

FIRST CORINTHIANS

Chapter 14

Prophecy and Tongues

Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. 2 For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. 3 On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. 4 The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. 5 Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up. Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? 7 If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? 8 And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? 9 So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. 10 There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, 11 but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. 12 So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church. 13 Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. 15 What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. 16 Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say “Amen” to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? 17 For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. 18 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. 19 Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue. 20 Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. 21 In the Law it is written, “By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.” 22 Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. 23 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? 24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, 25 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.

14:1–5 The basic principle Paul insists on is that whatever is done in the church must contribute to the edification (building up) of the body. This is in keeping with the declaration in 12:7 that gifts are “given for the common good.” It also is in agreement with the principle of love (ch. 13). What is spoken in the church, then, must be intelligible—it must be spoken in the vernacular language or at least be interpreted in the vernacular. Prophecy is therefore more desirable than tongues (unless an interpreter is present) because prophecy is spoken in the native language of the listeners. (CSB)

Tongues Compared to Prophesying (14:1–5)

Love is Paul's overriding concern. As in 12:31b–13:13, he again encourages the Corinthians to pursue love. From love, then, will flow a concern to edify the church. In striving for spiritual gifts, the congregation should always be guided by this criterion: what serves best to promote the loving edification of the whole church? Thus the words "edify" and "edification," which Paul had used four times in previous chapters,¹⁰ become the theme (*Leitmotif*) of chapter 14. These words occur seven times as the apostle takes up a detailed discussion of tongues and prophecy. "Let all things be done for *edification*" (14:26). In chapter 8 Paul demonstrated the superiority of love over knowledge: "knowledge puffs up, but love builds up," that is "edifies" (οἰκοδομέω, 8:1). In chapter 10 he portrayed the priority of edification over exercising one's Christian freedom: "all things are in my power," but not all things build up/edify" (οἰκοδομέω, 10:23). Just as "the triune God is the source" (chapter 12) and "love is the way" (chapter 13), so "the upbuilding of the church is the goal of the spiritual graces" (chapter 14). (CC)

"Gifts are the hands through which love serves." Whereas 12:8–10 lists nine gifts of grace, and 12:28 adds another five, chapter 14 singles out only two for special attention: tongues and prophecy. Paul recognizes that both have a vital role in edifying the church. But the Corinthians seem to have given undue emphasis to the more spectacular gift of tongues. Thus Paul's concern in 14:1–25 is to lead them to a healthier and more balanced view of the comparative value of each gift. Nowhere does he disparage tongues or discourage the Corinthians from exercising that gift; indeed, he wants all of them to speak in tongues (14:5a). But a more precise understanding of the respective contribution of tongues and prophecy will, he believes, lead them to give priority to prophecy. (CC)

Paul now explains why they should value prophecy above tongues. *His thesis is that tongues do not edify the church as well as prophecy does, because they are not intelligible to others without an interpreter.* The tongues-speaker prays, sings, blesses, and gives thanks to God well enough (14:14–17), but "no one understands" (14:2). He speaks of the exalted "mysteries" of God (14:2). These "mysteries" that comprise the message are aspects of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is "the mystery [μυστήριον] of God" (2:1). But the words of the tongues-speaker flow from his innermost being, his spirit, rather than his mind.¹⁶ Likewise, the minds of the listeners cannot engage the foreign tongue, with the result that no one can make sense of the message. On the other hand, the prophet's speech is superior, being intelligible to the hearers, since he articulates the Gospel in the hearers' native tongue. Thus by prophecy the church is built up (edified) in the faith, encouraged, and comforted (14:3). (CC)

For some commentators, 14:2 speaks decisively against the view that the tongues-speaking in Corinth was identical with the Pentecost phenomenon of speaking known human languages (Acts 2). At Pentecost "each one *heard* [ἤκουον] them speaking in his own language" (Acts 2:6; cf. ἀκούομεν in Acts 2:8, 11). There was no need for an interpreter. Carson basically agrees that 1 Cor 14:2 makes it likely that the tongues in 1 Corinthians were ecstatic speech, although he concedes that it is "barely possible" that the tongues may be foreign human languages. Lenski, on the other hand, regards the latter view as more than "barely possible," protesting: " 'No one understands' [14:2] does not mean absolutely no one, for one who has the gift of interpretation, i.e., who is conversant with the particular foreign language used, would understand. ... The audience in general does not understand the strange language." Engelbrecht states: "Here St. Paul is speaking with hyperbolic rhetoric against those who exaggerate the importance of tongues. The same type of hyperbole is found throughout 1 Cor 13" (see especially 13:1–3). (CC)

In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul is speaking about the congregation as a whole, and it would be likely that few (if any) of those present in Corinth would know the particular foreign language. On

Pentecost (Acts 2), the situation was different. Gathered in Jerusalem were large numbers of people from all over the Mediterranean world, and so the diverse foreign tongues were recognized and understood by at least some of those present. (CC)

In 1 Cor 14:4–5 Paul continues his exposition of the comparatively greater value of prophecy over tongues. The Christian who utilizes his gift of tongues without also translating or interpreting benefits only a single individual—himself—whereas the prophet edifies the whole church. As Chrysostom exclaims, “What a difference between one person and the Church!” Paul may indeed be saying no more than this, although a number of commentators add that 14:4a (“the person who speaks in a tongue edifies himself”) is also an ironical indictment of tongues-speakers for their self-centeredness. One might compare this self-edification (understood positively) to a contemporary pastor who practices reciting out loud Psalm 23 in Hebrew or the Lord’s Prayer in Greek. By doing so he certainly edifies himself. But if he speaks the original biblical tongues in the pulpit or in Bible class, even though he may impress the church, unless he also provides a translation or interpretation, he edifies only himself. (CC)

That Paul was not opposed to speaking in tongues per se—indeed, was favorably disposed toward it—is made plain in 14:5 (cf. also 14:18). Just as Moses expressed the wish that all the Lord’s people would be endowed by the Spirit to be prophets (Num 11:29), so Paul wished everyone in Corinth could speak in tongues. Far from denigrating the gift, he wanted as many as possible to be endowed with tongues and the other spiritual gifts. Above all, however, he wanted them all to prophesy. Because the prophet built up the whole church, he was greater than the tongues-speaker, unless the latter provided an interpretation or translation for the church’s edification. That elucidation of the Gospel in the common language of the listeners would make all the difference! (CC)

14:1 *pursue love and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts.* Love is the means by which spiritual gifts are made effective. (CSB)

Paul returns to the theme introduced in 8:1—love moves people to build one another up. (TLSB)

especially that you may prophecy.† Here especially the gift of “strengthening, encouragement and comfort” (v. 3). (CSB)

Prophecy is established as one of the chief gifts (12:28–31). Luther first applied ch 14 to the whole congregation (AE 40:22–23), but his view changed. He later wrote, “He is not commanding the congregation to preach, but is dealing with those who are preachers in the congregations or assemblies.... The lesson was sung or read by one or two.... Then one of the prophets whose turn it was spoke and interpreted the lesson.... When one was through, another might have something to add in confirmation or clarification” (AE 40:389). Luther’s mature view agrees with synagogue practices in the first century, which the early Christians adopted (cf Ac 13:14–16; 15:13–21). (TLSB)

14:2 *tongue.* The hearers cannot understand what the person who speaks in a tongue is saying. Therefore what he says is a mystery unless it is interpreted. Only God understands it. (CSB)

Hyperbole, because tongues could be interpreted, though this also was the Spirit’s work. Paul is describing the broader group’s experience. The speaker used a language people could not understand, so members of the congregation were confused (cf Ac 2:12). Paul’s hyperbole downplays the importance of tongues for the congregation (cf vv 6–11) (TLSB)

with his spirit. It is not spoken from his mind (see vv. 14–17). (CSB)

Earlier, Paul explained that God’s mysteries cannot be known by human means (2:6–13). The Spirit must reveal how Christ fulfilled the ancient mysteries (cf 2:10, 13). Elsewhere, Paul named specific “mysteries” the Spirit taught and revealed (throughout these passages appear terms of speaking, uttering, and proclaiming). The mysteries are the inclusion of the Gentiles in Israel’s salvation (Rm 11:25; Eph 3:2–6; Col 1:26–27), the Gospel truths recorded in the prophetic writings (Rm 16:25–26), salvation through the Lord’s crucifixion (2:8), the resurrection promised through Christ (15:51), and the Gospel of Christ generally (Eph 6:19; Col 2:2–3; 4:3–4; 1Tm 3:16). Peter preached most of these themes on Pentecost, when he explained OT prophecies to those confused by speaking in tongues (Ac 2:14–36). According to Acts and Paul, the content of speaking in tongues was “the mighty works of God” (Ac 2:11), “extolling God” (Ac 10:46), “prayer” (1Co 14:14), and “thanksgiving” (1Co 14:16). (TLSB)

14:3 In prophesying the speaker can edify and encourage others (12:7). (CSB)

Prophecy, as preaching, makes the meaning and application of God’s teaching clear (vv 24–25). Luther: “St. Paul writes of the office of preaching in the congregation, to which [the congregation] is to listen and to learn from it, when he says: Whoever comes forward, and wants to read, teach, or preach, and yet speaks with tongues, that is, speaks Latin instead of German [as happened in Luther’s day], or some unknown language, he is to be silent and preach to himself alone. For no one can hear it or understand it, and no one can get any benefit from it. Or, if he should speak with tongues, he ought, in addition, put what he says into German, or interpret it in one way or another, so that the congregation may understand him” (AE 40:142). (TLSB)

14:4 *builds up himself.* This edification does not involve the mind since the speaker does not understand what he has said. It is a personal edification in the area of the emotions, of deepening conviction, of fuller commitment and greater love. (CSB)

Rhetorically, Paul reduced tongues to a selfish act in order to shame the proud Corinthians. Yet he conceded the use of tongues, as he did other practices of the congregation (cf 7:6). (TLSB)

14:5 *like ... you to speak in tongues.* Paul was not opposed to tongues-speaking if it was practiced properly. (CSB)

unless he interprets. † If the tongues-speaker also has the gift of interpretation, his speaking is beneficial for then it can be understood (see v. 13). (CSB)

Tongues became edifying through translation or explanation. Cf Ac 2, where tongues are followed by quotation of Scripture and preaching. Luther understood the practical concerns raised by ritual language because of the medieval custom of using Latin rather than the common language of the people. Luther: “Hence has come the custom in all lands, to read the gospel immediately before the sermon in Latin, which St. Paul calls speaking in tongues in the congregation. However, since the sermon comes soon thereafter and translates and interprets the tongue, St. Paul does not reject or forbid it” (AE 40:142). (TLSB)

the one who prophesies is greater. Because he serves the common good more effectively since what he says can be understood and thus edifies the church. (CSB)

The Analogy of Musical Instruments (14:6–12)

Tenderly addressing the Corinthian Christians as “brothers” (1 Cor 14:6), Paul asks them to imagine what it would be like if their apostle made tongues-speaking the centerpiece of his next visit. Such an approach may be edifying for Paul himself (14:4), but how would it benefit them? They would only be benefited if he brought a message that was clear and comprehensible to all. As a modern equivalent, one might ask how it would benefit an English-speaking congregation if a guest preacher on mission Sunday were to preach in Russian or Swahili as he described his missionary work among native speakers of that language. Such a sermon might be memorable and impressive, but it would not build up the faith of the congregation. (CC)

Next Paul says that it would be more helpful to the Corinthians if he imparted a specific revelation (14:6). The noun “revelation” (ἀποκάλυψις) is sometimes used for an extended lengthy message, such as “the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:1), that is, the book of Revelation. In 1 Cor 2:10 the verb ἀποκαλύπτω, “to reveal,” refers to God revealing through his Spirit the Gospel itself: that the crucified Jesus is the Lord of glory, and that through Christ crucified God has prepared eternal salvation, although that salvation remains hidden from human sight now. But the noun may also be used more narrowly of a specific “revelation,” as when God revealed to Paul that he should visit the apostles in Jerusalem (Gal 2:2). That narrow sense of a brief, specific “revelation” is carried by the noun (ἀποκάλυψις) in 1 Cor 14:26 and by the verb (ἀποκαλύπτω) in 14:30. While neither this verb or noun is found in 1 Corinthians 15, the resurrection “mystery” Paul is about to impart in 15:51–57 may have been received as a specific revelation, and it was designed to benefit the Corinthians by strengthening their hope. In 1:7 the “revelation” (ἀποκάλυψις) of Jesus Christ will take place when he returns in glory. (CC)

In addition to revelation, Paul could also benefit the congregation “by knowledge or by prophecy or by teaching” (14:6). There may be a link between the first and third items on the list, “revelation” and “prophecy” (cf. 14:29–30), and between the second and fourth items, “knowledge” and “teaching.” The relationship would be as follows. Divine revelation comes to the prophet and then is proclaimed by his prophesying. Similarly, divine knowledge is acquired by the teacher, which he then transmits by his teaching. (Paul speaks of his own reception and transmission of divine truths in 11:23 and 15:3–8.) That relationship might be illustrated in the following way:

revelation——prophet——prophecy
knowledge——teacher——teaching

By way of analogy to musical instruments in 14:7–8, Paul illustrates how useless is the gift of tongues without interpretation or translation. First he draws a comparison to a tune played on musical instruments. If woodwinds or the stringed instruments were to produce only a drab monotone or jangle (as when an orchestra is tuning up), no one could possibly derive any benefit from the music. It would lack any coherent meaning. Instead of stirring the emotions, it would grate on the nerves. Music is composed to convey a message (compare, for example, the musical notations in the psalms and the hymnic passages in Rev 5:9–13; 15:2–4). But the kinds of sounds Paul has in mind would be chaotic and meaningless. (CC)

Moreover, Paul says in 1 Cor 14:8, an incoherent sound would be disastrous in the case of the battle trumpet. If the bugle gives a feeble and indeterminate note, the soldiers have no idea what is expected of them, and no one will prepare for battle. If the commanding leadership sounds tentative or confused, who will follow the call to arms? A forceful and unambiguous message is critical for a successful military operation. (CC)
Paul now applies the analogies to the Corinthians’ use of tongues (14:9). If their speaking fails to convey a recognizable message, the whole exercise will be futile, amounting to so much “hot air.”

