

**Draft copy 4.17.24**

When my daughter graduated from college, her first job was at a church plant in Chicago about 5 blocks from Lake Michigan. To walk to the lakefront park, you'd walk under the overpass that was Lakeshore drive, and underneath those bridges were the most amazing mosaic designs. What was interesting is that as you walked right next to them, you noticed dozens of individual pieces – each unique.

**[MOSAIC SLIDE CLICK 1]** Some of those pieces were glass, some metal, some pottery, some mirrored, and some that looked like some recycled trash. Each one of them was interesting enough, but there didn't seem to be any cohesion to the mix. It was only when you walked across the street to view this mosaic from a distance that you could see there was actually a larger illustration in view.

**[MOSAIC SLIDE CLICK 2]** Up close, it was a confusing jumble of content. But from a distance, it was beautiful art that communicated wholeness and **order** and joy.

Sometimes Paul's letters are like that. We might pick and choose verses that comfort us when we're struggling, or maybe those that agree with our presuppositions and help us make a point. We know that some of this letter to the Corinthians is confusing – case in point, Mark taught on chapter 11 a couple of weeks ago.

But no matter how hard to understand some of the text is, the truth is just like that mosaic I saw in Chicago. A lot of Paul's words make more sense when you zoom out to get a big picture view. That short phrase about women being silent is like two small, broken pieces of pottery that make a lot more sense when you understand it as part of a larger piece of art.

Full disclosure – I'm going to put on my professor hat today and geek out a little bit on the academics. As Mark did a couple of weeks back, I'll start by giving credit where credit is due.

**[CREDIT SLIDE—Two Book Covers and Jeff Miller Photo]**

While I've read numerous books over the last several years, the two that have been most helpful to me on this particular section of scripture are Kenneth Bailey's *Paul through Mediterranean Eyes*, and Anthony Thiselton's commentary on *1 Corinthians*. (available atrium) I also need to give a shout out to my Greek professor from seminary, Dr. Jeff Miller, who's published dozens of academic articles on Bible translation as well as this specific text over the last 20 years. His walk through of this chapter in second year Greek was extremely informative.

When you know what **Paul's overall priorities** are, you can interpret Paul's individual letters (and even verses) through that broader, birds-eye view. Paul's priorities are present throughout this letter to the Corinthians, and they give us the foundation – the framework – for what we'll study today:

**[SLIDE—House with priority words (see photo)—one click at a time]**

- in chapter 13. - Priorities like the need to show **LOVE** for one another
- from chapter 12. - The fact that we are **ONE BODY**, and that **UNITY** is possible with the **DIVERSITY** of gifts in the church
- in both chapters 7 and 11 - The priority of **MUTUALITY** – that we need each other
  - all of these priorities are for the **COMMON GOOD** of the church.
- Also for Paul, the supreme priority of the **GOSPEL WITNESS** is always in view, as in chapter 9 when he said he became all things to all people so that by any means he might save some.

As I've studied chapter 14 over the last several years, I'm convinced that each one of these priorities can help us redeem what seems to be a limiting text. And, I contend that one other priority intersects with all these others – the priority of **BUILDING UP THE CHURCH.**

In today's text, Paul writes about how the Corinthians use their gifts in the congregation – particularly tongue speaking and prophecy – and the importance of all things **being done in a way that edifies others.** In the Greek, that word is "***oikodomei***"

Note these phrases from the first half of the chapter – when you see a word in bold, that's where they translated the word ***oikodomei***:

**[SLIDE—all at once; keep the one word in each emphasized; YES put the Greek word at the top]**

- (3) the one who prophesies speaks to people for their **strengthening** [building up, edification], encouraging, and comfort.
- (4) ...the one who prophesies **edifies** [builds up] the church.
- (5) ...the one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues (unless someone interprets) so that the church may be **edified** [built up].
- (12) Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that **build up** [edify] the church.

So, now that we have some of that context in mind, let's hear the text in its entirety before we break it down into smaller sections.

[Alex read this excerpt]

**[SLIDES: 1 Corinthians 14:26–40]**

26 What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.

Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.

27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. 28 If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God.

29 Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. 30 And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. 31 For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.

32 The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. 33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people.

