

Is 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 a quote which Paul rejects?

THE CLAIM

'Paul quotes his opponents and then refutes them'¹

Ian and Averil note this as the claim of others, rather than making the claim themselves:

'Gilbert Bilezikian in *Beyond Sex Roles* (Second edition, tenth printing 1999, pages 286-288) suggests that "e" can frequently be translated as "Nonsense!", **but this is only partly supported by the examples he gives.**'²

'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!'³

THE FACTS

What Ian and Averil do not tell readers are that both of these authors are egalitarian commentators. The following quote is from a review of the work by Bilezikian which Ian and Averil cite:

'**Bilezikian writes from an unabashedly egalitarian position**, calling for "**deliberate programs of depatriarchalization**" (p. 211) in our religious institutions and "**a systematic effort of deprogramming**" in our thinking so that we do away with "**regard[ing] the opposite sex as *opposite***" (p. 210; italics his).'⁴

'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.**"'⁵

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:

³ Ibid., p. 66.

⁴ Trotter, review of Bilezikian's '*Beyond Sex Roles: A Guide for the Study of Female Roles in the Bible*', in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 12 (30.1.101), (1987).

⁵ 2008-09 *Bulletin of the Duke University Divinity School*; this is a publication by the university at which Arichea works.

'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.**'⁶

'f) **The spirit of Gal. 3:28 is not violated** by Paul in any way.'⁷

Further, Ian and Averil do not inform readers that Arichea himself lists a number of objections against this interpretation of the text:

'However, there are objections to this position as well, among which are the following:

a) There simply is no way to be certain, since the Greek text does not contain any interpretive markers of any kind. **What then if Paul was actually advocating the silence of women in the church?**

b) Such a position advocating the active participation of women in the church service seems **too advanced for Paul and for the early church at that stage of its history.**

c) Canonical history seems to indicate that vv 34-35 **was understood primarily as an admonition to silence, as is clear in the repetition of these same arguments in 1 Tim. 2:11-15.**

⁶ 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).

⁷ Ibid., p. 110.

¹ 'All One', p. 64 (March 2009).

² Ibid., p. 65.

d) But the main objection has something to do with **the difficulty of relating the passage to its immediate and wider context.**

Considering that the subject of the whole of chapter 14 is orderliness in the worship service, which came under threat due to the practice of speaking in tongues, **it would be rather unlikely for the chapter to contain a section asserting the right of certain people, and specifically the women, to speak in the church service.** It would be more likely **for an admonition to silence to be included** rather than a justification for speaking.⁸

Nor do Ian and Averil reveal that Arichea states clearly that the translation suggestion which he finally proposes has no support from the scholarly consensus whatever:

'Considering the whole argument, it does seem that this third option is worth considering and pursuing further. **It should be noted, however, that no translation (to my knowledge) has followed this option, nor has it been mentioned in the notes accompanying various translations.** Of all the commentaries I have examined, **only one advocates this position.**'⁹

SCHOLARLY COMMENTARY

This suggestion has not found significant support among scholarly commentators, and remains a marginal position even among egalitarians. It is rejected by egalitarians such as Alan Johnson and Ben Witherington:

'The best refutation of this view is given by Ben Witherington, who argues that the previous quotes of Corinthian views in the letter were actually stated and then refuted or circumstantially modified by Paul.'¹⁰

'More telling against this view is the large number of words in verses 34-35 **that resonate with the immediate context** (Witherington 1988:90-91).'¹¹

'Witherington offers stronger and more detailed arguments why the hypothesis of Odell-Scott and Flanagan and Snyder are open to doubt. In sum, because of such phrases as *as in all the churches of God's holy people*, and because 6:12; 10:23; 7:1 et al. **represent not "rebuttals" but circumstantial qualifications** "they raise more questions than they answer."359 With a deft turn, he adds: **"In all probability Paul is anticipating the response he expected to get** (v. 36) when the Corinthians read his argument (vv. 34–35)."360'¹²

It is also rejected by egalitarian Gordon Fee:

'The very first word *e, "or," "either... or," or the interjection "what!") **should not be seen as introducing a statement rejecting the previous two verses, as if they were an aberrant Corinthian viewpoint,** but as Paul's anticipation that **his rules to control speech**

practices at Corinth would anger the Corinthians. As Gordon Fee correctly points out, "Has God given them [the Corinthians] a special word that allows them both to reject Paul's instructions... and to be so out of touch with the churches?" (1987:7210).

"It appears that the Corinthians were trying to make up their own rules, and perhaps even thinking their own word is sufficient or authoritative or even the word of God themselves" (cf. v.36; Witherington 1988:98).'¹³

Thiselton notes other commentators rejecting the suggestion:

'Horrell finds the view of Odell-Smith and Allison "implausible" not least because, as **Conzelmann also notes**, v. 36, which attacks the self-important claims of some at Corinth to be "different," then leaves v. 33b either as part of the Corinthian slogan, **which would not cohere with our knowledge of Corinth,** or as simply hanging without continuation until after an overly long quotation, or as belonging to vv. 26–33a, which, apart from Barrett, KJV/AV, RV, Alford, and Phillips, **is widely accepted** as belonging with vv. 34–37 (as **UBS 4th ed., NRSV, REB, NIV, NJB, Conzelmann, and most writers**).357 "The point about the particle ... makes most sense when v. 36 is linked with v. 33."'¹⁴

(Jonathan Burke, 2009)

¹⁰ Johnson, '1 Corinthians', p. 272 (2004).

¹¹ Ibid., p. 272.

¹² Thiselton, 'The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A commentary on the Greek text', p. 1151 (2000).

¹³ Johnson, '1 Corinthians', p. 277 (2004).

¹⁴ Thiselton, 'The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A commentary on the Greek text', p. 1151 (2000).

⁸ Ibid., p. 110.

⁹ Ibid., p. 110.