Paul saw no point in such purposeless and undisciplined activity. Like “beating the air” in 9:26, that kind of speech would be “talking into the air” (14:9). (CC)

In 14:10–11 Paul now carries further his argument that a language must be εὔσημος, “intelligible, easily recognizable, clear, distinct” (14:9), if it is to be serviceable to the church. Recalling the familiar babble of languages heard in the streets and public places of cosmopolitan centers like Corinth, he observes: “There are who knows how many different languages in the world” (14:10). Each of them, he adds, is perfectly intelligible to those conversant with that language. But if anyone is not adept in a particular tongue, he will be regarded as a foreigner by anyone who speaks it, while he in turn will regard the speaker as a foreigner (14:11). There will be a barrier between them—a barrier that prevents constructive communication. (CC)

In 14:12 Paul draws the final conclusion from his arguments. The flute and the harp need to play a meaningful tune (14:7), the trumpet needs to produce a compelling sound (14:8), and—finally—human speakers need to be intelligible to one another if anyone is to benefit from what they are hearing (14:9–11). Even if the tongues are facilitated by the Spirit, they are useless babble without a translator for those who are not conversant in the particular language. Surely then the Corinthians (14:12), in their enthusiasm for the Spirit and his gifts, would not want to be considered as completely ineffective speakers because of their zeal for foreign languages (tongues), coupled with carelessness about supplying a translation or interpretation. They would prefer to be considered as influential instructors about the spiritual life. Thus Paul urges them again to make the upbuilding of the church their highest priority: “Seek that you may excel at the edification of the church” (14:12; cf. Rom 14:19). There is no place in the church for showing off one’s gifts for the purpose of self-aggrandizement. If gifts “do not edify they do not matter.” (CC)

14:6 *how will I benefit you ... ?* It would be useless for a person to speak in tongues unless, by interpretation, he brings the church something understandable and edifying. (CSB)

revelation ... knowledge ... prophecy ... teaching? Similar activities are mentioned in 12:8–10, 28. These were the content of apostolic preaching. (TLSB)

14:7-11 Paul uses rhetoric to build empathy for the “outsiders” (v 23), who could not understand and were alienated by the Corinthians’ practices. (TLSB)

14:7 *flute or harp.* Instruments that were well known in Greece. (CSB)

distinct notes. For a person to recognize the tune and to understand and appreciate it, there must be a variety of notes so arranged as to create a meaningful tune. One note repeated monotonously cannot accomplish this. (CSB)

14:8 *the bugle ... ready for battle.* All Greeks would be acquainted with the use of the trumpet for battle signals (cf. Homer’s *Iliad*, 18.219), and the Jews would be familiar with the use of the ram’s horn (Nu 10:9; Jos 6:4, 9). Again, the notes sounded must convey a message. (CSB)

14:11 *foreigner.* Gk barbaros, a non-Greek (as in Eng “barbarian”). (TLSB)

14:12 *eager for manifestations of the Spirit.* Lit, “zealots of the spirits.” Some manuscripts have “zealots of the spiritual gifts,” which probably gives the sense. However, cf Is 11:2; Rv 1:4. (TLSB)

excel in building up the church. The basic principle of ch. 14. (CSB)

perisseuate – To be rich in or have an abundance of, or abound in. This also reminds us that we will not be perfect in this and that we need to keep on growing by being in the Word. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

oikodoma – This literally means the construction or building of something. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

Paul urges that they prefer to be considered as influential instructors about the spiritual life. Paul urges them again to make the up-building of the church their highest priority. There is no place in the church for showing off one’s gifts for the purpose of self-aggrandizement. If gifts do not edify they do not matter. (CC p. 481)

14:13 *power to interpret* – diermeveuo – To translate from human language to another. The theme of this whole section is that what gifts we have are useful for the whole body. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

Lit, “pray so that he may interpret.” Interpretation was a spiritual activity that should follow speaking in a tongue. (TLSB)

Paul has established the principle that what benefits the church is edification, or upbuilding. With a strong “therefore” (14:13), he begins to spell out how tongues-speakers may begin to make themselves more helpful to the church. As he does so, it becomes apparent that in asking them to seek excellence in building up the church, he is not throwing them back on their own spiritual exercises or ethical resources. No, he means that they should lift up their hearts to God in prayer. Just as Jesus encouraged his disciples to pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit (Lk 11:13), so Paul encourages these saints to pray for a specific gift of the Spirit. It is by prayer that they are to “strive for the gracious gifts that are greater” (1 Cor 12:31). This does not mean that Christians may *demand* a particular gift. In his divine freedom, “the one and the same Spirit” distributes “to each one individually *as he [the Spirit] wishes*” (12:11). But the Corinthian tongues-speakers urgently needed to be freed from their self-centered preoccupation and begin thinking of others. To that end, therefore, each should “pray that he may interpret/translate” (14:13) the language into the vernacular of the listeners. Then he will no longer sound like a “foreigner” (14:11) to his fellow Christians, but as someone who can be genuinely helpful. (CC)

As long as he only prays in a tongue, he will only edify himself (see 14:4). That is because only his inner being, or “spirit,” is engaged in the activity (14:14). Filled with the Holy Spirit, he is speaking about the Gospel in other languages as the Spirit inspires his spirit to give utterance (as in Acts 2:4). But since his rational mind is “in neutral”—not engaged with his spirit—he is unable to communicate that spiritual utterance in meaningful terms in the language(s) known by the listeners. (CC)

As a result, the apostle is resolved to pray and sing not only with his spirit but also with his mind and faculties of understanding (1 Cor 14:15). Again it becomes evident that tongues-speaking was not primarily a form of teaching, directed to human beings, but consisted of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving addressed to God (“I will pray,” “I will sing,” 14:15; cf. Acts 2:11; 10:46; 1 Cor 14:2). Nevertheless, as exalted and worthy as such expressions may be, Paul determines to set an example by ensuring that in public worship anything he says in a tongue will be translated for the congregation’s benefit. (CC)

On the basis of Eph 5:19 (“speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs”), one commentator underlines Paul’s insistence that

vocal utterances in worship must be mutually edifying (1 Cor 14:1–19). ... Just as in [Eph] 4:2, 32 love and forgiveness are shown by the Christians to “one another,” so in [Eph] 5:19 “singing” is part of the mutual edification of the saints. ... This means not only that its special place is in common worship (not excluding the family), but also that it has to be so qualified that the faith, obedience, love, and joy of fellow Christians are stimulated and increased. The singer’s private pleasure alone, not to speak of ancient or modern exhibits, cannot be its primary purpose. (CC)

Many a Christian could testify how his faith and joy have been increased by the hymn singing of others. (CC)

If the tongues-speaker persists in praising God only in spirit, it will be impossible for anyone not conversant with that foreign prayer-language to adopt and affirm the prayer as his own with the “amen” (1 Cor 14:16). Paul’s expression for someone not conversant with the tongue is ὁ ἰδιώτης, a person who is inexperienced or incompetent in a certain skill. The word is used in Acts 4:13, where Peter and John are classed as ἰδιῶται (“laymen”) in comparison with the rabbis, and 2 Cor 11:6, where Paul calls himself an ἰδιώτης (“inexpert”) in speech. The outsiders in Corinth (1 Cor 14:16) possessed other gifts of grace, as do all Christians (1:4–7), but could make no sense of uninterpreted tongues. The tongues-speakers may have been showing off their talents by the way they said the table grace/eucharistic prayer before the congregational meals which served as the setting for the Lord’s Supper (11:17–22). (CC)

No matter how fine the speaker’s thanksgiving may be, if it is in a language unknown to others, the only person to be edified is the speaker himself (14:17; cf. 14:4). The others receive no spiritual benefit—no edification—because the speaker’s only concern is his private conversation with God. (CC)

Paul then clarifies in 14:18 that he is not protesting this misuse of tongues from a sense of “sour grapes.” Rather, Paul is thankful to God for enriching him with this gift beyond anyone else in Corinth. Nonetheless, he does not want to parade this gift. While it has its place in private prayer and praise, Paul prefers to concentrate on what counts “in church” (14:19), what builds up the body of Christ. To that end, he regards it as infinitely more helpful to speak five intelligible words with his mind fully engaged—words in the common language that also engage the minds of the hearers—in order to instruct others in the faith, rather than countless words that are meaningless to the hearers. As one commentator put it, “It is better to be useful than brilliant.” (CC)

This is not to advocate a “dumbing down” of the church’s language, and even less an abandonment of the church’s biblical standards and heritage of liturgical worship. When people do not comprehend biblical and ecclesiastical language (cf. “the outsider” in 14:16), what is needed is catechesis, which Paul calls interpretation and/or translation (διερμηνεύω, 12:30; 14:5, 13, 27). Luther considered the pulpit an appropriate place for such catechesis:

When we are in the pulpit, we should nurse people and give them milk to drink; for a new church is growing up daily which needs to know the first principles. Therefore one should not hesitate to teach the Catechism diligently and to distribute its milk. The lofty speculations and matters should be reserved for the wiseacres. I will not consider Drs. Pomeranus, Jonas, and Philipp while I am preaching; for they know what I am presenting better than I do. Nor do I preach to them, but to my little Hans and Elizabeth. ...

Therefore see to it that you preach purely and simply and have regard for the unlearned people, and do not address only one or the other. (CC)

Paul begins to spell out how tongue-speakers may begin to make themselves more helpful to the church. As he does so, it becomes apparent that in asking them to seek to excellence in building up the church, he is not throwing them back on their own spiritual exercises or ethical resources. No, he means that they should lift up their hearts to God in prayer. Just as Jesus encouraged His disciples to pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13), so Paul encourages these saints to pray for a specific gift of the Spirit. This does not mean that Christians may demand a particular gift. The Corinthian tongues-speakers urgently needed to be freed from their self-centered preoccupation and begin thinking of others. To that end, therefore, each should “pray that he may interpret/translate” the language into the vernacular of the listeners. Then he will no longer sound like a “foreigner” (14:11) to his fellow Christians, but as someone who can be genuinely helpful. (CC p. 484)

14:14 *mind is unfruitful.* † When a person speaks in tongues or prays in tongues, the human mind does not produce the language and is not involved. (CSB)

Ritual language is known for its conservative tendencies. E.g., we still pray “Our Father,” quote Bible passages, or sing hymns and liturgy in seventeenth-century English (KJV); immigrant communities typically use their heritage language and their new language alongside each other in worship settings, even when the meaning of their heritage language is being lost (linguists refer to this as “language shift”). Records of ritual conservatism, multiple languages in worship, and the confusion they caused are known from the Jerusalem temple and from Palestinian Judaism (Sotah 7:1–2; Megillah 2:1). Paul gives evidence of ritually conservative language at Corinth as well. (TLSB)

If the person’s mind is in neutral – not engaged with his spirit – he is unable to communicate that spiritual utterance in meaningful terms in the language(s) known by the listeners. (CC p. 485)

14:15–17 *pray ... sing ... praising God ... say “Amen”... thanksgiving.* Elements employed in OT (1Ch 16:36; Ne 5:13; 8:6; Ps 104:33; 136:1; 148:1) and NT worship (Ro 11:36; Eph 5:18–20). “Amen,” meaning “It is true” or “So be it,” is the believer’s confession of agreement with the words spoken (cf. Gal 1:5). Thus it is important that a message in tongues be interpreted. (CSB)

14:15 *pray with my spirit ... with my mind ... sing with my spirit ... with my mind.* May mean that Paul will sometimes pray or sing with his spirit in a tongue; at other times he will pray or sing with his mind in his own language. Others believe that Paul was declaring his intention to pray or sing with both mind and spirit at the same time. (CSB)

Lit, “pray in the spirit ... in the mind.” Paul displayed his thoughts as an example for the readers to follow. At church, a person might pray personally for spiritual edification or understandably for the edification of others. Paul resolved to live with both practices. He displayed such resolve in other conflicting situations, using similar expressions about “spirit” and “mind”: in Rm 7:25, he described the inner conflict over following God’s Word and following the sinful nature; in Rm 8:16, the Holy Spirit bears witness “with our spirit” against the spirit of slavery and fear. With these expressions, Paul describes feeling torn, but persists in what he knows is right and best. He acknowledges the congregation’s selfish practice while emphasizing his main point: speak in an understandable way at church. “The adversaries have a long speech about the use of the Latin language in the Mass. In this speech, they joke about how it benefits an unlearned hearer to hear, in the faith of the Church, a Mass that he does not understand” (Ap XXIV 2). (TLSB)

Again it becomes evident that tongues-speaking was not primarily a form of teaching, directed to human beings, but consisted of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving addressed to God. Nevertheless, as exalted and worthy as such expressions may be, Paul determines to set an example by ensuring that in public worship anything he says in a tongue will be translated for the congregation's benefit. (CC p. 485)

14:16 *give thanks ... thanksgiving.* Different Gk terms: *eulogeo*, "to praise," "bless" God in prayer (as in Eng "eulogy"); *eucharistia*, "gratitude," "a prayer of thanksgiving" (as in Eng "Eucharist"). Paul may have in mind specific liturgical prayers, such as the Eighteen Benedictions that were used in first-century Jewish synagogues. (TLSB)

he does not know – idiotai – Uninstructed. We would call them the catechumens. They participated in the worship service but if they did not understand then they would not be instructed. Paul reminds us that the prime concern of worship is to proclaim clearly the Good News of Jesus Christ. Everyone, including children and visitors should be able to understand what is done during the worship service. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

Commonly, a person who was not an expert. Here, a layperson or someone new to the church is likely meant. In v 23 "outsider" is paired with "unbeliever." (TLSB)

say "Amen." Proper liturgical response to prayer in synagogue and church. John Chrysostom: "If you shall bless in a barbarian tongue, not knowing what you say, nor able to interpret, the layman cannot respond the Amen. For not hearing the words, 'forever and ever,' which are at the end [of a prayer], he does not say the Amen" (TLSB)

14:17 *being built up* – oikodomeitai – It is from the same root as "built up" in verse 12. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

No matter how fine the speaker's thanksgiving may be, if it is in a language unknown to others, the only person to be edified is the speaker himself. The others receive no spiritual benefit – no edification – because the speaker's only concern is his private conversation with God. (CC p. 486)

14:18 *I speak in tongues more than all of you* – Paul clarifies in this verse that he is not protesting this misuse of tongues from a sense of sour grapes. Rather, Paul is thankful to God for enriching him with this gift beyond anyone else in Corinth. (CC p. 486)

Paul boasted rhetorically to show the Corinthians that the activity they valued so highly was common. John Chrysostom: "This he does also in another place intending, namely, to take away the advantages of Judaism and to show that henceforth they are nothing, he begins by declaring that [he] himself had been endowed with them" (NPNF 1 12:211). Cf 2Co 11:21–23. (TLSB)

14:19 *But in the church.* † Some believe that an interpretation is unnecessary when the gift of tongues is being used as a private prayer language. They base such a distinction on v. 18 (see v. 14) when compared with the phrase quoted here. Others think Paul is very forcefully emphasizing the importance of understanding the message spoken in church, rather than making a distinction between public and private. (CSB)

five words with my mind. More rhetoric, emphasizing the need for meaningful communication. "Not only has Paul commanded that a language understood by the people be

used in church (1 Corinthians 14:2, 9), but human law has also commanded it” (AC XXIV 4). (TLSB)

Nonetheless, he does not want to parade this gift. While it has its place in private prayer and praise, Paul prefers to concentrate on what counts in church, what builds up the body of Christ. To that end, he regards it as infinitely more helpful to speak five intelligible words with his mind fully engaged – words in the common language that also engage the minds of the hearer – in order to instruct others in the faith, rather than countless words that are meaningless to the hearers. As one commentator put it, “It is better to be useful than brilliant.” (CC 486)

4:20 Before presenting one final argument regarding the comparative superiority of prophecy over tongues, Paul pauses for a moment and appeals to his “brothers” (14:20) to take a more mature approach. To be concerned for the edification of Christ’s body is a mark of mature thinking. But to be concerned with vain and competitive displays of one’s spiritual prowess through tongues-speaking, with no thought for the effect on fellow believers, is a mark of childishness. Paul wants the Corinthians to press on to the maturity of Christian thought which characterizes the veteran of the cross (see 2:6; 3:1–3). At the same time, they should have the innocence of children as far as wickedness is concerned (cf. Rom 16:19). They should not be experienced in the wickedness which plagued the city and constantly tempted the church (cf. 1 Cor 5:8; 10:6; and Paul’s final appeal in 15:32–34). (CC)

be infants in evil. Just as in the case of infants, have no evil desires or wrong motives in wanting to excel in spiritual gifts (such as speaking in tongues) as an end in itself. (CSB)

A proverbial saying. Paul did not suggest that infants are innocent of sin (Rm 3:23; 5:12). Augustine: “In the weakness of the infant’s limbs, and not in its will, lies its innocency” (*NPNF* 1 1:48). (TLSB)

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14:21–22† The passage from Isa 28 indicates that the foreign language of the Assyrians was a sign to unbelieving Israel that judgment was coming on them. Paul deduced from this fact that tongues were intended to be a sign for unbelievers (v. 22). Similarly, prophecy was for believers (v. 22) since it communicated revealed truth to those disposed to receive it (cf. Mt 13:11–16). (CSB)

14:21 *In the Law.* Cf. Ro 3:10–19, where Paul quotes from a number of passages from the OT, including Isaiah, and then in v. 19 collectively calls them “the law.” (CSB)

Paul quoted Isaiah, whose saying stemmed from a prophecy of Moses. (TLSB)