34 Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. 35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

36 Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? 37 If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command. 38 But if anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored.

39 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

Last week Mark mentioned how Paul uses a Chiasm to show how chapters 11–14 in 1 Corinthians relate to and inform one another. A Chiasm is tool of rhetoric—something 1<sup>st</sup> century writers used to shape their message and help people remember or note what was most important. I’ve simplified Kenneth Bailey’s language a bit, but it looks like this:

**[SLIDE]**

- (A) 11 – Boundaries and behavior in worship
- (B) 12 – Spiritual gifts for building up the body of Christ
- (C) 13 – The priority of LOVE
- (B 2) 14:1–25 Spiritual gifts for building up the body of Christ
- (A 2) 14:26–40 Boundaries and behavior in worship

Chapter 11 and the last half of 14 give us boundaries for our behavior in worship. We need order so that the church is built up.

Chapter 12 and the first half of 14 talk about spiritual gifts for the common good – what will BUILD UP the body of Christ.

And in the center of this chiasm, the most important thing for Paul (as we learned last week) is LOVE. In today's text we're going to learn that...

**[SLIDE] BOUNDARIES in the BODY are for the COMMON GOOD so that the Church is BUILT UP.**

Paul uses two rhetorical tools in chapter 14 to help us (and his original audience) follow along with what's important in this section. **The first tool he uses** to set this section apart is **a mini-chiasm that refers back to his earlier theme** in the beginning, middle, and end of today's text.

**[SLIDE] (1 Cor 14:26) What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.**

By starting with the phrase “What then shall we say?” Paul makes it clear that the section we're about to enter is a continuation of theme he mentions in the first 25 verses of chapter 14. The fact that “each one” has a hymn, etc, gives us a clue that the house churches of Corinth, probably only 30-40 people, are more like our community groups than our more structured worship services. The idea was that in these Christian assemblies, a variety of people shared in the teaching and encouraging part of the service – **so that the church may be built up.**

**[same slide—add] (14:33) For God is not a God of disorder but of peace – as in all the congregations of the Lord's people.**

Here in the middle, Paul reminds us that God's church should reflect God's peace. The theme continues because when the church is at peace – when our worship is orderly – **the church will be built up.**

**[same slide—add]**

**(14:40) Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.**

Paul will close out this section reminding the Corinthians that an orderly worship service is one of the ways we make sure that what we do **builds up the church.** Just like with Creation – God wants to turn chaos into order. As we walk through the verses between

26 and 40, we'll notice specific boundaries Paul puts in place that help the church accomplish this goal of **orderly worship that builds up the body**.

**The second tool Paul uses is a *repeated word*.** In the Greek, that word is ***sigao***. Guess what that Greek word means? Verbal Silence. Be Quiet. Hush up! Pipe down.

This repetition is harder to see in the NIV because each time the word is used, the translators give it a slightly different nuance. But **Paul's repeats that word three times in reference to three groups of people**. Let's walk through the rest of the text, starting in verse 27, and on the slides, we'll mark in **bold** where that Greek word shows up:

**[SLIDE] 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. 28 If there is no interpreter, the speaker should **keep quiet** in the church and speak to himself and to God.**

**The first group of people Paul addresses are tongue speakers.**

I grew up in churches where they didn't believe this miraculous gift was an option, and I've personally never heard anyone speak in tongues. In scripture, the word usually refers to a "different language" like we see on the day of Pentecost. And we don't hear a lot today about the gift of tongues. Miraculous "message" gifts might have been more helpful then because they didn't have access to the printed Bible we have today.

But in our denomination, the Alliance, it's allowed, it's just not required to prove that you have a gift of the Spirit. The Spirit's gifts show up in all kinds of ways. So maybe you've heard someone speak in tongues or experienced it yourself. That spiritual gift is allowed here just as it was in Corinth—but **Paul establishes a BOUNDARY to make sure the church is built up!**

Everybody needs to take turns. They have to speak one at a time—to preserve order—and they have to have an interpreter. Why? Because earlier Paul clarified that without an interpreter, no one in the church **would be built up**. Without an interpreter, that **tongue speaker should "SIGAO"** and let someone else edify the church.

