

What is the 'law' to which Paul refers in 1 Corinthians 14:34?

THE CLAIM

'The reference to the law could either be to a Jewish understanding of the Old Testament, or to the Jewish oral law where women were forbidden to address the congregation in the synagogue:

Our Rabbis taught: All are qualified to be among the seven [who read], even a minor and a woman, only the Sages said that a woman should not read in the Torah out of respect for the congregation.
(Babylonian Talmud, Megilla "The Scroll of Esther" 23a)

It is interesting that The Bible Translator (January 1995) **suggests the following as an alternative which should be offered in translations.**

Some of you say, "Women should be silent in the churches, because they are not permitted to speak. **As the Jewish law says**, they should be subordinate to men. If there is anything they want to know, they should wait until they get home and then ask their husbands. It is shameful for women to speak in church." What kind of thinking is that? You are acting as if the word of God came from you! And you

men, don't ever think that you are the only ones who receive this word!"¹

THE FACTS

What Ian and Averil do not tell readers are that the article in 'The Bible Translator' which they quote was written by egalitarian David Arichea Junior.² In the article quoted by Ian and Averil, Arichea lists among the 'advantages' of this interpretation of the text the fact that it is supportive of the egalitarian case:

'a) **It changes the passage** from that of an **oppressive text that can be used as an anti-feminist tool** to one which **advocates the active participation of women within the church.**³

SCHOLARLY COMMENTARY

Ian and Averil do not tell readers are that the scholarly consensus is that Paul's reference to 'the law' is a reference to the Old Testament. It is not a reference to Jewish oral law, or a Jewish understanding of the Old Testament.

¹ 'All One', p. 66 (March 2009).

² 'He [David C. Arichea Jr] has also written numerous Bible studies for young people and on the subject of women in the Scriptures, one of which is entitled "**Laying to Rest the Misconception of the Subordinate Role of Women in the Church.**"', 2008-09 *Bulletin of the Duke University Divinity School*; this is a publication by the university at which Arichea works.

³ Arichea, 'The Silence of Women in The Church: Theology and Translation in 1 Corinthians 14.33b-36', *The Bible Translator* (46.1.110), (January 1995).

The very phrase which Paul uses is found in a number of proximate Jewish writings, and its meaning is not in doubt.⁴ It is a clear reference to a principle drawn from the Biblical text (not a direct quote), either to the Pentateuch⁵ or some other part of the Old Testament:

'Against the argument that the use of οὐ γὰρ ἐπιτρέπεται, there exists no permission, is not Pauline, **several writers refer with approval to S. Aalen's argument** that the key word is drawn here by Paul **from a rabbinic formula used in the context of biblical texts**, especially in the Pentateuch, which express a **principle often introduced with ὁ νόμος λέγει, the law indicates.**⁶

BAGD, Moulton-Milligan et al. and Grimm-Thayer **provide instances of the verb in the sense of it is permitted** (sometimes with the perfect stative sense, there exists permission) **in the papyri, Josephus, and other first-century sources.**⁶

⁴ 'The apostle's reference to "the Law" (ὁ νόμος, ho nomos) is not as enigmatic as many scholars have suggested. **This type of use of the Old Testament is generally in line with Paul's technique at other places in 1 Corinthians.**', Oster, '1 Corinthians', The College Press NIV Commentary (1995).

⁵ Paul's reference to the teaching of "the law" **probably has the Genesis creation narratives in mind, with their implications for order and propriety in relationships between men and women** (see Thiselton 2000: 1153-54; Bruce 1980: 136; Carson 1987: 129; Keener 1992: 86-87; see also commentary on 1 Cor. 11:2-16 above).⁵ Beale & Carson, 'Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament', p. 743 (2007).

⁶ Thiselton, 'The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A commentary on the Greek text', p. 1151 (2000).

Other scholarly commentary notes that this appeal to ‘the Law’ is a standard form of argument in Paul’s writings.⁷

‘The same apostle Paul who so naturally **curbed unacceptable male and female head coverings practices** during prophecy and prayer on the basis of **principles from Genesis** and challenged aberrant tongue speakers at Corinth **with a theme from Isaiah**, could with equal facility **curb aberrant women’s speech with a theme from Genesis**.’⁸

BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

In light of the scholarly consensus, the phrase in question is translated as a reference to ‘the law’ by the following translations.

- CEV: The text has ‘as the Law of Moses teaches’, referring explicitly to the

⁷ ‘In particular, **Paul felt quite comfortable in employing Scripture texts from the Old Testament to prescribe and interpret aspects of assembly activities**. In 1 Cor 5:4 the church is assembled to censure a sinful fellow believer. The expulsion of wayward believers is authorized **on the basis of a frequently found command (“Expel the wicked man from among you”) from Deuteronomy** (e.g., 17:7; 19:19; 22:21, 24; 24:7). First Corinthians 11 provides a singular example of **the use of Genesis material from the Creation and Fall Narratives to insure propriety regarding liturgical head coverings** in the worship assembly of believers. More to the setting and context of 1 Cor 14, **Paul refers to the Law** (though the quotation is **principally from the Prophets**) **to interpret the phenomenon of tongue speaking in a worship service** in the Roman colony of Corinth.’, Oster, ‘1 Corinthians’, The College Press NIV Commentary (1995).

⁸ Ibid.

inspired Law of God given in the Old Testament

- ESV: The text has ‘as the Law also says’, the definite article and capitalization indicating that this is a reference to the law revealed in the Old Testament, not Jewish oral tradition or Roman law, and a footnote says ‘[ver. 21]’, referring to 1 Corinthians 14:21, where Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11–12 and refers to it as ‘the Law’
- GNB/TEV: The text has ‘as the Jewish Law says’, the definite article and capitalization, which may be a reference to the Jewish oral tradition rather than the Law of Moses
- HSCB: The text has ‘as the law also says’
- The Message: The text has ‘God’s Book of the law guides our manners and customs here’, referring explicitly to the inspired Law of God given in the Old Testament
- NAB: The text has ‘as even the law says’
- NASB95: The text has ‘just as the Law also says’, the definite article and capitalization indicating that this is a reference to the law revealed in the Old Testament, not Jewish oral tradition or Roman law, and a footnote says ‘1 Cor 14:21’, where Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11–12 and refers to it as ‘the Law’
- NCV: The text has ‘as the law says’

- NET: The text has ‘as in fact the law says’
- NIV: The text has ‘as the Law says’, the definite article and capitalization indicating that this is a reference to the law revealed in the Old Testament, not Jewish oral tradition or Roman law
- NIRV: The text has ‘as the Law also says’, the definite article and capitalization indicating that this is a reference to the law revealed in the Old Testament, not Jewish oral tradition or Roman law
- NLT: The text has ‘just as the law says’
- NRSV: The text has ‘as the law also says’
- TLB: The text has ‘the Scriptures also declare’, referring explicitly to the inspired Old Testament
- TNIV: The text has ‘as the law says’, and a footnote says ‘ver 21; Ge 3:16’, referring to 1 Corinthians 14:21, where Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11–12 and refers to it as ‘the Law’, and citing the subordination of Eve in Genesis 3:16 as the specific principle Paul has in mind

Only one standard modern Bible translation renders this passage with an egalitarian interpretation.

(Jonathan Burke, 2009)