In the NT aeon an outbreak of speaking in tongues continues to signify God’s judgment on unbelievers and its hardening effect (“not even so will they listen to me,” 1 Cor 14:21). Indeed, a consistent line can be traced from the Deuteronomy and Isaiah texts through the book of Acts to

the present reappropriation in Paul.⁷ According to Acts, the unbelievers in Jerusalem mocked the Pentecost message proclaimed to them in various tongues, and obstinately concluded: “These men are full of new wine” (Acts 2:13). They would have none of Jesus Christ as the “precious cornerstone” of the church (Is 28:16; Acts 4:11), none of the positive aspect of the tongues-message that the Gospel was for all peoples and tongues. Likewise, Paul declares that the phenomenon of tongues in Corinth was (unlike prophecy) not designed simply as a salutary sign to build up believers in the faith; rather, one of its great purposes was to serve as *a negative judicial sign arousing the hostility of unbelievers* (cf. σημεῖον ἀντιλεγόμενον, “a sign that is spoken against,” Lk 2:34). Thus the unbelievers, confronted with tongues-speaking in the assembly, would draw a conclusion similar to the conclusion of the unbelieving Jews on Pentecost Day, “You are out of your minds” (1 Cor 14:23). (CC)

Law. Could refer to the entire OT (Rm 3:19). (TLSB)

14:22 *sign ... for unbelievers.* Israel failed to believe the Lord and so was conquered by the Assyrians, who spoke a different language. Conquered people are forced to tolerate and finally adopt the language of the conquerors. The foreign language constantly reminds the conquered people of their failure. (Cf Jer 5:15, which applied Moses’ prophecy to the Babylonians.) The Greek Corinthians were conquered by the Latin-speaking Romans, who completely destroyed Corinth in 146 BC and began to rebuild it as a Roman colony in 46 BC. Virtually all Corinthian inscriptions from the first century AD are in Latin, not Greek. Both Jews and Greeks at Corinth understood the relationship between conquest, judgment, and language.(TLSB)

prophecy is a sign. When God grew tired of Israel’s sin, He did not give them prophets. Therefore, clear preaching of God’s Word by the prophets was a sign of God’s favor. (TLSB)

In this respect, the gift of tongues served a similar dual purpose to Jesus’ parables, which enlightened those to whom the mysteries of the kingdom were given but also blinded the eyes and hardened the hearts of unbelievers (Mt 13:11–17 and parallels). Thus tongues without a translation or interpretation were not at all helpful in building up the believing congregation; prophecy alone served that purpose. (CC)

14:23-25 In 1 Cor 14:23–25 Paul proceeds to paint an imaginary scene to illustrate his point about the respective roles of tongues and prophecy. He first asks the Corinthians to imagine what it would be like if, instead of gathering in their separate house churches, the whole Corinthian church were to come together in one place (14:23), such as the home of his host Gaius, and everyone present were to speak in tongues. That would fulfill the fondest wishes of those who were so keen on tongues. But Paul asks them to consider the likely consequences. What would be the effect if, once they were all in high gear, a group of unbelievers unfamiliar with these languages should suddenly enter the assembly? The visitors would think they had entered a gathering of yet another mystery cult like that of Dionysus or Cybele, with its adherents all carried away by religious mania (cf. 12:2). Thus their encounter with tongues-speech would be a negative experience, a sign that only confirmed them in their sarcastic unbelief. (CC)

14:23 *whole church.* Christians gathered in “house churches” (cf 16:19; Ac 18:7–8). These physical divisions could contribute to the congregational divisions, which may have included differences in worship practices or even differences in languages. However, Paul regarded the Corinthians as one congregation (1:2) and here referred to the gathering of all Corinthian believers in a unified worship service. (TLSB)

outsiders. Perhaps those who had become “inquirers” concerning the gospel but as yet did not really understand. (CSB)

unbelievers. Those who have made no movement toward saving faith. The context is a meeting of the church in which everyone is speaking in tongues with the result that general confusion reigns. (CSB)

out of your mind. The visitors will be repulsed by the confusion, and the phenomenon meant to be an impressive sign will have a negative effect on the unsaved. (CSB)

14:24-25 When God’s Word is clearly preached, the Law and the Gospel go to work on the hearer’s heart. The Law convicts the hearer of sin, and the Gospel creates faith and brings forth the good fruit of sincere worship and confession. The Corinthians’ zeal for tongues has hindered these essential works of God’s Word. (TLSB)

Paul then paints a contrasting picture in 14:24–25. If an uninitiated visitor should enter the assembly when everyone was engaged in *prophecy*, he would be overwhelmed by the clear Word of God addressed to his heart in intelligible language. As the call to repentance was a key theme of prophetic speech, he would hear every voice in the room speaking to his conscience. Step by step Paul describes the process through which this person will be led by the Holy Spirit as the great spiritual gift of prophecy takes effect. First, the Spirit will work in the person’s heart to convince him of his sinfulness (cf. Jn 16:8). Second, he will hear everyone calling him to account: “You cannot let matters rest. Something has to be done about your sin.” Thus, in the third place, the person is led to make confession: the secret thoughts and motives of his heart are exposed by the light of God’s truth and then renounced. He who once walked in darkness has now come to the light (cf. the similar terminology in Jn 3:19–21; Eph 5:8–14). Finally, the Spirit leads him to fall on his face and worship, humbly acknowledging that “the God of Israel, the Savior” (Is 45:14–15) is truly present in this Christian assembly. The vision of the prophets was that one day the Gentile nations would be incorporated into the people of God together with Israel (Is 45:12–17; Zech 8:20–23). Paul alludes to that prophetic vision with the quote in 1 Cor 14:25, which draws on Is 45:14 and Zech 8:23. The Christians endowed with the spiritual gift of prophecy now fulfill Israel’s ancient prophetic hope. (CC)

The process Paul describes is similar to at least one incident in Jesus’ earthly ministry. Jesus encountered a Samaritan woman beside a well (John 4). He spoke to her in language that she readily understood. He revealed his knowledge of the sins in her private life (Jn 4:17–18), and she replied, “I see that you are a *prophet*” (Jn 4:19). She was led to ask the people of her town whether Jesus might be the Christ, and she invited them to come to him (Jn 4:28–30). (CC)

Thus by seeking to excel in prophecy, the sign so superbly suited for edifying and enlightening the members of the church, the Corinthians will also be more effective in evangelism to outsiders. Their practice of speaking God’s Word in clear, intelligible language will not only strike the visitor as eminently sensible; above all, the Holy Spirit will use the prophecies to convict him of his sins and bring him to the light of Christ. (CC)

14:24 *all prophecy.* Prophecy, spoken in the vernacular language and intended for believers, turns out to have a positive effect on unbelievers because they hear and understand and are convicted of their sins. (CSB)

14:1–25 Some Corinthians were pursuing their own edification to the neglect of those around them. We, too, are naturally tempted to pursue what we think of as our own spiritual needs rather

than patiently sharing God's Word with others, especially those we regard as less spiritual. Such attitudes contribute to deeper spiritual divisions among us. God calls us together for mutual edification in His Word, which always richly applies to the mature as well as the immature. Through the Word, God is really among us, giving His Spirit, faith in Christ, and all blessings of salvation. • Dearest Jesus, grant me the maturity to desire the edification of my brothers and sisters and to pursue gifts that build them up in Your love, so that our congregation may confess You with one voice in one Spirit. Amen. (TLSB)

Orderly Worship

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. 27 If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. 28 But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. 30 If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, 32 and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. 33 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, 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. 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. 36 Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? 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. 38 If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. 39 So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But all things should be done decently and in order.

Excursus – Worship Practice Today

Paul's apologetic for worship to provide a straightforward and uncompromising proclamation of the Word of God—the Law's convicting and the Gospel's pardon—has great significance for the church's worship practice today. In modern "worship wars" the battle lines often are drawn by the answer to this question: what is the primary purpose of worship? Should worship be primarily for edifying those who are already church members (and who presumably are Christian believers), or should worship be designed to attract and recruit outsiders (marginally Christian "seekers" and also unbelievers)? The twofold answer furnished by 1 Corinthians 14 is that *worship should be designed to edify the church, and that such edifying worship is also the best kind of worship for evangelism and outreach.* (CC)

The goals of edification and evangelism, when properly framed, are not in conflict with each other, but in harmony. Seven times in 1 Corinthians 14 Paul speaks of edifying or building up the church as the goal and criterion for proper Christian worship. In 14:20–25 he addresses the effect of worship on the "outsider" (ἰδιώτης, 14:16, 23–24) and on the "unbeliever" (ἄπιστος, 14:22–24). The same worship that builds up the church also converts unbelievers (14:24–25). (CC)

This worship is characterized by a direct presentation of the Law, which accuses and convicts the hearers of their sin (14:24–25; cf. Jn 4:17–18). Worship should not soften or downplay the Law on the grounds that it may offend; it always does and must offend the sinner in each of us! As for offending unbelievers who may happen to be visitors, they especially are in need of the Law's condemnation so that they may be brought to repentance and faith. (CC)

This worship must also plainly proclaim the Gospel of the full forgiveness of sins by grace alone and through faith in Jesus Christ alone. A creedal confession about the God in whom we believe—his creation, his redemption, and his uniqueness among all the world’s gods—is found in the OT texts to which 1 Cor 14:25 alludes (especially Is 45:12–17; see also Zech 8:20–23). Those OT texts portray the ingathering of the Gentiles to join Israel in the worship of the God who is like none other. In 1 Cor 14:25 the converted worshiper responds with a creedal confession of his faith in the one true God who is to be found among his worshipful people. (CC)

Following Paul’s terminology, such salutary worship might be called “prophetic.” Paul’s concern in 14:1–25 has been to demonstrate the superiority of prophecy over tongues in edifying the church at worship. Tongues are fine for an individual’s private devotional worship (14:4), but prophecy is what benefits the corporate congregation (14:1–25). “Prophetic” worship then stands in contrast to what might be called “charismatic” or tongues-oriented worship, which gives free (and chaotic) reign to diverse individual gifts and talents. The diverse gifts of the Spirit are indeed blessings to the body of Christ, but the issue here is the proper exercise of gifts during the church’s corporate worship. (CC)

To be avoided are idiosyncratic worship practices which may appeal to a segment of the congregation, but which the congregation as a whole would not find edifying and readily understandable. Depending on the degree of idiosyncrasy, visitors might even echo 14:23 by wondering whether the practitioners are out of their minds. In light of Paul’s concerns for the “outsider(s)” in 14:16, 23–24, a high degree of uniformity in worship practice among all churches would be best for Christians who may be traveling and visiting other congregations. At the same time, such uniformity would also provide the most consistent evangelical witness to “unbelievers” (14:22–24) who may frequent various congregations. Again, the goals of the edification of believers and the conversion of unbelievers are in harmony; the most edifying worship is also the most evangelistic worship. (CC)

The direction of Paul’s argumentation in chapter 14 points to an employment of worship forms that have been accepted and practiced by the whole Christian church throughout her history. The historic liturgies of the catholic (universal) church are “prophetic” because they are drawn from the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures and proclaim Law and Gospel uncompromisingly to engender repentance and faith. Paul’s emphasis on plain and direct language and his recurring reminders that tongues need translation and interpretation (διερμηνεύω, 14:5, 13, 27) suggest the need for catechesis whenever worship language is not readily understood. (CC)

Untold damage has been caused to congregations by the reckless and iconoclastic jettisoning of the church’s historic liturgies and hymns in the interests of “change.” In a turbulent world where people are faced with overwhelming changes, the church should stand as the temple of the unchanging God who is “not [a God] of disorder but of peace” (14:33), the God who offers stability and a safe refuge and anchorage from life’s storms (Is 33:6; cf. Is 4:6; 32:2; Heb 6:19; 13:8). Christians should be able to look to the church as a place which treasures her continuity with the communion of saints through the centuries and across national borders, as expressed in her rich international heritage of liturgies, “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” (Eph 5:19). (CC)

At the same time, the church’s worship should never become ossified but should always be open to further enrichment from the fresh contributions of contemporary saints (cf. 1 Cor 14:26). A vibrant church in every age and culture will have musically gifted members who express the faith in new compositions. The best survives, to be shared with others; the rest falls by the wayside. (CC)

It would seem to be consistent with Paul's concerns in 1 Corinthians 14 (a) that all liturgy and hymnody, whether ancient or modern, should be based on the Word of God, which convicts worshippers of their sin and comforts them with the Gospel, and (b) that *the whole church* be nourished and edified by the life-giving Word and Sacraments. The church should not focus only on "seekers" at the expense of the regular flock. Nor should the worship be intelligible only to "baby boomers"; things precious to elderly saints should also find an honored place. On the other hand, there should be no rigid adherence to what is old if that means a refusal to make any room for what is both biblical and meaningful to the young. An issue in immigrant communities has often been the adherence to worship in the parents' mother tongue at the expense of the younger generation who needed nourishment in their adopted language. Jesus' words in Mt 13:52 are instructive for those who prepare and lead Christian worship: "Every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (NRSV). (CC)

Paul will address further worship concerns in 1 Cor 14:26–40. Upbuilding worship will also observe the scriptural guidelines that Paul offers later. His topics in 14:26–39 are propriety and due order in worship, and the observance of appropriate roles. In 14:33–38 he addresses the proper roles for women in public worship and reminds the church of a divine command. It may suffice to say here that edifying and evangelical worship precludes the service of women as pastors, since that is contrary to the express command of the Lord (14:37) and is also contrary to the universal practice of the universal church for almost two millennia. The argument that women should be ordained to allow them to use freely the individual gifts God has given them runs counter to Paul's emphasis in 1 Corinthians 14 that the edification of the corporate church takes precedence over the desire of individuals to exercise their particular gifts. The argument that women should be ordained for the sake of outsiders or potential converts (who may be offended by limitations placed on women's roles) overlooks Paul's thesis that the Christian church's orderly and edifying worship is also her evangelistic worship. A concern for evangelism should not overturn the church's order; the church's order is part of her witness to the unbelieving world. Paul's consistent priority in 1 Corinthians 14 is on fidelity to the Word of God, observance of the divine order, and harmony with the practice of the universal church—all for the sake of building up the church and winning the unbeliever. (CC)

14:26-33a Evidently the Corinthian worship services were characterized by a degree of disorderliness unacceptable to the apostle. The Corinthians' unruliness in worship became apparent in the women abandoning their head-coverings, and the well-to-do members' selfishness at the communal supper which preceded the Lord's Supper (11:2–22). Apparently speaking in tongues had also gotten out of hand (14:23, 27–28), and prophets competed with each other for the floor (14:30). Another concern was the proper roles of women in worship (14:33b–38). (CC)

Now that Paul has clarified the role and relative value of tongues and prophecy (14:1–25), he begins to bring his discussion to a close by spelling out the implications for the rubrics of their worship services. All things, he insists, should be done in love, so that the whole body of Christ receives "edification" (14:26), the last of seven occurrences of οἰκοδομή, "edification," and οἰκοδομέω, "to edify," in chapter 14. (CC)

Again (as in 14:6, 20) he addresses the Corinthians affectionately as "brothers" (14:26). Then he describes some aspects of their worship. When they assemble as a church, many individuals make a contribution to the service. One person brings a hymn that has come into his hands or that he has composed himself (see Lk 1:46–55, 68–79 and 1 Tim 3:16 for possible examples of early Christian hymns; the "hymn" [ψαλμός, 1 Cor 14:26] might be a biblical psalm set to music).