Next section:

**[SLIDE] 29 Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. 30 And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should **stop**. 31 For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. 32 The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. 33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord's people.**

## The second group of people Paul addresses are prophets.

When we hear the word prophet, we might be tempted to think of Huldah or Balaam in the Old Testament who received and delivered a special message from the Lord. Or someone who predicted the exile like Jeremiah or Isaiah. But earlier in the chapter, Paul tells us what he means by those who prophesy; **they speak to people for their strengthening, encouraging, and comfort.** In other words, kind of like what Mark does most Sundays, only in the house churches of Corinth they were more likely to have multiple people share as part of their worship time.

Paul also makes clear that prophets have control over the time and place they share a prophecy. (they are “Subject to the control of prophets”) Corinthian worship allowed multiple voices – not just the trained rhetorician – to speak words of encouragement out loud, as long as they are orderly. So even today, spiritual gifts don’t have to overtake our logic or interrupt the order of the service in order to be effectively used **for the common good.**

As he did earlier, **Paul establishes a BOUNDARY to make sure the church is built up.** They have to speak one at a time and share the floor if someone else has a word. They have to “**SIGAO**” to make sure that others with prophetic gifts have an opportunity to use those gifts as long as it is orderly. Why? *Because God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people.* And that brings us to the third group:

**[SLIDE] 34 [The] Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. 35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.**

**The third group Paul addresses are some women. We finally unearthed the “elephant in the room.”**

As I mentioned earlier, these two verses have sometimes been singled out to silence women in all sorts of contexts, not the least of which is our present one, preaching in a worship service. But remember the mosaic we mentioned at the beginning. These two verses are a small piece in the middle of a much larger section concerned with the issue of **orderly worship. Paul establishes a boundary to make sure the church is built up.** Just like tongue speakers and prophets, **these women must “SIGAO”** to limit disruption in the service.

As you may have guessed, in the world of evangelical scholarship, there are a variety of ways to interpret this text. Bible scholars and translators are also shaped by their experience and worldview, so they DO make different choices during their interpretation. Notice the two extreme views on this scale.

**[SLIDE] Options for interpretation (verses 34–35 especially)**

Face Value	Paul corrects a few specific women	Paul quotes, then corrects	Paul didn't write this
------------	------------------------------------	----------------------------	------------------------



**NOTE – I flipped the order in which one you remove first**

One extreme is to just take the words at face value —I mean, the Bible is clear, right? **[slide click—take off “Face Value”]**. Unfortunately, you don't have to look far to see that churches aren't consistent about silence for women. Does it mean making announcements? Singing in worship? Offering a prayer? It's not actually clear, so churches apply it in dozens of different ways.

Another extreme view is that Paul didn't write these two verses, and so they just throw them out. I disagree with that hypothesis, **[slide click—take off “Paul didn't write this”]** so we're not going to take time to unpack it today. I just want to acknowledge **how many** interpretive choices exist. All this to say, I'll focus on the two options in the middle.

On **why** so many approaches might exist, I'll share a story:

From the time I was 10 years old, my dad was the preacher I listened to every Sunday morning. I don't remember many of those sermons, though I can imagine he taught on this text at least once or twice. More than the **sermons I heard**, though, what shaped my worldview was **what I saw** in my church experience. While women could ask questions in Sunday school, I never heard a woman pray or lead worship or read the Bible aloud until I was in my late 30s. Perhaps like some of you, I never heard a woman preach until I was nearly 50 years old. While I often assumed I would marry a preacher, it never occurred to me that I might eventually preach.

I often heard that women were expected to be seen and not heard – but I can be pretty outspoken. I often heard that women should stick to potlucks and childcare – but what I really got excited about was studying the Bible. In my business experience, I led a team of 40 people and trained at our national conference in front of hundreds – but in church I followed and listened and helped with the kids. I felt like **my gifts didn't fit** where the church wanted me to serve. I wondered if I was the **broken** one – if God made a mistake when I was wired to lead.

I know that personal experience should not guide how we interpret this text. However, it does remind us that **our experiences CAN and DO shape what we expect to find in the text.** This is also the case for every Bible translator, which leads us into these verses.

