

Life Group Notes
Sunday 30 April 2017

Speaker: Sean Green

Passage: 1 Corinthians 14:33-40

Title: Orderly Worship #2

Read 1Cor14v33-35

Most of us will find these verses jarring to read. They contain difficult loaded words of silence, submission and shame, and these directed at women. It is unexpected because it is contrary to the flow of the letter, earlier Paul says women can speak in church gatherings (11v5). And it is emphatic *'as in all the churches of the saints'*. So, what's going on?

Scripture does not contradict itself so we must try to understand these verses in light of others. Joel 2v28-32 states that prophesy is the inheritance of all believers, regardless of gender. Acts 21v8-9 records that Paul visited the home of Philip the evangelist, who had four unmarried daughters who prophesied, presumably in church meetings. In Colossian 3v16 he urges them to corporately sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. So, Paul must have been responding to a specific situation. The original readers would not have been confused by this apparent 'contradiction'.

The immediate context is Paul's concern for orderly worship in general and the careful weighing of prophecy (14v29). Paul's instruction for women to "remain silent, not speaking" must refer to "carefully weighing what is prophesied". This is not because women can't carefully weigh something, wisdom is personified as a woman in Proverbs 4v6-9. Rather it is because of God's created order of headship (11v8-9), this is supported up by his reference to the Law (presumably Genesis 2v20-23).

The worship meetings in Corinth were most likely organized along the lines of a synagogue, meaning men and woman would be segregated. It may well be that the women were discussing, weighing or questioning prophetic words amongst themselves and causing a disruption. Worse still, they may have been calling out and asking their husbands across the divide.

What would be considered 'disgraceful' would be for a woman to publicly question the opinion of her husband (or the church elders) in weighing the prophesy. Paul is not suggesting it is unthinkable for a man to be wrong, rather, there was an expectation for how they were to be questioned. Most of the church, and unbelievers looking in (14v23), would have seen the expression of submission to her husband as a good thing and dishonoring your 'head' by questioning as disgraceful (11v6).

As such, Paul tells the woman to ask and debate with her husband at home, not raise questions, or cause a disruption, in the church meeting. A wife is to honour her husband by directing questions to him, in so doing she is acting appropriately. Note that 'women' refers to married women, there was no practice of a single woman living alone. If you were an unmarried woman, you either lived with your family as a daughter or as a widower.

Read 1Cor14v36-40

Paul reminds them that they are the fruit of God's word and are part of a much bigger movement by God. How their meetings operate matters within the wider church. He anticipates a few disagreeing with his teaching but there are times in the life of a church that clear direction needs to be given and dissenters ignored.

Church meetings are to demonstrate charismatic gifts; a supernatural component should hallmark their gatherings. But these meetings are also to have a clear sense of order and decency. Structure in meetings can often squeeze out the charismatic gifts, conversely the misuse of charismatic gifts can squeeze out a sense of order. But Paul contends for both. It is a tension to be held not a problem to be fixed. Both the spontaneous and the planned are to be embraced by believers and witnessed by unbelievers.

Suggested questions:

What have you learnt about handling 'hard' verses in the bible?

What questions are still unanswered?

What can you do to bring order and decency as well as tongues and prophecy to our meetings?