Another has a gift for teaching and is prepared to expound a portion of the Scriptures. Another is a prophet and has just received a fresh revelation from the Lord.⁸ Another has something to say in a tongue, while another is able to interpret the foreign language. Each of these contributions has its rightful place in the church's worship, as long as each participant remembers to "let all things be done for *edification*" (14:26). Again Paul declares that the chief guideline must be what is most edifying, what is best suited for building up the whole congregation in the faith. (CC)

Paul now adds more specific directions for the tongues-speakers and prophets (14:27–33a). He is happy to include tongues-speaking in worship. As in Acts 2, these tongues are proclamations of God's magnificent deeds in foreign languages. But in keeping with his wish that everything be done for edification he adds three qualifications. (1) He commands that no more than two tongues-speakers, or three at the most, should speak to the congregation at one gathering. Apparently a great number of people had been speaking in tongues at the Corinthian worship services and carrying on at some length. Paul urges restraint. (2) He urges those who do speak on a given occasion to do so in an orderly fashion, each awaiting his turn, rather than speaking on top of one another and trying to drown the others out. (3) They should only speak when an interpreter or translator is available (cf. 1 Cor 14:5, 13). Otherwise the tongues-speaker should remain silent, communicating with his own spirit and with God (cf. 14:2). (CC)

The command that the *tongues-speaker* who is unable to supply an interpretation must "be silent in church" (14:28) is the first in a series of three closely-linked injunctions. The other two are (1) that the *prophet*, too, must be silent if another receives a revelation (14:30) and (2) the *women* must be silent in the churches (14:34). (CC)

Like the tongues-speakers, it seems the prophets were also vying with one another for the floor (14:29–30). Accordingly, Paul also restricts them to no more than two or three at a worship service. The other prophets should listen attentively and evaluate the message, lest anyone introduce a false prophecy (cf. 1 Jn 4:1–3). (CC)

The criterion for evaluating messages is whether they are in harmony with the Scriptures and the apostolic Gospel. The Bereans, many of whom became Christians, evaluated Paul's preaching on the basis of the OT Scriptures and found it to be true (Acts 17:10–12). The test of whether prophecy is true involves whether it comes to pass and whether it is in accord with the words of the great Prophet (Christ) promised in the OT (Deut 18:15–20). If anyone utters false prophecy or a false "gospel," he is to be anathema (Gal 1:8–9). True prophecy and the correct interpretation of prophecy come about only through the activity of the Holy Spirit (1 Pet 1:10–12). Revelation is the final prophetic book (προφητεία, Rev 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19), and it ends with a dire warning against anyone who adds or subtracts from its prophetic message (Rev 22:18–19). By extension, since Revelation is the last book of the canon, that warning applies to anyone who would distort or detract from any doctrine in all the sacred Scriptures. (CC)

Again, the prophets should refrain from speaking on top of one another (1 Cor 14:30). If a prophetic revelation suddenly comes to someone who is seated, the prophet holding the floor should be silent and make way for this fresh word from the Lord. (CC)

Paul assures the Corinthians that by restricting them to two or three prophetic messages at any one gathering (14:29) he is not imposing a harsh restraint. In the course of time, everyone with a prophetic gift will have his turn to prophesy (14:31). The goal, after all, is not to stroke the prophet's ego but to edify the church. All need to learn and be encouraged (cf. 14:3). The prophets, then, should patiently wait their turn, for everyone will get his opportunity (14:31). (CC)

Moreover, if one truly is a prophet, then he should be able to keep his spirit, his inner self, under control (14:32). After all, self-control is one fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23). The Christian faith is not a pagan cult which calls forth uncontrolled emotional outbursts. As Fee notes: “Paul lifts Christian ‘inspired speech’ out of the category of ‘ecstasy’ as such and offers it as a radically different thing from the mania of the pagan cults. There is no seizure here, no loss of control; the speaker is neither frenzied nor a babbling.” Pagan Greek and Hellenistic prophecy was characterized by madness and a loss of self-control, but prophecy of that sort is not a Christian spiritual gift. (CC)

The proper exercise of self-control on the part of tongues-speakers and prophets is in keeping with God’s character (1 Cor 14:33a). For, as Paul explains, God is not a God who delights in disorder but is “the God of peace.” If the Corinthians wish to be in harmony with their God, they will do all they can to promote peace and good order in the church.¹⁸ Brunner comments:

We would completely misjudge the work of the Spirit if we assumed that the Spirit has anything in common with arbitrariness, disorder, and confusion. Rather, the end-time gift of the Spirit again asserts the original well-being of the creature and its adaptation to a comprehensive, God-ordained order. Spirit and peace belong together (1 Cor. 14:32 f.). Therefore also Spirit and order go hand in hand (1 Cor. 14:40). Both order and peace are embraced by love and taken into its service. And love is intent on building an articulate structure of the congregation and on promoting its services (1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1). (CC)

14:26–27 *everyone ... anyone ... someone.* The stress here is again on the diversity and yet complementary nature of spiritual gifts. It is also apparent that every member could participate, not just certain leaders or officers. (CSB)

14:26 *brothers?* Paul addresses congregational leaders. (TLSB)

a hymn, a word listen, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Elements that made up the worship service at Corinth. Some of these elements (the hymn and the word of instruction) came from OT and synagogue worship (cf. Mt 26:30; Lk 4:16–22). All parts of Christian worship should be edifying (“strengthening”) to the church. (CSB)

Leaders in the congregation competed to represent their interests in the gathering of all worshippers. The list represents common elements of worship at Corinth. (TLSB)

Let all things be done for building up. Paul again emphasizes his main point. (TLSB)

14:27–28 Three restrictions are placed on speaking in a tongue “in the church” (v. 28): 1. Only two or three should do so in a meeting. 2. They should do so one at a time. 3. There must be interpretation. (CSB)

Because the divided Corinthians could not agree on how to proceed, Paul provided commonsense guidelines for worship practices. Note well: he excluded use of uninterpreted tongues in church. (TLSB)

14:28 *should keep quiet.* The implication seems to be that it was up to the one speaking in a tongue in the Corinthian church to make certain that there was in the audience someone to interpret his message. (CSB)

14:29 *Two or three prophets should speak.* Apparently in turn (v. 31), as with the tongues-speakers (v. 27). (CSB)

weigh what is said. Judge. The prophets themselves were to decide whether the messages of their fellow prophets were valid. (CSB)

Gk *diakrino*, “to distinguish,” “to judge.” God charges congregational leaders with judging whether doctrine and practice are based on His Word. “Other writings by ancient or modern teachers—no matter whose name they bear—must not be regarded as equal to the Holy Scriptures. All of them are subject to the Scriptures” (FC Ep Sum 2). (TLSB)

14:30 *a revelation.* Not an inspired revelation intended to become a part of written Scripture. In OT times, Scriptural revelation came through prophets, and in NT times through apostles or close associates of apostles. Prophecy referred to in chs. 12–14 could come through any member of the church (vv. 26, 29–31). It could be a prediction (Agabus, Ac 11:28; 21:10–11), a divine directive (Ac 13:1–2) or a message designed to strengthen, encourage or comfort (v. 3). (CSB)

Paul emphasizes common courtesy. “Paul concludes that ... interpreters be heard in order in the church” (AC XXVIII 54). (TLSB)

14:31 *all prophesy.* Paul has leaders in mind, not that every person in the congregation would have a chance to speak. (TLSB)

14:32 *prophets are subject to prophets.* Prophecy (and tongues as well) was not an uncontrollable emotional ecstasy. Paul insists that these gifts should be controlled by the recipients themselves (vv. 15, 26–32). (CSB)

14:33 *God ... of peace.* God would not inspire the divisions and confusion that plagued the congregation. (TLSB)

confusion. Paul was concerned that disorderly and unregulated worship at Corinth would bring discredit on the name of the God who had called them in Christ to peace and unity. (CSB)

in all the congregations of the saints. A unique expression in the NT that stresses the universality and commonality of the whole visible church of God on earth. All congregations are to obey the directives that follow. (CSB)

Luther and other translators did not place a period after “peace” but after “saints.” Paul reminded the Corinthians of a universal principle from which they had deviated. (TLSB)

14:33-34 “Let the Women Stay Silent in the Churches” (14:33b–34a) “God is not [a God] of disorder but of peace” (14:33a). The Spirit of God has nothing in common with disorder and confusion. Rather, the presence and gifts of the Spirit are manifested whenever the congregation shows a loving concern for mutual edification through orderly and peace-promoting worship (cf. chapter 13 and 14:26c). In the interests of a God-pleasing peace, then, Paul finally adds a third command for silence: “Let the women stay silent in the churches” (14:34). (CC)

For a fuller discussion of the relationship between chapters 11 and 14, see the section “The Relationship between 11:2–16 and 14:33b–38” in the excursus “The Ordination of Women.” (CC)

In 14:33b–37 Paul uses a closely knit argument with a structure similar to the structure in 9:3–14, where he defends his freedom as an apostle. First, he employs an ecumenical argument, appealing to the practice of the universal church: “as in all the churches of the saints” (14:33b; cf. similar appeals in 4:17; 7:17; 11:16). He is reminding the Corinthians that they are not on some spiritual plane superior to that of other churches, but simply an outcropping of the one holy catholic and apostolic church. Second, he appeals to “the Law” (14:34). Third, he appeals to their sense of shame (14:35b). Finally, he cites a specific command of the Lord Jesus (14:37). (CC)

The apostle’s command is simple and clear: let the women be silent in the congregational gatherings (14:34)! Paul’s injunction for women covers any kind of authoritative teaching of God’s Word—the leading role in speaking or teaching when the church assembles for worship.²⁷ Just as clear is the parallel in 1 Tim 2:12: “I do not permit a woman to teach.” Here in 1 Corinthians 14 Paul may be focusing primarily on women’s participation through tongues-speaking and prophecy. This is confirmed by his use of *λαλέω*, “to speak,” throughout chapter 14. After frequent references to *speaking* (*λαλέω*) in tongues and three references to *speaking* prophetically (*λαλέω* again, 14:3, 6b, 29), practices which must be regulated in an appropriate way (14:27–32), he now adds this further regulation, commanding the women not to “*speak*” (*λαλέω*, 14:34) in church. See the section “The Relationship between 11:2–16 and 14:33b–38” in the excursus “The Ordination of Women” for an analysis of the various ways Paul’s prohibition here may be reconciled with chapter 11, and for a discussion of the modern debate on women’s ordination, which also entails the roles of preaching and pastoral teaching. This commentary’s view is that Paul’s prohibition does forbid the ordination of women and their service as pastors. (CC)

14:34–35† Some believe that in light of 11:3 there is a God-ordained order that is to be the basis for administration and authority. Women are to be in submission to their husbands both at home (see Eph 5:22) and in the church (see v. 34; 1Ti 2:11–12) regardless of their particular culture. According to this view, a timeless order was established at creation. This interpretation has been the traditional view of Lutheran theologians. (CSB)

A Divine Command (14:34b–35) Paul hastens to add that this prohibition is not some arbitrary imposition of his own authority. Rather, it is grounded in the divine will. The passive form of the verb *ἐπιτρέπω*, “to permit,” in the phrase “it is not permitted” (*οὐ ... ἐπιτρέπεται*, 14:34) indicates that God is behind the command, as does the final clause in the sentence, “as the Law also says” (*καθὼς καὶ ὁ νόμος λέγει*, 14:34). Behind the apostle’s word (cf. 1 Tim 2:12: “I do not permit a woman to teach”) stands the word of God. (CC)

Rather than speaking, the women “should be subordinate” (1 Cor 14:34; cf. the headship pattern enunciated in 11:3). What Paul asks of the women here is in keeping with his counsel to Christians in other situations in life. By reverent submission the Christian obeys God and gives a positive witness to Christ and the Christian faith (Rom 13:1–7; 1 Pet 5:5–7). Of special importance in this context is the willing subordination of a Christian wife to her husband which proceeds from “a gentle and quiet spirit” (1 Pet 3:4). The Christian family under the husband’s headship forms the pattern for the Christian congregation (cf. the close connections Paul draws between family and church in Eph 5:22–33). Both at home and at church (“in everything,” Eph 5:24) the woman will submit in a self-giving manner to the man’s authority. Her submission to the man of the house (her husband or father or other men in authority) does not demean her any more than it demeans husbands to submit to Christ or Christ himself to submit to the Father (1 Cor 11:3; cf. 15:27–28). (CC)

Paul's words to the women are backed by God's "Law" in the OT (14:34). Paul appeals to the Torah in a general way, as he often does (e.g., Rom 2:12–27; 3:19–31), but the parallel in 1 Tim 2:11–12 reveals that he especially has in mind the Genesis account of the creation of Adam and Eve and their fall into sin (Genesis 2–3). According to his sketch in 1 Timothy of the creation account, the woman has a subordinate role both before and after the fall. "Adam was formed first, then Eve" as his helper (1 Tim 2:13; cf. Gen 2:18). Thus the man has precedence as the first person created. Moreover, "Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and fell into transgression" (1 Tim 2:14). Her transgression, according to Genesis, led to the conflict in which her desire (to rule) is over her husband, but he will rule over her (Gen 3:16). Thus by the order of creation she was subordinated to the man before the fall, and after the fall her subordination was confirmed. (CC)

Thus the man is to exercise leadership in theological speaking, while the woman is to learn "in quietness" (ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ, 1 Tim 2:11–12). In this manner the church will abide by the order of creation, the divine order instituted from the beginning for human welfare and confirmed by the Gospel. The order of redemption does not abrogate the original divinely willed order (cf. Mk 10:2–9). (CC)

Unlike those rabbis who discouraged the teaching of the Torah to women, Jesus and the apostles were happy to instruct women in the Word of God (see Lk 10:38–42; Jn 4:7–30; Acts 16:14–15). But in church (ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ) they were to listen and learn quietly, and if they had questions, they were to bring them to their men at home (ἐν οἴκῳ, 1 Cor 14:35). (CC)

Paul does not indicate the precise nature of the women's questions (14:35). However, judging from the use of ἐπερωτάω ("to ask") in a significant number of other texts, it is not unlikely that the questions took the form of interrogation and disputation with the speaker on the grounds that the women wanted to learn. Every experienced pastor and public speaker knows how easy it is for a person in the audience to use a question as an opportunity to instruct, even to undermine the speaker's message. (CC)

Just as it was "shameful" for a woman to appear at public worship without a head-covering (αἰσχρὸν, 11:6), so it is "shameful" for her to assume a teaching role on those occasions (αἰσχρὸν, 14:35). The formula "it is shameful" covers what is offensive to God as well as what causes social offense (cf. αἰσχρὸν, "shameful," also in Eph 5:12). (CC)

women should keep silent. Women likely participated as singers during worship, as they had in the OT (Ex 15:20–21; see p 993). They also prophesied privately (11:4–5; Ac 21:9). But they did not serve as public ministers of the Word. Based on the distinction between male and female in God's created order, Paul distinguished between male and female roles. (TLSB)

the Law also says. John Chrysostom: "Where does the law say this? 'Your desire shall be to your husband, and he shall rule over you' " (NPNF 1 12:222; cf Gn 3:16). (TLSB)

Others maintain that Paul's concern is that the church be strengthened (v. 26) by believers showing respect for others (see vv. 30–31) and for God (see v. 33) as they exercise their spiritual gifts. Such respect must necessarily take account of accepted social practices. If within a particular social order, it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in church—and it was in this case (v. 35)—then she shows disrespect by doing so and should remain silent. There were occasions, though—even in this culture—for women to speak in church. For example, in 11:5 Paul assumes that women pray and prophesy in public worship. Thus his purpose, according to this view, was

not to define the role of women but to establish a fitting (vv. 34–35) and orderly (vv. 27–31) way of worship (v. 40). (CSB)

Still others say that in this context Paul is discussing primarily the disruption of worship by women who become involved in noisy discussions surrounding tongues-speaking and prophecy. Instead of publicly clamoring for explanations, the wives were to discuss matters with their husbands at home (cf. v. 35). Paul does not altogether forbid women to speak in church (see 11:5). What he is forbidding is the disorderly speaking indicated in these verses. (CSB)

14:36 *word of God.* With heavy irony in 1 Cor 14:36, Paul challenges the Corinthians’ sense of their own importance. Puffed up (φουσιόω, 4:6, 18–19; 5:2; 8:1) by their spiritual insights and accomplishments, they were behaving as if they were “the Α and Ω [alpha and omega] of the Gospel,” the fount of God’s revelation to the world. Were they forgetting that the Word of the Lord had not gone out from Corinth but from Jerusalem (Is 2:3; Micah 4:2; cf. Jn 4:22; Rom 11:18)? Or, if their pride had not carried them away to the extent that they thought they were the source of the Gospel, were they acting as if they were the only church to have received it? (CC)

Paul’s rhetorical questions apply equally to modern churches that go their own way in the matter of women’s ordination, as if their unique cultural situation somehow justified it or they now possessed superior wisdom to the church of previous generations. Brunner’s citation of 1 Cor 14:36 with regard to Christian traditions in worship applies with even greater force to the church’s universal and ecumenical tradition of not ordaining women, which is the chief topic at this point in the epistle:

