

**Examining the authenticity of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35...**  
**Part 1: a peek into the discipline of Lower Criticism**

**The Problem**

In the majority of ancient New Testament manuscripts, verses 34-35 appear after verse 33; however, roughly half of a group of manuscripts classed as the Western witnesses, limited to manuscripts from northern Italy and Irish monastics, place these verses after verse 40. While there are no manuscripts that omit verses 34-35, why is there some evidence of two locations for these verses?

**Possible Explanations**

Despite the fact that an overwhelming majority of manuscripts place verses 34-35 after verse 33, there are 3 possible explanations for the two locations of verses 34-35:

1. Paul wrote the words after verse 33, which were later deliberately transposed by copyists after verse 40.
2. Paul wrote the words after verse 40, which were later deliberately transposed by copyists after verse 33.
3. Paul did not write the words at all; rather, they were an early marginal gloss, which were subsequently inserted into the text at two different places.

Of these three explanations, there is little debate for the second; thus, the argument is between the first and third explanation, which have significant ramifications:

1. Verses 34-35 are Paul's authentic words and therefore demand exegesis of the plain meaning of the Text.
2. Verses 34-35 are not Paul's own words, but rather interpolations by later editors, and should be dismissed and removed from the Bible.

**The Textual Debate**

In the quest to determine whether verses 34-35 are authentic or not, scholars study the internal evidence found within the manuscript. This form of study examines the question of probability: transcriptional and intrinsic.

**Transcriptional Probability**

Transcriptional probability takes into account the habits and tendencies of scribes and how the manuscript was generated or published. It asks the question, "given what we know of the scribal tradition and method, what parts of a manuscript most likely reflects the original?" In answering this question, Johann Bengel (1687-1752) developed what has become known as the first principle of text criticism: the form of the text that best explains the origin of all other forms is most likely the original.

In applying Bengel's first principle and observing the transposition of verses 34-35 in two different places, some scholars believe that 1 Corinthians 14 was originally without verses 34-35. They believe that verses 34-35 were marginal gloss, which were subsequently incorporated into the Text at two places.

But many scholars still question the appropriateness of applying Bengel's first principle on 1 Corinthians 14.

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1. There's been no real evidence of gloss. Most glosses intend to explain a passage, not introduce a problem to the flow of the text. Many scholars believe that the universal presence of verses 34-35 in all ancient manuscripts suggest a more likely possibility of a displacement of the passage in one Greek copy where the verses were transposed after verse 40; subsequent copies made the error more ubiquitous. But the reason for the initial transposition remains unknown.

2. A more important text critical principle that takes precedence over Bengel's first principle is *lectio difficilior portior*, which states that "the manuscript with the more difficult reading is preferable." It is based on the observation that scribes tend to smooth out the rough textual spots of a manuscript and not introduce difficulties to the text. Verse 34-35, following verse 33, represents the more difficult reading and therefore has the greater claim to authenticity.

3. In instances where marginal gloss was added into subsequent copies of the Bible, ancient manuscripts on hand show versions with and without the added gloss. Because **all** ancient manuscripts of 1 Corinthians 14 contain verses 34-35, if it were "marginal gloss", the "marginal gloss" had to be inserted very early and perhaps into the original manuscript. This begs the question, if verses 34-35 were so obviously in the margin as marginal gloss, how could scribes mistakenly consider it as authentic and part of the original Text?

4. When scribes questioned the authenticity of some verses of the Bible, the adjacent margin was marked with an asterisk or obelisk. No ancient manuscript of 1 Corinthians 14 contained such a notation.

5. If verses 34-35 were marginal gloss, scribes would consider them as authentic and part of the Text if Paul himself wrote the marginal gloss as an insertion. Some scholars speculate that if the location of the insertion could not be determined, scribes could locate it at the end of the subject, which would have been after verse 40 (note: verses and chapters did not exist at this time) (1).

#### Intrinsic Probability

Intrinsic probability asks the question, "what would the author most likely to have written?" This examines, among other things, the literary habit of the author such as his use of words or literary style, the immediate context, and the harmony with the author's work elsewhere in the Bible.

From this perspective, some scholars challenge the authenticity of verses 34-35 for 3 reasons:

1. Verses 34-35 disrupt the flow of thought of the passage regarding tongues and prophecy.
2. Verses 34-35, which silences women in church, seem to contradict 1 Corinthians 11:5 where Paul accepts the praying and prophesying of women.
3. Verses 34-35 contain terms that are seemingly not typical of Paul. One such unpauline feature is, "... just as the Law also says." Scholars note that Paul always cites a biblical passage to justify his position, but never appealed to the Law to support *Christian* behavior.

