudiation is so important. The closest English term would be “Pfffft!” but I translate it as “Bunk!” to make it more pronounceable, other expletives like “Garbage!”, “Nonsense!” or similar are also

possible. Paul uses this term many times in 1 Cor, it is as if he was speaking to the congregation, recall that most could not read so the letter would be read aloud to the congregation.

The word “law” (Greek nomos) might refer to the Torah/Pentateuch of Moses, the entire Tanakh (or Written Law, the Old Testament) or the so-called Oral Torah of the Pharisees, which was later written down in the Mishnah about 200 CE. There is no command for women to be silent or in submission in the Tanakh, but there is in the Mishnah, which is how we can figure out which law is meant.

The key verse is 1 Cor 14:36 and it is important to see that the Tanakh includes contributions from both men and women who were inspired by God to prophesy and otherwise speak authoritatively in the most authoritative way possible, namely Scripture. In other words, Paul is using an indirect reference to the Tanakh to repudiate the claims of the believers who were influenced by the Oral Torah of the Pharisees, probably Messiah-believing Pharisees.

Note also that 1 Cor 14:26 contradicts what is stated in 1 Cor 14:34-35, but when it is realized that these statements are from Corinth (like others in the letter) and repudiated by Paul, then the whole pericope flows and makes sense.

My translation of 1 Cor 14:33b-36:

1 Cor 14:33b [Corinthian legalists:] “As in all the assemblies of the saints,

1Co 14:34 the women should keep silent in the assemblies. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the [Oral] Law also says.

1Co 14:35 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.”

1Co 14:36 [Paul:] Bunk! Was it from you (legalists) that the word of God came? Bunk! Are you (legalists) the only ones it has reached?