In this area ... decisions have been made which only the Enthusiasts can disregard and ignore, who have no fathers and brothers, but are given to the delusion that the people of God on earth had their inception with them. “What! Did the Word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached?” (1 Cor. 14:36 RSV). This critical question of the apostle, which the Enthusiasts in Corinth had to hear, obligates the church of all times to approach with due respect and reverence the traditions of Christendom which do not conflict with Christ’s institution and the Word of God. (CC)

Again, it must be affirmed that the tradition to which Paul refers here in 14:33b–38 is part of the unchanging and authoritative Word of God. (CC)

14:37 *thinks that he is a prophet.* Using sarcasm, Paul chastens any congregational leaders who remain contentious. (TLSB)

Paul asks these rhetorical questions sarcastically, suggesting that the Corinthians were following their own practice in these matters rather than conforming to God’s word. (CSB)

command of the Lord. Paul’s commands are the Lord’s commands and are to be followed. In a situation where so much stress was being placed on gifts, Paul insists that any genuinely gifted person will recognize the apostle’s God-given authority. (CSB)

An outstanding example of pastoral practice: after Paul carefully explains things from Scripture and provides commonsense guidelines, he appeals to his apostolic authority in these matters. He does not begin with his authority, lest that become the issue. He focuses on Scripture and application first. (TLSB)

“The Lord’s Command” (14:37)

Finally, Paul clinches his argument with an appeal to a “*command*” (14:37) of the Lord Jesus (cf. Paul’s earlier appeal in 9:14 to Jesus issuing a specific command: ὁ κύριος διέταξεν). Anyone

claiming prophetic or spiritual discernment should recognize that to defy Paul at this point is to defy the Lord himself (14:37). Paul's injunction that women should be silent in church is no light matter. It may not be dismissed as a temporary concession to a first-century congregation influenced by Jewish patriarchy. Nor is the authority of the command at all dependent on the prevailing culture; as the excursus "The Ordination of Women" will show, this command of the Lord is *countercultural*, even in its first-century setting, *not* a response to or a result of culture. So far in this epistle Paul has used the word "command" (ἐντολή) only in 7:19, where he places great emphasis on the importance of keeping the divine directives: "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but [what counts is] keeping the *commandments* [ἐντολῶν] of God." Now, in his only other use of ἐντολή, "command," in the epistle, he insists that what he is writing about women's subordination at public worship is a divine command to be accepted in the obedience of faith. (CC)

Most likely Paul is reminding the Corinthians of a command which came directly from the Lord Jesus himself and impressed itself on the memory of the disciples (although it was never recorded in the gospels). Similar examples of unwritten sayings of the Lord are found in Acts 20:35 and 1 Thess 4:15 (cf. Jn 20:30; 21:25). Alternatively, the phrase "the Lord's command" (1 Cor 14:37) could be synonymous with "the Law" (14:34) and "the Word of God" (14:36), thus underlining Paul's earlier appeal to the opening chapters of Genesis. In that case, the injunction rests on the written text of Genesis, which expresses the words, will, and action of the Lord. (CC)

A Permanent "Command"

Some divine commandments may be temporary, designed for a particular time and circumstance. The following examples are found in the NT: (1) Jesus called the divorce legislation in Deuteronomy a temporary concession to the Israelites' hard-heartedness, which was superseded by his own command not to rend asunder what God has joined (Mk 10:2–9; see also 1 Corinthians 7). (2) Upon Jesus' descent from the mount of transfiguration, he issued a temporary command: "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, *until* the Son of Man has been raised from the dead" (Mt 17:9 NIV). (3) Jesus received commands from his Father which related to his ministry in a specific time and place (Jn 10:18; 12:49). (4) The epistle to the Hebrews regards the OT ceremonial law as a temporary arrangement, calling its ἐντολαί, "commands," regarding the levitical priesthood "fleshly" (Heb 7:16) and "weak and useless" (Heb 7:18), since they have been superseded by Christ's eternal priesthood after the order of Melchizedek (Heb 7:4–19). In this category belong other commandments of the Torah (e.g., circumcision, Eph 2:11–15) which applied only to the OT people of God. (5) Although it is not called an ἐντολή, the decision taken by the council in Jerusalem may—at least in part—be viewed as a divinely inspired but temporary decree: "it seemed [good] to the Holy Spirit and to us ..." (Acts 15:28). (CC)

Wherever a divine command has only temporary significance there are contextual indicators, for example, "don't tell anyone ... *until* ..." (Mt 17:9). However, without such a contextual indication, divine commandments issued or reissued in the NT possess permanent significance. As we have seen, Jesus confirms—indeed, he sharpens—the Decalogue and its individual commands (ἐντολαί), avowing that until heaven and earth pass away not a jot or tittle of the Law will pass away (Mt 5:17–19). Nor are any limits set to his "new commandment" (ἐντολή καινή) that his disciples should love one another (Jn 13:34; cf. Jn 15:12; 1 Jn 2:7–11). Similarly, the Johannine ἐντολαί to "believe in the name of [God's] Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 3:23) and to walk "in truth" (2 Jn 4) are open-ended and so apply to all Christians of all times and places. (CC)

According to John's gospel, "keeping the ἐντολαί of Jesus is a mark of love for Him." The Lord himself says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (Jn 14:15; cf. Jn 14:21; 15:10, 14). Keeping Jesus' commandments is equivalent to keeping his Word (Jn 14:23), which leads to

blessed fellowship with the Father and the Son, and fullness of joy (Jn 15:9–11). The command to keep Jesus' Word is not subject to any time limit. (CC)

As explained in the commentary on 1 Cor 7:19, the “commandments” referred to there (“circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God”) are probably to be understood in the light of Gal 5:6 as God’s requirement of a faith that is active in love. Paul does not use the word ἐντολή lightly in 1 Corinthians: the only two occurrences are in 7:19 and 14:37. (CC)

The context of 14:37 contains no indications that the command for women to be silent was a temporary restriction. (Some interpreters who assert that it may be temporary suggest that it could be a concession to Jewish Christians who had only recently become accustomed to the higher regard in which women were held in Christianity, and who were by no means ready for the further step of seeing women in preaching and teaching roles.) If Paul were asking Gentile Christians merely to make a temporary concession out of consideration for the weaker brother, one would think he would make this plain in his usual fashion. All the evidence points to this “Lord’s command” (κυρίου ... ἐντολή) in 14:37, like the “commandments of God” (ἐντολαί θεοῦ) in 7:19, *being a specific divine command of the Lord possessing permanent validity.* (CC)

Sometimes it is argued—or implied—that those Christians who would uphold this command (ἐντολή) are falling prey to a legalism which fails to distinguish between Law and Gospel. This argument suggests that because “we are not under Law but under grace” (Rom 6:15), anything that smacks of being a command no longer has a place in the Christian life. This argument amounts to Gospel reductionism and antinomianism, which is condemned in the Formula of Concord (SD V 15–17). It also operates with a definition of a “command” (ἐντολή) that is too narrow. As outlined above, the ἐντολαί θεοῦ/κυρίου (*mandata dei/domini*) cover the whole counsel and will of God as expressed both in Law and Gospel and, above all, the command for faith and love (1 Jn 3:23). They involve teaching Christians “to observe all things that *I have commanded* you” (τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν, Mt 28:20; the verb ἐντέλλομαι in Mt 28:20 is cognate with the noun ἐντολή in 1 Cor 14:37). In other words, the church is bound to treasure and uphold the entire Word of God, both Law and Gospel. And, as the Lord of the church, which he has purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28), does he not have the authority to lay down guidelines for the church’s welfare? Dare we criticize Christ himself as being legalistic when he says, “Do this in memory of me” (Lk 22:19), or “Go therefore and make disciples, baptizing ... teaching” (Mt 28:19–20)? (CC)

14:38 *he is not recognized.* Paul and the churches will ignore such a disobedient person, and so he will be regarded as an unbeliever. (CSB)

Most manuscripts state less forcefully, “let him be ignorant.” However, the more forceful wording, which basically removed the obstinate leaders from office, is well attested and also fits the context. (TLSB)

Paul solemnly warns anyone who refuses to recognize this as the Lord’s command that “he is not recognized” by God (1 Cor 14:38). Obviously, such a person is not concerned for the edification, peace, and good order of God’s people (cf. 14:26, 33a, 40). Rather, he is “puffed up” by his pretended knowledge (φουσιώω, 4:6, 18–19; 5:2; 8:1). Although he claims to be “a prophet” and “spiritual” (14:37), that claim is actually null and void in God’s sight; his ministry—in contrast to the faithful ministry of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (16:17–18)—“is not recognized” (14:38). Consequently, his “work” will not survive the fire of judgment, though “he himself” will be saved if he repents (3:13–15). (CC)

On the other hand, if he persists in flouting the divine will, he may (in light of the broader context) lose God's recognition in a far more serious sense: he may be in danger of falling under the divine anathema, "If anyone does not love the Lord [τὸν κύριον], let him be cursed/anathema" (16:22). Compare also Jesus' condemnation of the false prophets in Mt 7:23: "I never knew you." Whether a person loves the Lord will become manifest, above all, from his attitude to the Lord's commandment (κυρίου ... ἐντολή, 1 Cor 14:37):

Jesus replied to him: "If anyone loves me, *he will keep my Word*, and my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him. The person who does not love me *does not keep my words*; and the word that you hear is *not mine but the Father's, who sent me.*" (Jn 14:23–24) (CC)

14:39-40 The conclusion of the matter. For issues of worship and liturgy, Luther often cited v 40. Luther: "Because this life in the body cannot be completely without ceremonies and rituals, since there must be some sort of discipline, the Gospel permits ordinances to be established in the church ... especially for the sake of children and uneducated people, so that they can be taught more easily" (AE 26:448). (TLSB)

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14:39 *do not forbid speaking in tongues.*† Paul's solution to the tongues problem in the Corinthian church was not to forbid tongues, but to correct the improper use of the gift and to discourage the congregation from overemphasizing it. (CSB)

14:40 *all things should be done decently and in order.* As spelled out in vv. 26–35. (CSB)

Excursus – The Ordination of Women

Wherever the Gospel has free course, it has a liberating effect on women (as indeed the Gospel liberates all people, Jn 8:31–36). In the South Pacific nation of Papua New Guinea, for example, where women were traditionally treated as chattels, the advent of Christianity has often brought them a new dignity and respect. Indeed there are countless societies where many women, once

regarded merely as garden beds for raising children³—to be discarded if they proved unfruitful—have found their Christian husbands treating them with courtesy and affection. (CC)

This Christian regard for women is, of course, inspired by “the meekness and gentleness of Christ” (2 Cor 10:1). Jesus himself set the pattern for his church by his own respect for women, beginning with his childhood submission to his mother (Lk 2:51). To women he extended his healing hand; with women he was happy to converse, to the amazement of his disciples (Jn 4:27); to women and men alike he taught the Word of God. Luke records how on one occasion the Lord took time to teach a class consisting of one woman, Mary, who received his praise because she “chose the best part, which will not be taken away from her” (Lk 10:38–42). Paul commands husbands to love their wives “as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph 5:25). Peter counsels husbands to “live considerately ... with [their] wives, bestowing honor [on the women] as joint heirs of the grace of life” (1 Pet 3:7). Thus biblical Christianity elevates women, honors them as equal members of the Christian community, and encourages them to study the Scriptures. The same is true of the Lutheran church in particular. The Lutheran Confessions sharply criticize misogyny: “Daniel says that it is characteristic of Antichrist’s kingdom to despise women.” (CC)

Whereas the OT honors women as equal members of the worshiping community (Ex 19:6–8; Deut 29:10–12), rabbinic Judaism during the days of Jesus and Paul was developing in a direction which relegated women to an inferior status. Women could worship only in the forecourt of the Herodian temple (the court of the women) or in the gallery or outer chamber of the synagogue. The Tosefta includes this second-century A.D. rabbinic teaching:

R. Judah says, “A man must recite three benedictions every day: (1) ‘Praised [be Thou, O Lord, our God, King of the universe,] who did not make me a gentile’; (2) ‘Praised [be Thou, O Lord ...] who did not make me a boor’; (3) ‘Praised [be Thou, O Lord ...] who did not make me a woman.’ ...

“[Praised be Thou, O Lord ... who did not make me] a woman—for women are not obligated [to perform all] the commandments.” (CC)

Most rabbis did not see themselves under obligation to teach women the Torah; indeed, some discouraged the practice. (CC)

At the opposite extreme from rabbinic Judaism, the Greco-Roman culture of Paul’s day frequently allowed women a leading role in religious rites. Whereas the Jewish Torah restricted the priesthood to men, there were no explicit prohibitions of priestesses in other religions. Thus women priests may be found at any time and in any place in the Hellenistic world. On the basis of inscriptional evidence, Gill states categorically: “Woman priests were present in [imperial] Corinth.”⁸ Gooch adduces evidence from the large sanctuary of Demeter and Kore in Roman Corinth, where women are known to have played a prominent role in the fertility rites. Each October/November the festival known as Thesmophoria was held in honor of Demeter and Kore. Gooch describes the rites:

On the first night of the festival women gathered to drink and participate in rites of fowl, abusive language and sexual joking (*aischrologia* [αἰσχρολογία, the activity Paul condemns in Col 3:8; cf. αἰσχρόν, “shameful,” in 1 Cor 11:6; 14:35]). ... There is evidence for feasts held on the last day of the festival, *presided over by women elected to office in the cultus*. Finally, associated with the festival are sacrificial cakes made into the shape of phalli. ... Sexual organs made from pastry were set out on the tables. (CC)

Whether all cults in which women figured as priestesses were as gross as the Demeter cult is not the issue here. The point is simply that a number of ancient cults, including those represented in Corinth, featured female priests. (CC)

In the light of the contrasts with its religious environment, the apostolic teaching on the role of women in worship is *countercultural*. Whereas the male chauvinism characteristic of some cultures (in Paul's day and ours) regards women as mere chattels, and rabbinic Judaism tended to treat them as second-class members of the community, the apostles counsel husbands to cherish and honor their wives.¹² On the other hand, in contrast to the permissiveness of pagan religions, which often allowed women to serve as priestesses and instructors in the cult, the biblical revelation does not permit them to serve as priests (Ex 28:1) or pastors (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6). Thus Paul's command that the women be silent in the churches (1 Cor 14:34) must be understood, in part, as countercultural and antisyncretistic. It is a command that distinguishes and separates the Christian church from other religions. Inspired by the Spirit of God, its roots are deep in the biblical revelation, which always runs counter to the spirit and the wisdom of this world (2:12). (CC)

The Scriptures Are the Basis for Deciding the Issue

There is a broad consensus among those who desire to remain faithful to historic Christianity that the issue of whether or not to ordain women must be decided on the basis of the biblical evidence. Only the most radical postmodernist would disagree with Reumann: "Any decision about women functioning in the ordained Ministry of the church must rest ... on careful examination of the scriptural data." (CC)

There is also consensus that the results of this biblical study will depend on the principles of interpretation (the hermeneutics) employed. Reumann continues: "The whole question is basically one of hermeneutics: how do you interpret and apply the Scripture?" Beyond this point of consensus, however, the ways divide. While there is general agreement that different hermeneutical approaches are at the root of the differing conclusions, some maintain that these variations in approach and result should not trouble the church; after all, the divergence is *merely* a matter of hermeneutics and should not be considered church divisive. (CC)

Others object that much more is at stake in one's choice of a hermeneutical approach. Not every way of interpreting the Bible is equally true to the Bible's self-understanding and therefore equally faithful to God and helpful in building up the church. No matter what assurances may be given regarding a common commitment to the Bible, it is by no means insignificant that higher-critical methodologies foster a critical stance toward the authority, truthfulness, and clarity of parts of the Bible. Again the church faces this old question: Is the Bible the Word of God, as a whole and in all its parts (1 Thess 2:13), or does it merely contain the Word of God? And—a corollary to that primary question—is the Bible clear, harmonious, and self-consistent, or does it contain (as critical scholars suggest) divergent theological strands which make it "possible to draw different, even diametrically opposed, conclusions on the subject [of women's ordination] from different parts of Scripture"? Thus the issue of women's ordination is no isolated phenomenon.¹⁶ Rather, the church's stance on the issue will be symptomatic of its attitude to more fundamental questions of hermeneutics and the doctrine of Scripture. (CC)