However, there is ample evidence to dispute those who challenge the authenticity of verses 34-35.

1. The difficulty in the flow of thought is accounted for in the text critical principle of *lectio difficilior portior* where the manuscript with the more difficult reading is considered more authentic.

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2. The apparent contradiction with 1 Corinthians 11:5 only exists when one views 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 as absolute statement (“... they are not permitted to speak;...”) without any qualification. Yet when verses 34-35 are read after verse 33, one can perceive Paul’s flow of thought and see the larger context, which would qualify the apparent absolute statement of verse 34-35. As it will be seen in the article, **Examining the authenticity of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35... Part 3: an exegetical study**, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 does not teach that women be silent in the church assembly **all** the time, but that they not exercise any authority in the evaluation of prophecy and thus be perceived as teaching-preaching in public.

3. Because of the similarities in terms found in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and Ephesians 5:21-33, verses 34-35 are considered “unpauline”, because some scholars consider these verses as work of a later redactor who was determined to subordinate a women’s public role in the church by editing Paul’s pastoral letters. However, this is not true as terms associated with subordination are found elsewhere in Paul’s work:

“To subject,” a verb found in verse 32, can be found in Romans 8:7, 20; 13:1, 5; 1 Corinthians 15:28; Ephesians 5:24; and Colossians 2:20.

“To be silent,” in verse 34, can be found in 1 Corinthians 14:28.

“To learn,” a verb found in verse 35 and 1 Timothy 2:11, can also be found in 1 Corinthians 4:6 and 14:31, 35; Galatians 3:2; 1 Timothy 5:4, 13; and Titus 3:14.

“To permit, a verb found in 1 Corinthians 14:34.

Furthermore, Paul’s letters contain terms that occur once in all his letters or in the entire New Testament (*hapex legomena*). This makes it very challenging to determine what is “unpauline.”

If one considers these three pieces of evidence: a) the use of terms elsewhere in Paul’s work, b) the fact that Paul’s letters contain *hapex legomena*, and c) that the manuscript evidence for the omission of verses 34-35 is weak, the argument of “unpauline” terminology or “odd usage” is not very strong.

4. Much easier to dismiss than to comprehend is Paul’s reference to the “law” in verse 34. Absent, in the Mosaic Law or the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible which Jew considered the “Book of the Law”), is any explicit directive that a woman be silent. Several approaches to this interpretive challenge have been proposed:

A) The “law” refers to an unspecified local law contemporary to the time. In this interpretation, women were expressing their freedoms allowed under 1 Corinthians 11:5 but were too noisy, and Paul appeals to this unmentioned local law to silence them.

However, Paul *never* uses the term “law” to refer to any laws outside of the Bible.

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B) The “law” refers to Paul’s earlier directives in verses 27-33. In this interpretation, women were expressing their freedoms allowed under 1 Corinthians 11:5 but were too noisy, and Paul refers to his prior decree to silence them.

However, Paul *never* uses the term “law” to refer to his own directives.

C) The “law” is Paul’s reference to Jewish traditions. There are two interpretations based on this definition of “law.” One interpretation has Paul appealing to Jewish traditions to silence the women. The second interpretation reads verses 34-35 as Paul summarizing Jewish traditions that the Corinthians have unwisely adopted, which promote female submission and silence. In this interpretation, verse 36 is seen as Paul’s indignant statement, “What! Did the Word of God originate with you men only?”

However, Paul never uses the term “law” to refer to any Jewish tradition.

D) The “law” refers to the Pentateuch. This interpretation and further discussion of the above interpretations can be found at **Examining the authenticity of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35... Part 3: an exegetical study**.

Unswayed by the arguments for a later redactor who introduced the interpolation, most scholars consider verses 34-35 as authentic and rightfully belong after verse 33. However the debate over 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 will continue as long as the textual evidence is not conclusive. The questions remain:

- a) if verses 34-35 were in the original Text, why would copyists make a transposition?
- b) if the verses were authentic, then how did it show up in its location after verse 40 in the Western witnesses?

References:

1. Wallace DB, *The Textual Problem of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35*, in *www.Bible.org*, (2004).
2. Piper, J, Grudem, W, eds, *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books (1991), p.140-153.