The question, then, is whether to adopt (1) an understanding of the entire Bible as the Word of God, together with a hermeneutic which allows Scripture (rather than culture) to interpret Scripture ("the hermeneutics of appreciation"), or (2) whether to follow a critical approach to the Scriptures, which to a greater or lesser extent questions the authority, clarity, and relevance of

foundational texts (a hermeneutic which in its crasser forms has been called “the hermeneutics of suspicion”). (CC)

Despite assurances that the differences among Christians on the issue are merely a matter of hermeneutics, the advocates of women’s ordination themselves do not accept all hermeneutical approaches as equally salutary. Reumann, for example, describes two different ways of interpreting Scripture. One approach, he writes, “argues by proof texts,” the other supposedly is Gospel-centered. Thus we face this question: “Does a central gospel or do individual texts ... prevail in reaching a decision?” Already the dice are loaded: one approach professes to be Gospel-centered, and therefore good; the other, by implication, is not Gospel-centered, and therefore is legalistic and bad. This latter approach, it is claimed, sets too much store by “proof texts” and “individual texts.” (CC)

Those expressions have been used, without proper definition, to disparage any appeal to the key foundational texts which have served as the church’s basis in determining its teaching and practice. If employing “proof texts” means that a person appeals to biblical texts without regard to their context, then all would agree that this is bad. But what Reumann (among others) attacks specifically is making too much of texts that speak directly to the issue: “To begin with the Old Testament, with 1 Corinthians 14, or 1 Timothy 2, can lead only to the exclusion of women from ordained Ministry.” But that is not the method Reumann advocates. (CC)

Again one must ask, What is wrong with appealing to key foundational texts? Jesus himself, immersed in the Scriptures as he was, constantly appealed to individual texts from the OT as the foundation for his teaching and practice (see the thrice-repeated “it is written” in Mt 4:1–13, for example). A reading of the Small Catechism will show that Luther also quotes the Bible over and over as the foundation of the teaching he expounds. He uses texts that speak to the specific issue. In elucidating the doctrine of Baptism, for example, he does not appeal in general terms to “the Gospel.” Rather, he adduces individual texts (the *sedes doctrinae*) that deal specifically with Baptism (Mt 28:19; Titus 3:5–8; Rom 6:4). (CC)

Applying the Scriptures Today: Bridging the “Gap” between the Bible and the Modern World

Advocates of women’s ordination see enormous significance in the cultural, linguistic, and historical gaps that divide the first century from the twenty-first. They assert that what the biblical text meant then may be different from what it means today. Biblical texts are said to be “time conditioned” and “culture bound.” In view of this gulf between the biblical and the modern “horizons,” it should not be surprising (it is alleged) that whereas in Paul’s day to have ordained women would have been harmful to the church’s mission, in our day it would be helpful to her mission. (CC)

We must, indeed, deal discriminatingly with the Scriptures. Not all is on the same level, not all is as equally and directly applicable to the church today. For example, much of the OT law has been fulfilled and thus superseded: the ceremonial law has been fulfilled in Christ, our great high priest; the civil law applied specifically to the nation of Israel, and no longer applies to us. The Ten Commandments, on the other hand, still do apply; Jesus and the apostles constantly confirmed them (e.g., Lk 18:18–20; Rom 13:8–10). And the NT is the authoritative interpreter of the OT. Consequently we need to be careful before concluding that any NT teaching no longer applies. To be sure, we no longer wash one another’s feet (John 13). But that custom is not prescribed in the NT, anyway; Jesus simply refers to it as an “example” or “pattern” (Jn 13:15) of how we are to serve one another in Christian love. What is commanded, *mandated*, is that we love one another, however that love may be expressed in our modern culture. Similarly, in 1 Cor

11:2–16, Paul urges the women to conform in feminine modesty to the custom of their day by wearing a head-covering at public worship. *Customs* of dress may change, but the *principle* of male headship and female subordination (1 Cor 11:3) remains in effect. We have no authority to abrogate a command, a mandate of the Lord. To do so involves disobedience to the Lord of the church. (CC)

Certainly the first-century world differed from ours in a host of ways (the practices of foot-washing and head-coverings are but two examples). But the significance of these differences should not be exaggerated. Cultures vary from one another in their surface configurations—thus the fascination of studying other cultures and languages. But the longer one is immersed in another culture, whether ancient or contemporary, the more one realizes that under the surface all human beings have the same desires, weaknesses, aspirations, and so forth. It is a myth that modern men and women are thoroughly different from the people of biblical times. Deep down, all share a common humanity which is far more important than anything that appears on the surface. (CC)

And the same Word of God is addressed to all. From one point of view, indeed, there are two horizons; we need to dig into the biblical world and its history and languages if we are to grasp it accurately. But the more we enter that world sympathetically, the more we hear the same Word that was addressed to people of biblical times addressing us today. For, from the divine perspective, there is really only one horizon. The OT prophets were taken up into God’s council (his רִצּוֹן , Jer 23:22) and enabled to see past, present, and future from God’s vista. Similarly, the apostles and evangelists of the NT are given the Word of the One who sees and foresees all human history. As H. Wheeler Robinson observed, God’s people across the generations have a “corporate personality.” Thus Moses can speak to the Israelites some forty years after the exodus and revelation at Mt. Sinai: “The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. *It was not with our fathers* that the Lord made this covenant, *but with us*, with all of us who are alive here today” (Deut 5:2–3). What God said to our forefathers and mothers he still says to us “today” (Ps 95:7)—unless there are clear indications to the contrary in Scripture. The God in whom there is “no change or shadow of turning” (James 1:17), the Lord who is “the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb 13:8) has given the same clear Word to all generations of his church. (CC)

The Gospel

Some have argued that the only link between the first and twenty-first centuries that remains unchanged is the Gospel: “The gospel principle is a long-standing Lutheran principle governing both how we ‘do theology’ and how we interpret the Scriptures.” Indeed, if there is one thing on which both the advocates and opponents of women’s ordination are agreed, it is the importance of the Gospel as the *cantus firmus*, the great central theme of the Scriptures. In 1 Corinthians, Paul’s argument concerning the role of women in the church is embedded in his magnificent presentation of the Gospel. This Gospel is first articulated in his announcement of the epistle’s theme—the word of the cross (1:18)—then reiterated throughout the epistle in keeping with his desire to know only “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (2:2). Finally it is taken up again immediately after Paul’s discussion of the role of women as he reminds the Corinthians of their basic lessons in the Gospel: “I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins ...” (15:3). On the importance and permanence of this golden theme we are all agreed. (CC)

Disagreement begins to arise, however, when we consider the relationship of this fundamental article of the Christian faith to other articles. While we agree that every other article will—if correctly stated—be in harmony with the Gospel, this appreciation of the way the various articles of the faith form one perfect tapestry does not provide a warrant to drain individual articles of

their color. Thus our adherence to the Gospel principle—the centrality of the Gospel—and our appreciation of the new creation in Christ does not warrant reduction and homogenization of other doctrines (most importantly in this context, the ongoing significance of the original order of creation,²⁹ the fall into sin, the Law, and the doctrine of the ministry) so that these collapse and cease to have significance. (CC)

Paul defines and spells out the Gospel of justification in very specific ways and continually highlights it as his great central theme. But he addresses other topics as well and deserves an attentive hearing on each issue. These other topics are relevant for the faith and life of the church, and ultimately they are connected in an organic way to the Gospel, even if they may appear otherwise. Thus in this epistle we hear him speaking to a great variety of topics, and even making “rules, regulations, and conditions,” as when he commands the Corinthians to “remove the wicked person from among yourselves” (5:13) or solemnly warns them that wicked people will not inherit the kingdom (6:9). Likewise, this thoroughly Gospel-centered apostle does not see any inconsistency with the Gospel in laying down rules and regulations for the proper conduct of divine worship, using a string of imperatives to demand silence from the tongues-speaker who has no interpreter, from the prophet who finds that another has just received a revelation, and, finally, from the women (14:28–34). (CC)

Thus the advocates of women’s ordination must concede that Paul does from time to time use his apostolic authority to lay down “rules, regulations, and conditions.” This is not a naked use of authority for its own sake; it always expresses a fatherly concern (4:14–16) for the eternal welfare of the saints. At the same time, opponents of women’s ordination must concede, indeed, must wholeheartedly agree that the same Gospel which makes saints is the Gospel which makes ministers. The same “grace” (χάρις) of God, richly poured out on all “called saints” in Corinth (1:2–5) had bestowed on Paul and his fellow apostles and pastors the gracious gift and calling which was the basis of their ministry (4:1; 9:1–2). By grace alone a person became a saint; by that same grace some were called to the public ministry. Thus Paul praises God: “To me as the very least of all saints was given this grace, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8). And in the following chapter of Ephesians he prefaces his discussion of the ministry of apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers with these words: “To each one of us was given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ” (Eph 4:7). (CC)

Thus it is freely granted that there can be no proper discussion of the pastoral ministry which does not have its foundation in the doctrine of God’s grace, his grace in calling all Christians to be saints, and in calling some to be pastors. As for the saints, their call to be Christians was not through their own willing or running, but through God’s mercy alone (Rom 9:16). As for pastors, what the author of Hebrews says of the Jewish high priest applies: “No one takes the honor upon himself, but he is called by God” (Heb 5:4; cf. 1 Cor 15:10). (CC)

But just as not all are apostles, not all are prophets, so not all are pastors and teachers (1 Cor 12:29; Eph 4:11). And not only women are excluded from the pastoral office, but also most men. For most men have not been called to the office, nor have they been given sufficient aptitude in teaching. The ministry can be difficult enough, in these turbulent times, even for men who are “apt to teach” (1 Tim 3:2). This catechetical aptitude is the one qualification on Paul’s lists of qualifications for pastors (1 Tim 3:2–7; Titus 1:6–9) which is not required of every Christian man. Since God has called the church into existence through the Gospel, he has every right to select those whom he chooses to be pastors, and to establish such qualifications as he desires pastors to have. Just as in Israel the eleven other tribes had no right to cry foul because God selected only the Levites to serve at his sanctuary, and only the sons of Aaron to be his priests, so Christians have no right to criticize God for limiting the pastoral office to those who meet his

qualifications, including that of gender. It is not inconsistent for the God of the Gospel also to establish such an order in his church: “God is not [a God] of disorder” (1 Cor 14:33). (CC)

Creation and the New Creation

The relationship between the order of creation and the order of redemption is another key topic where hermeneutical assumptions will lead to certain conclusions relevant to the ordination of women. For example, the paragraphs by Habel and Wurst under the heading “Women and the New Creation” totally dissolve the tension between the overlapping old and new aeons and accord no ongoing significance to the order of creation.³³ Reumann asserts:

The early church, with its eschatological consciousness of the Spirit’s presence as a token of the New Age, did not opt just for retaining such [headship] structures, but at times—in spite of its historical circumstances, in a culture where the role of women in society was often severely limited—allowed women in ministry roles, as foretaste of the new creation “in Christ” or fulfillment of God’s original will for male and female in Genesis, Chapter 1. (CC)

But nowhere in his book does Reumann give serious consideration to Genesis 2–3. Furthermore, there is no hard evidence that women served as apostles, bishops, or pastors in the early church. (CC)

Responding to Reumann, Hamann argues persuasively:

We are not to see the new order in Christ as gradually transforming the old orders of creation, until the new order of things has completely dispossessed the old. A true understanding of the New Testament rather sees the old order of creation ... continuing till the end when Christ returns, while the new order of things in Christ (“the old has passed away, behold, the new has come,” 2 Cor. 5:17) runs parallel with the old—there is an overlapping of the two aeons—till that same return of Christ. But the new is there in faith, not sight. Nothing of the new is visible, demonstrable: not Christ, not the Spirit, not the *Una Sancta*, not the new birth in Baptism, not the body and blood of the Sacrament, not the forgiveness of sins—nothing. All these are realities, and faith is sure of them, because of the Word of God, but they are all hidden in this world, where what is visible is exactly what has been there from the beginning. There is a realism about this proper view of eschatology which stands in marked contrast to the wishful thinking and enthusiasm of all eschatologies which look for a change in the present world’s basic structure. (CC)

The order of creation is not merely a construct of theologians but has deep roots in the Scriptures. When Jesus and Paul provide guidance for the proper ordering of marriage and relations between the sexes, they go back to the order of creation set forth in the first three chapters of Genesis. Thus Jesus, in speaking against lax attitudes toward divorce, says, “In the beginning it was not so” (Mt 19:8), and quotes Gen 1:27 and Gen 2:24 in Mt 19:3–9 and Mk 10:2–12. And Paul, in arguing that the woman is not to function as head and teacher of the church family at worship, grounds his injunction “I do not permit a woman to teach ...” (1 Tim 2:12) in the order of creation and fall established in Genesis 2 and 3: “For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and fell into transgression” (1 Tim 2:13–14). In other words, Adam reneged on his spiritual responsibilities. He failed to exercise his headship by following his wife instead of correcting her after she had given a false lead. Finally, when Paul appeals to “the Law” as the basis for his ruling in 1 Cor 14:34 (“it is not permitted for [the women] to speak ... as the Law also says”), he almost certainly has in mind the same passages of Genesis 2–3 which he cites in his epistle to Timothy (1 Tim 2:13–14). (CC)

In 1 Corinthians, when discussing worship practices and the conduct of women Paul invokes the order of the original creation in 11:7–10. God’s activity in creation is in harmony with his activity in redemption (11:11–12). These two activities of God are not in conflict with each other or contradictory; the goodness of God the orderly Creator is manifested also in the *ordo salutis*, the order of redemption. (CC)

The fifth argument of the case “for the ordination of men only,” outlined in *The Ordination of Women: Initial Report of the Commission on Theology and Interchurch Relations* of the Lutheran Church of Australia, is entitled “the representation of Christ’s headship.” The argument aptly expresses the significance of the order of creation in the debate:

The ordination of women contradicts the reality of male headship in the church and family which was established by God in the creation of Adam and fulfilled by the incarnation of God’s Son as a male person (1 Cor 11:3, 8, 9; Eph 5:22–24; 1 Tim 2:13). It therefore involves disobedience to Christ, the head of the church, and disrespect for his gift of order in the church (1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim 2:11). (CC)

That apostles and pastors are representatives and ambassadors of Christ is the clear teaching of the NT (Lk 10:16; 2 Cor 5:20). The Apology of the Augsburg Confession states: Pastors “do not represent their own persons but the person of Christ, because of the church’s call, as Christ testifies (Luke 10:16), ‘He who hears you hears me.’ When they offer the Word of Christ or the sacraments, they do so in Christ’s place and stead” (Ap VII and VIII 28). However, that does not, in itself, necessarily imply that a pastor must be a man. The NT never develops an argument that because the first person of the triune God is the Father and the second person, the Son of God, was incarnate as the man Jesus, therefore only a man can serve *in persona patris* (“as a personal representative of the Father”) and *in persona Christi* (“as a personal representative of Christ”). Whereas the catholic wing of the Church of England and the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches ground their opposition to women’s ordination partly “on the belief that it is ‘ontologically’ impossible for a woman to be a priest since Christ was a man, and the priest represents Christ at the altar,” the Scriptures themselves go back to the order of creation (1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim 2:12–14; cf. 1 Cor 11:3). Christ’s incarnation as a man is ultimately rooted in this divinely willed order. A man (Adam) was head of the old humanity; so, in the divine economy, a man (the second Adam) is head of the new humanity (Rom 5:12–19). And because Christ chose to follow (and fulfill) the old order of creation rather than overturn it, he chose only men to serve as apostles and pastors and thus provide the leadership for his church. (CC)

The Relationship between 11:2–16 and 14:33b–38

One of the main questions which must be addressed is the relationship between 1 Cor 11:2–16 (especially 11:5), where Paul seems to accept that women may pray or prophesy in worship, and 14:33b–38 (especially 14:34), where he seems to forbid any speaking by women. Advocates of women’s ordination often assert one or more of the following: (1) The two passages simply contradict one another. (2) Since they conflict, the apparently more lenient passage (11:2–16) is to be preferred. (3) By means of a text-critical argument 14:34–35 is deleted as inauthentic. (4) The import of 14:34–35 is reduced to a mere ban on women asking disruptive questions. (CC)

The following may be said in response. First, the apparent discrepancy between 11:5 and 14:34 should not be exaggerated. After all, the “heading”—the thematic verse that sets the tone for 11:2–16 (especially 11:3–10)—is the introductory statement on headship (11:3). And unless the meaning of κεφαλή (“head [of]”) in 11:3 is reduced to “source [of],” this headship/subordination theme in 11:2–16 plays in perfect harmony with 14:34. Second, the larger passage which speaks directly to the issue of women speaking in worship (the *sedes doctrinae*, 14:33b–38) should be

given more weight than 11:5. And third, a number of solutions are at hand which do not assume a contradiction between 11:5 and 14:34. (CC)

The following five harmonizations have been proposed by various scholars. They are presented in order from least likely to more probable. This commentary's view is that the fifth explanation is the best. The fourth has much to recommend it, but the second and third are less plausible, and the first is not supported by sound evidence. (CC)

Post-Enlightenment exegesis tends to presuppose that contradictions will be found in many parts of the Scriptures. Apparent difficulties and discrepancies are often blown out of proportion, while attempts to supply harmonizing solutions are disparaged. The alternative approach adopted in this commentary is based on the belief that the Scriptures are a unity, the Word of one primary, divine author—the Holy Spirit—speaking through prophets, apostles, and evangelists as secondary authors, and that consequently the Scriptures are all true and consistent. This assumption that the Scriptures possess the integrity, consistency, truthfulness, and authority of God himself legitimizes the attempt to demonstrate their unity and harmony in particular cases. For this purpose it is sufficient to show that one or more plausible explanations exist, even if the state of our knowledge does not permit us to state definitively that one explanation is right and all others are wrong. (CC)

1. Many advocates of women's ordination "solve" the "problem" by arguing that the offensive verses in which Paul prohibits women from speaking in church, 14:34–35, are inauthentic. Having eliminated these verses from the picture, it is readily concluded on the basis of 11:5 that Paul is content to allow women to pray and prophesy in church, and generally to take a leading speaking role in worship. One of the great popularizers of this view in recent times has been the influential commentary by Fee. A number of commentators make a similar case with regard to the authenticity of 1 Timothy by classifying it and the other pastoral epistles (2 Timothy and Titus) as "pseudepigraphical" (i.e., forgeries) and thus unworthy of the same regard as the "authentically Pauline" epistles.⁴⁶ Thus at a stroke two of the most significant texts (1 Cor 14:34–35 and 1 Tim 2:11–12) are eliminated from consideration, undercutting the ecumenical doctrine and practice of the Christian church over the last two millennia of not ordaining women. (CC)

The problem with this explanation is that the actual manuscript data support the authenticity of 1 Cor 14:34–35. In the overwhelming majority of manuscripts these two verses are found in their normal location between 14:33 and 14:36. In a few manuscripts, however, they are placed after 14:40. (CC)

Hauke set himself the detective task of trying to track down who may have been responsible for moving 14:34–35 in some manuscripts. While the case against the suspected culprit falls short of final proof, Hauke uses an array of circumstantial evidence to argue that it was Marcion who took offense at the references to creation and Law in these verses and excised them from the text, thus leaving an enduring mark on the "Western" textual tradition. He believed that the creator God of the OT was an inferior being different from the God of the NT. Marcion, of course, also removed the pastoral epistles from his canon. Should Marcion be the culprit, we would face the intriguing question of whether there could be a parallel between him and those modern scholars who show a similarly cavalier attitude—a parallel not only in excising canonical texts, but also in the basis for their excisions: the distaste for anything in Paul that smacks of Law and the OT. (CC)

Hauke's speculations, however, probably outrun the evidence. Niccum's approach is more restrained. His detailed study refutes the case for the inauthenticity of 14:34–35 and points to

“northern Italy and neighbouring Alpine regions” as the source of the scribal transposition. He concludes: “The motivation for displacing the text may never be discovered.” (CC)

2. A second suggestion is that when Paul insists a woman wear a head-covering (11:2–16) he has in mind private devotions in the home. Thus there is no conflict between his apparent tolerance for a woman praying and prophesying in that private setting, and his later insistence that she should not speak “in the churches” (14:33). But this solution to the difficulty does not seem tenable. Among the arguments Carson advances against it, most noteworthy is his reference to Paul’s statement in 11:16: “We have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.” Paul’s concern from 11:2 to 14:40 is what happens *in the churches*. Thus the Jerusalem Bible sees a major section of the epistle as beginning at 11:2 and places a major heading over that verse: “C. Decorum in Public Worship.” (CC)

3. Carson offers a more plausible reconciliation between chapters 11 and 14 in his book *Showing the Spirit*. He proposes that Paul expects the women to be silent in church only when it comes to “weighing” prophecies, that is, giving an authoritative interpretation of what the prophecy means for the church’s faith and life (cf. 14:29). By no means is the apostle banning the women from any kind of speaking in the assembly. They may, as can be assumed from 11:5, pray and prophesy; they may also speak in tongues. Only the evaluation of prophecies is prohibited. Carson then explains that the parallel in 1 Tim 2:11–12 shows that the apostolic injunction in 1 Cor 14:34–35 applies to authoritative speaking, that is, to teaching the Word of God to the assembled congregation (“I do not permit a woman to teach,” 1 Tim 2:12). The interpretation of prophecies is a kind of authoritative teaching, according to Carson. (CC)

Carson certainly is correct that the parallel injunction in 1 Tim 2:11–12 shows that in 1 Cor 14:34–35 Paul is prohibiting women from teaching authoritatively (as a pastor does) in the church’s worship. Carson is also certainly correct in saying that 14:34–35 should not be interpreted so broadly as to prohibit women from joining in the church’s prayers, hymns, liturgical responses, and confessions of faith in the worship services. (CC)

However, Carson’s view suffers from a weakness. If interpreting prophecies (a form of authoritative teaching) were the only restriction Paul had in mind in 14:34–35, it is surprising he did not spell it out: “Let the women be silent in the churches by not weighing prophecies, but let them speak in tongues and prophesy.” If this was what the apostle meant, the best that can be said is that he did not express himself—or God’s will—unambiguously. Throughout the chapter Paul has used *λαλέω* (“to speak”) in connection both with speaking in tongues and with prophecy.^b Tongues-speakers may speak (*λαλέω*) if there is an interpreter; two or three prophets may speak (*λαλέω*) if they take their turn (14:26–32). But then Paul declares—and there is no way of getting around the abruptness—that the women are *not* permitted “to speak” (*λαλέω*). There is no exception clause. (CC)

As attractive, then, as Carson’s proposal may be in allowing women some latitude to speak in the assembly (hymns, prayers, and so on), and in harmonizing 11:5 and 14:34, it does not fit the flow of Paul’s argument in chapter 14. Nevertheless, it is one of the most plausible of the solutions that have been offered. (CC)

4. A fourth interpretation is that in 14:34–35 Paul is prohibiting women from speaking authoritatively in church. As in 1 Tim 2:11–12, in 1 Cor 14:34–35 Paul prohibits women from preaching and authoritative (pastoral) teaching of the church in worship. Thus there is no conflict with 11:5, where Paul apparently accepts that women with head-coverings may pray and prophesy in church. Teaching is an activity distinctly different from praying and prophesying. In

14:34–35 Paul, then, is permitting the women to prophesy and speak in tongues, but he is not permitting them to preach and teach. This would coincide with 1 Tim 2:12, where he states: “I do not permit a woman to teach.” (CC)

This view is expressed well in the CTCR document *Women in the Church*:

First, that [in 1 Cor 14:34–35] Paul is not commanding *absolute*, unqualified silence is evident from the fact that he permits praying and prophesying in 1 Corinthians 11. The silence mandated for women in 1 Corinthians 14 does not preclude their praying and prophesying. Accordingly, the apostle is not intimating that women may not participate in the public singing of the congregation or in the spoken prayers. It should be noted in this connection that Paul uses the Greek word *laleo* [λαλέω] for “speak” in 1 Cor. 14:34, which frequently means to “preach” in the New Testament (see Mark 2:2; Luke 9:11; Acts 4:1; 8:25; 1 Cor. 2:7; 2 Cor. 12:19; Phil. 1:14; *et al.*), and not *lego* [λέγω], which is the more general term. ... When *laleo* has a meaning other than religious speech and preaching in the New Testament, this is usually made clear by an object or an adverb (e.g., to speak like a child, 1 Cor. 13:11; to speak like a fool, 2 Cor. 11:23). Secondly, it must be underscored that Paul’s prohibition that women remain silent and not speak is uttered with reference to the worship service of the congregation (1 Cor. 14:26–33). ... Thus, Paul is not here demanding that women should be silent at all times or that they cannot express their sentiments and opinions at church assemblies. The command that women keep silent is a command that they not take charge of the public worship service, specifically the teaching-learning aspects of the service. (CC)

According to this view, women may teach as long as they are not occupying the pastoral office, that is, if their teaching is done under the supervising authority of the pastor, or in a private setting. For example, Paul tells Titus to “speak” (λαλέω, Titus 2:1; the same activity women are prohibited from carrying out in 1 Cor 14:34; NIV translates it as “teach” in Titus 2:1) to the older women so that those women may be “good teachers [καλοδιδασκάλους]” who can “advise [σωφρονίζουσιν] the younger women to be lovers of their husbands and lovers of their children” (Titus 2:3–4). Older women were to teach younger women, and women were expected to teach children. A woman like Priscilla could also give private instruction in the faith to a man like Apollos (Acts 18:26). Nor should it be understood as an absolute ban prohibiting women from joining in the hymns and prayers, creeds and responses. (CC)

A difficulty with this view is Paul’s use of λαλέω earlier in 1 Corinthians 14 in connection with tongues and prophecy (e.g., 14:2–6, 27–29). One might naturally assume that λαλέω in 14:34 refers to the same kind of speaking: to speak in a tongue or to speak a prophecy. In that case, Paul would be telling the women that they cannot speak in a tongue or prophesy in church, in a worship service (that is the next explanation, number 5, below). (CC)

However, against that objection, and so in favor of this explanation (number 4), is a different approach to the understanding of the verb λαλέω. The verb itself can refer to a variety of kinds of speaking (see BAGD). The *kind* of speaking must be determined by the context, the words and phrases used with the verb. In 14:2, “the person who speaks in a tongue [λαλῶν γλώσση]” obviously refers to tongues-speaking, while in the next verse, in the phrase “the person who prophesies speaks to people [προφητεύων ἄνθρωποις λαλεῖ],” the same verb is in the context of prophesying. Speaking in tongues and prophesying are distinctly different activities, even though the same verb, λαλέω, can be used for either. It entails tongues-speaking in 14:2, 4–6a, 9, 11, 13, 18, 21, 23, 27–28, 39, but prophesying in 14:3, 6b, 29. (CC)

In 14:34–35, λαλέω is used absolutely; there are no modifying or qualifying words such as “in a tongue” or “a prophecy.” The only qualifying phrases are “in the churches” in 14:34 and “in church” in 14:35. This absolute kind of speaking may then be interpreted in light of the similar passage in 1 Tim 2:11–12, which leaves no doubt that the kind of speaking prohibited for women is the authoritative teaching of men. Therefore 1 Cor 14:34–35 prohibits women from assuming the role of authoritative (pastoral) speaking (preaching and teaching) of the church in worship. (CC)

5. A fifth explanation is preferred by this commentary. This explanation assumes that because λαλέω, “to speak,” earlier in chapter 14 referred to speaking in tongues and prophesying (see number 4 above), that same verb (λαλέω) must entail those same kinds of speaking in 14:34–35. This reading of 14:33b–38 is that here Paul prohibits the women from speaking in tongues, prophesying, and, a fortiori, authoritative (pastoral) preaching and teaching in the worship service. Nevertheless, this should not be understood as a blanket ban on women prophesying or speaking in tongues in *any* context. Philip’s daughters, presumably, would still be permitted to prophesy in private (Acts 21:8–9), and Priscilla could still give private instruction (Acts 18:26). (CC)

If this interpretation is correct, the question arises why Paul did not make his position clearer back in 1 Corinthians 11, where he seems to allow properly covered women to speak in tongues and prophesy (11:5). Here it may be helpful to consider his pastoral approach in other parts of the letter. A close parallel may be found in his discussion of food offered to idols (chapters 8–10). In chapter 8 he lays the theological foundation for approaching the issue and gently suggests that reclining in an idol temple could be an offense to the weaker brother. Then by way of a lengthy excursus (chapter 9) he points to his own example as the free Christian apostle who has voluntarily given up some of his rights for the sake of the church, including the weak brother. Then he firmly forbids any participation in cultic meals (10:14–22). His position in both chapters 8 and 10 is that the Christian should not partake of meals in pagan temples, but his appeal in chapter 8 is based on Christian love, and he saves his explicit command until chapter 10. A similar dynamic may explain the relationship between chapters 11 and 14. In chapter 11 Paul appeals to the Corinthians on the basis of Christ’s headship and their natural sense of propriety and decorum. He calls his description a “custom” (συνήθεια, 11:16), not a “command” (ἐντολή, the word in 14:37 that refers to 14:34–35). Then in chapter 12 he lays the theological foundation regarding spiritual gifts and follows it up with an excursus on Christian love (chapter 13). Paul then concludes the more detailed discussion of tongues and prophecy in chapter 14 with a number of directives regarding the proper role of tongues, prophecy, and the appropriateness of women holding the teaching office. (CC)

Paul’s approach, then, is a fine example of wise pastoral care. Not everything can be addressed at once. A foundation must first be laid before the more difficult things that must be said can be said. Thus Paul in 11:2–16 is not yet ready to issue “the Lord’s command” (14:37) regarding the women. He restricts himself primarily to the issue of their head-coverings and prayer. Although he briefly mentions prophesying (11:5), he leaves his direct orders regarding the more sensitive issue of their speaking during worship (including prophesying and speaking in tongues) to the end of chapter 14. (CC)

Objections to “the Lord’s Command”

As is well known, the apostle’s injunction in 14:34–35 is encountering more opposition today than at any time since the Gnostic, Marcionite, and Montanist movements of the second century

A.D. The objections are legion; to respond to them all with any measure of adequacy would require another book.⁶⁴ Six of the most significant may be singled out for discussion: the crucial NT passage Gal 3:28; the appeal to justice and human rights; the appeal to “inclusivity”; the appeal to women’s giftedness; the argument that the case against women’s ordination rests on the “subordinationist heresy”; and the appeal to the role of prophetesses in both testaments. (CC)

Galatians 3:28

Gal 3:28 is the text most frequently cited by the women’s ordination movement. Reumann hails Gal 3:28 as “the breakthrough,” “the crucial New Testament [text] ... cited for ordaining women.” Reumann draws out what he believes to be the implications of the text: just as “women, like men, have experienced the gospel of grace” through “the ‘Christ event,’ ” so “women too are to witness to the gospel of grace and minister in its name.” (CC)

While the argument from Gal 3:28 may seem persuasive, if one examines its context even cursorily, it is obvious that Paul is not speaking to the issue of ordination—of women or of men—at all! The topic is the baptismal identity of all believers as God’s “sons” and “heirs” of the Abrahamic promise of eternal life in Christ Jesus. The verse must be read in context: “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, *there is neither male nor female*; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you are of Christ, therefore you are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:26–29). Ordination is another topic, which Paul addresses elsewhere. If Gal 3:28 is taken as the standard for determining who may be ordained, what prevents the church from ordaining incompetent Christians, children, or for that matter, homosexuals? To such questions, proponents of women’s ordination often respond that one must then look elsewhere, for example to 1 Tim 3:2, which says a pastor should be “apt to teach.” But that is precisely the point: we must look to other passages, not to Gal 3:28, to find the qualifications for ordination. These are set out in 1 Tim 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9, where “husband of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2 and Titus 1:6), together with the masculine Greek nouns and adjectives, limits the office to qualified men. That conclusion is corroborated by 1 Cor 14:33b–38 and 1 Tim 2:11–14. (CC)

Justice and Human Rights

For some, the case for women’s ordination is straightforward: it is a matter of simple justice. The movement toward justice and equal rights for women in the workplace or political arena is taken as a normative signal to the church that Christian women should be eligible to be ordained. Although this argument can appeal in general terms to the biblical theme of “justice,” its real impetus is in the secular culture. The church should not be shaped by the world, but by the Word. (CC)

Advocates of the ordination of women sometimes draw a parallel between the way the church was slow to recognize the evils of slavery but eventually was led by the Gospel to denounce slavery, and the way the church was slow to recognize the evils of “patriarchy” but is now being led by the Gospel to protest “patriarchy” and the withholding of the pastoral office from women. But the two cases are vastly different. Slavery was a powerfully entrenched system of the Roman state, imposed on Christian and non-Christian alike by Roman society. Yet Paul could say, “But if indeed you are able to become free, by all means make use of [the opportunity]” (1 Cor 7:21b). The headship of the man, on the other hand, applied only to the Christian home and the Christian church, where Christians were free to order their relationships in keeping with the Word of God. Paul never said to the women: “If you can assume the leading teaching office in the congregation, by all means avail yourself of the opportunity.” Rather, he insisted that “the Lord’s command” (14:37) ruled it out (14:34–38). (CC)

Inclusivity

More recently, “inclusivity” often replaces “justice” as one of the movement’s buzz words. In keeping with Gal 3:28, the church should abolish all social barriers between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female. The ordination of women serves as an important sign of greater openness and inclusivity.(CC)

The “inclusivity” slogan confuses the issue. On the one hand, to be sure, the Gospel is inclusive: “God wants *all people* to be saved” (1 Tim 2:4; ἄνθρώπους there is inclusive: “people,” not just “men”). Through Baptism into Christ *all* Christians share a oneness in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28). This does not mean, however, that all are called to the public ministry. It is God who calls certain individuals into the pastoral ministry in accordance with his Word; the church has no right to add unbiblical requirements or to abolish biblical prerequisites. (CC)

The “inclusivity” argument unfairly brands those who do not accept women’s ordination as “exclusive” and narrow minded, in contrast to those who are “inclusive,” “open minded,” and so on. It is also infinitely elastic and raises these questions: “Whom would you debar from the public ministry? Why not ordain practicing homosexuals, or children, or the intellectually disabled? Where do you draw the line? And on what basis?” All Christians will agree that not *everyone* is fit for the ministry. The question then becomes whether the criteria will be determined by human reasoning or by the Word of God. (CC)

The Giftedness of Women

The claim is often advanced that women should be ordained because they too have been endowed with the Spirit’s gifts and should therefore be given an opportunity to exercise them in the public ministry. While it is true that the modern emphasis on the giftedness of all Christians has sometimes led to aberrations such as the construction of “inventories” of gifts in terms of people’s personal qualities and abilities, the NT does indeed teach that God’s multifaceted grace has endowed every Christian with a “gift of grace” (χάρισμα), either for speaking or for service (1 Pet 4:10–11; see the commentary on 1 Cor 12:8). Christian women also have a station and vocation in life, as do Christian men—in family, church, community, and workplace. As with all Christians, this gives women ample opportunity to speak “the words of God” to others, and to serve “out of the strength which God supplies, so that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 4:11). But the gift of the public ministry has not been given to them (nor to most men). (CC)

The “Subordinationist Heresy”

In an article in *Dialog* entitled “The Trinity, Ordination of Women, and the LCMS,” C. Volz charged that some theologians of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, as part of their defense of that church body’s practice of not ordaining women, were developing a “new exegesis of 1 Cor 15:28 ... identical with that of the Arians in 357 A.D.” The debate between Volz and these theologians takes us into areas of patristic theology which lie outside the scope of this excursus. But on the basis of our common grounding in the NT and the Athanasian Creed the following comments can be made. (CC)

The Greek verb ὑποτάσσω occurs nine times in 1 Corinthians, each time indisputably carrying the active meaning “to subordinate or subject” or the middle or passive meaning “to be subordinate or be subject to someone.” In chapter 14 it refers to the subjection of the spirits of prophets to prophets (14:32), and the subordination of women in the churches (14:34). In chapter 15 it refers first to the Father subjecting everything, including death, to the Son, and then the Son’s subjecting himself to the Father (15:27–28). Finally, in 16:16 it refers to the need for the

Corinthian Christians to subject themselves to Stephanas and the other church servants like him. (CC)

Significant in the context in 1 Corinthians are two nouns from the same word-family, τάξις (14:40) and τάγμα (15:23). Both words have to do with the proper “order” of things. Everything in the church’s worship must be done “properly and in order” (14:40). And the resurrection will take place “each in its proper order”: Christ is raised first as the firstfruits, then those who belong to him, and then comes the end (15:23–24). Thus whether Paul is speaking of “order” or “subordination,” he has in mind “a divinely willed order.” (CC)

In Eph 5:21, 24 Paul uses the verb ὑποτάσσω in close conjunction with the concept of headship (Eph 5:23). This supports the assumption that his statement about headship in 1 Cor 11:3 (“the head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God”) implies the subordination or subjection of the woman to the man, the man to Christ, and Christ to God the Father. (CC)

Given this headship structure, then, it is proper to view the apostolic word on women’s subordination in the light of what Paul says in the context (11:3; 15:28) regarding the Son’s subordination to the Father. Moreover, this broader context leads inescapably to the conclusion that it is no more demeaning for the woman to be subject to the man than it is for the man to be subject to Christ, and Christ to the Father. Conversely, the man’s headship (properly exercised according to the divine order) over the woman is no more oppressive than Christ’s headship over the man and the Father’s headship over the Son. (CC)

To affirm, with the NT, that the Son is subordinate to the Father is not to detract from his full divinity, nor from his equality and consubstantiality with the Father. The mystery of his person can only be described by way of paradox. Jesus could say of himself both “I and the Father are one” (Jn 10:30) and “the Father is greater than I” (Jn 14:28). Likewise, the Athanasian Creed affirms that the Son of God is “equal to the Father as touching his Godhead and inferior to the Father as touching his manhood.” (CC)

Delling notes that “subordination ... may be either compulsory or voluntary.” The Son of God submitted himself voluntarily to the Father, delighting to do his will (Ps 40:7–8; Phil 2:5–11; Heb 10:5–10). As Luther expressed it:

The Son obeyed his Father’s will,

Was born of virgin mother;

And God’s good pleasure to fulfill,

He came to be my brother.

Likewise, Paul never calls on the Christian men to make the women submit. There is nothing in Pauline theology providing a warrant for men to be oppressive, dictatorial, or misogynistic. The pattern Paul holds before men is the self-sacrificing love of Christ for his bride, the church (Eph 5:25–33). When he speaks of the submission of women, he always appeals to the women themselves to submit voluntarily (1 Cor 14:34; Eph 5:22–24). (CC)

As A. Pfeiffer has commented, this Christian “submission is a gift. Submission cannot be demanded or forced, it can only be given. As submission is a gift, so love is a gift, the right use of authority is a gift, obedience is a gift, honor is a gift and so on. Christians live in their society,

family and work place this way by exercising their Christian freedom to give and serve, not to revolutionize and overthrow.” Some may take offense that it is Paul, a man, who demands this submission. However, Paul is not speaking in a private capacity, but as the “apostle of Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:1). The Gospel provides the motivation for men and women joyfully to take their appointed places in God’s order, especially in the church. It is possible to resist and reject the Gospel, as Paul himself once did, but such rejection is “to kick against the goads” (Acts 26:14). On the other hand, the person of faith—the new creation in Christ—delights in God’s order (cf. Pss 1:2; 112:1; 119:16, 24, 35). (CC)

Prophetesses in the Old and New Testaments

The occasional references to prophetesses in both testaments have been taken as a warrant for ordaining women. But as has been argued in the excursus “Spiritual Gifts in 1 Corinthians,” we cannot draw a straight line from the office of the prophet to that of a pastor. Unlike pastors, prophets speak on the basis of special revelations.⁸⁰ When the Montanists allowed women to make public speeches in church, referring for support to the prophetesses Miriam (Ex 15:20), Deborah (Judg 4:4), and Huldah (2 Ki 22:14; 2 Chr 34:22) in the OT, and to Philip’s daughters (Acts 21:9) and Anna (Lk 2:36) in the NT, Hauke notes that

Origen counters that all these women would never have spoken in public in the presence of men. Acts mentions nothing about prophesying by the daughters of Philip in the congregation, nor is that reported of Anna. Miriam only directed the singing of a group of women. In contrast to Jeremiah and Isaiah, we hear of no address to the people by Deborah. Huldah, likewise, did not address the people; rather, it was necessary to go to her home to hear her. (CC)

Among the slighter arguments are the appeal to supposed NT precedents in the case of Priscilla, who assisted her husband Aquila in giving private instruction to Apollos (Acts 18:26), or Phoebe, the deaconess at Cenchrea (Rom 16:1), or Junia, whom some take to be a female apostle (Rom 16:7). But Origen’s comments apply here too; none of these women preached, led, or taught the church in worship or administered the Sacraments. It may be added that, in contrast to the few women who were OT prophets, all the priests were men. And it may be argued that the priests’ responsibilities in teaching the Torah and administering the sacrifices bear the closest relationship to those of the NT ministers of Word and Sacrament. (CC)

Conclusion

The above will have to suffice in response to the array of arguments advanced by the advocates of women’s ordination. None of those arguments stands up to serious exegetical scrutiny. Nor is that surprising, for the movement to ordain women does not really have its starting point in the Scriptures, but in the sociology and spirit of the modern age (cf. 1 Cor 2:12). It is a novelty, an aberration from the Scriptures and from the universal doctrine and practice of the church for almost two millennia. (CC)

Nonetheless, Christians are subjected to emotive arguments like these: “We must go forward in faith, not hold back in fear.” Naturally no one wants to be charged with fear and cowardice and hesitancy to go forward in faith. But how are commands to go forward in faith and not be afraid used in the Bible? One passage that comes to mind is the Lord’s word to Moses as the Egyptians pursued the Israelites to the shore of the Red Sea: “Tell the Israelites to go forward!” (Ex 14:15). Here indeed was a situation where the people were called to go forward in faith and not hold back in fear. But they were to go forward *at the command of God—a clear word from the Lord*. And as

they obeyed that divine word, God blessed and delivered them through the waters of the Red Sea. (CC)

It is a perilous situation, however, when Christians are told to go forward in defiance of the Lord's command. In such a situation, we should take notice rather of texts like Is 66:2: "This is the person for whom I [the Lord] will have regard: for the one who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word." (CC)

Thus the apostolic command that women be silent in the churches (1 Cor 14:34), as it is "*the Lord's command*" (14:37), binds the church's conscience to "the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:5). Christians who submit their thinking and living to this obedience will not be deterred by ostracism and anathemas, even as Luther ignored the papal bull and took his stand on the Word of God. This has been ably expressed by Slenczka in response to the Evangelical Church in Germany's 1992 anathematizing of even the criticism of women's ordination by its pastors:

Whether we like it or not, the literal meaning of the text here concerns itself ... with a matter that affects our salvation. This means that Women's Ordination is not just a question of ecclesiastical order, or historical custom. Here the Apostle is concerned with the fellowship of the churches and their obedience to the Word of the Lord. ... A church is not to place itself above the Word of God and a clear command of the Lord and at the same time sever its fellowship with other churches in other places and times. Such a decision is aimed against the church itself. The church disintegrates when it no longer clings to the Word of its Lord; and it sinks as it subjects itself to the throw of a dice (Eph. 4:14) of human opinion and social currents. ... You can neither alter the Word of God in the literal rendering of the Holy Scriptures nor abolish its effect on consciences. (CC)

Appendix

On November 11, 1992, at about 4:30 p.m., the Church of England approved the ordination of women to the priesthood. The vote was carried by majorities of over two-thirds in each of the synod's three houses (bishops, clergy, and laity). The earlier part of the day was devoted to speeches for and against the legislation. Of those who spoke against the legislation, one of the most eloquent was Mrs. Sara Low. Her speech may be described as a cry from the heart, or in C. S. Lewis' terms, the bleating of a sheep trying to catch the ear of her shepherds. I believe she is an able spokesperson for all Christians who desire to remain faithful to their Lord. (CC)

When I was converted to Jesus Christ in my early twenties and came into the Church of England, I was told by my first parish priest, now a bishop on these benches, that the Church of England based itself on Holy Scripture, holy tradition and human reason. This legislation gives me the gravest possible concern on all three counts. (CC)

One of the things that I have learned in my time as a Christian is that where we are faithful to the revealed truth, there the promises of the New Testament are fulfilled. The Churches that believe this and do it are, in my experience, those that are blessed. (CC)

Like many of those here, I have listened for nearly twenty years to this debate. I listened very carefully to the early arguments about Jesus' cultural conditioning and the claim that Jesus did not have the freedom to appoint women. If cultural conditioning was determinative for Jesus, then all his teaching and all his actions are thus heavily influenced. We are no longer talking about the eternal Son of God. Jesus Christ is different today from what he was yesterday, and he will be different again tomorrow. I have listened to the arguments that the early Church was equally unable to make this

change, yet, on the contrary, what could have made a bigger bridgehead with the pagan world than the introduction of women priests, with which they were already familiar? I have listened to arguments on St Paul where one classic quotation [Gal 3:28] has been wrenched out of context, given a meaning that no previous generation of believers has given it, and seen it used to deny the clear teaching on headship in the rest of St Paul's letters. I have listened to the doctrine of creation being divided into greater and lesser truths, so that the complementarity of male and female has been debased to a banal interchangeability. I have listened patiently to talk of prayerful, thoughtful majorities when surely our problem is that the minority is also prayerful and thoughtful. (CC)

These are not comfortable things to say, but they must be said because if the Synod overturns scriptural authority today it will be no good coming back next time and hoping to impose it on other issues. For the Church, the authority of the Scriptures and the example of Jesus has always been determinative; I do not believe that this House has the authority to overturn them. (CC)

My second concern is the legislation itself. What of those who dissent? It seems strange, does it not, to call those who faithfully believe what the Church has always believed "dissenters"? Bishops and archbishops may give verbal assurances that there will be no persecution against such priests and laypeople, but it is with great sadness that I have to tell the bishops that I have not met one opponent of the measure who believes them. The reasons are simple. First, no verbal assurance can undo the fact that you are legislating for two classes of Christian; any good intentions that may exist will wither before the law and practice, as in other provinces. Second, in many dioceses the spirit of this legislation has been in operation for some years. Orthodox clergy are excluded from appointments and orthodox laity are made to feel excluded from that warm glow of official approval, as if they are suffering from some embarrassing handicap. I have experienced that myself often enough in these corridors. (CC)

However, if the human injustice of this legislation, which eases old men into retirement and condemns others to serve forever under authorities whose primary qualification is compromise, is disgraceful, it is as nothing besides its theological arrogance and blasphemy. The legislation clearly instructs the Lord God Almighty whom he may raise up to lead the Church. The Holy Spirit will be told, "You may choose anyone you want so long as it is one of us." A Church that denies the sovereignty of God is no longer a Church. The fruits of this debate are not the fruits of the Holy Spirit. (CC)

What of tomorrow? If you wake in the morning having voted yes, you'll know that you have voted for a Church irreconcilably divided, for whom the revealed truth of God is no longer authoritative. If you vote no, you will wake to tears and a healing ministry, but above all to the possibility of a renewed New Testament Church, for all of us could then be united in encouraging, training and funding the ministry of priest, deacon, teacher, prophet, healer, administrator, spiritual director—all promised by the Holy Spirit. (CC)

14:26–40 Just as issues of worship practice have divided the Corinthians, many congregations today are divided over matters of worship. God's Word insists on clear order so that the teaching of Law and Gospel is not hindered. Though Paul tolerates the Corinthians' personal interests, he insists that such interests have no place in congregational gatherings, which should clearly teach God's Word for all. The "God of peace" (Rm 15:33) has established our salvation and life in the cross of His dear Son, our only Savior, who makes us one and strengthens us in the one true faith.

- God of peace, tear down our elitist opinions and personal preferences. Build us up and nurture us through Your humble and patient Son, Jesus. Amen. (TLSB)