Verses 34-35 of this chapter are filled with messy questions for interpreters. My professor, Dr. Jeff Miller, addresses several challenges in an article he published titled “Translation Troubles.” In other words, there are so many challenges in these specific two verses that he uses it as a test case for challenges in translation! Let’s walk through a few of those and I hope it will help us see that in this text, the limitation on women is related to the issue of **orderly worship so that the church is built up.**

**[Possible Slide: “Three challenges”—build one challenge at a time]**

The first challenge is **translating a word inconsistently or imprecisely.** For instance, remember I mentioned how the NIV translation makes the choice to translate **SIGAO** with different nuances – “keep quiet,” “stop,” and “remain silent.” This can prevent a reader from realizing **the word SIGAO is used three times as a pattern.** The meanings themselves don’t vary enough to be concerning, but missing the pattern means we lose a clue that the women are **one of three** sets of people Paul asks to be quiet.

The second challenge could be seen as two sides of the same coin—either **removing a word that’s present in the Greek, or adding a word that is not present in the Greek.**

The NIV adds the word “remain,” which unnecessarily emphasizes the word “silent.” And perhaps more significantly, the NIV leaves out a word that is present in the Greek.

First, you may have noticed that when I read these verses, I included the word [**The**] in brackets. That word **is** present in the Greek, and I believe signifies some specific women—not all women everywhere for all time. Remember, the Corinthians had written Paul about some specific issues they wanted him to address, which he does with this letter. It makes sense that Paul would have known about which women they were referring to, even though it’s not clear to us in the text.

Another reason I believe Paul is referring to some specific women is that verse 35 says “if they want to inquire about something, they should ask their **own** husbands at home.” Some translations, including the ESV, leave out the word [**own**]. Dr. Miller explains this significance well, so I’ll quote him to explain:

**[quote slide with Dr. Miller picture] “...the word ‘own’ is present for emphasis and should therefore not be omitted. This sentence reveals a key to the passage: **the type of speaking that certain women are to stop is the asking of questions.** Paul is not addressing preaching or teaching. He is addressing behavior ‘in the pews.’ The**



*previous several verses have been about speaking in tongues and prophesying in an orderly and edifying way. Now Paul says that the asking of questions should also not be disruptive.”*

Women discovering their new-found freedom in Christ may have been speaking out of turn more than they should have. And as less educated participants in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Corinth, it would have been inappropriate for them to interrupt and ask questions. In fact, it would have been inappropriate for them to speak to a man in public unless they were married to him. Paul was glad for women to learn, but these women needed to ask their own husbands, and not interrupt the worship to ask questions of other men.

A third challenge in these verses relates to **variations in capitalization, paragraph divisions, and/or punctuation.** For instance,

- Some translations **capitalize the word Law** (which might make you think it refers to the Torah, or the Law of Moses.) But there is no law in the Torah (or anywhere in the Old Testament) that requires women to be silent or in submission. There may well have been a Greco-Roman law that prohibited from women speaking in public assemblies (and the word we translate “church” simply means “assembly”)
- **Add slide** - Some translations **divide verse 33** and move the phrase “as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people...” to connect with the phrase about women being silent.

<sup>33</sup> For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

As in all the churches of the saints, <sup>34</sup> 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. **(ESV)**

<sup>33</sup> For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people.

<sup>34</sup> Women<sup>®</sup> should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the **law** says. **(NIV)**

- (You can actually see this variance in the ESV). I think the NIV gets this part right, because if you move the phrase to connect with verse 34, the emphasis **moves away** from the verse on “**orderly worship**,” which we already established as the point of this passage by Paul.
- A final challenge in this category is the **possibility of “quoted sayings”** by Paul that don’t always include punctuation. The original Greek didn’t include punctuation so translators are constantly debating those choices. That could be happening in verses 34-35. Several scholars raise the question as to whether both verses, or at least the phrase “it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church,” could be a Corinthian saying that Paul quotes.

Now please hear me when I say - **none of these challenges make me doubt the authority or authenticity and accuracy of the text!** But they might cause us to ask why the variations exist, and perhaps give pause before making these verses the main point of chapter 14.

The reason some scholars think Paul is **quoting, then refuting** here is because of what comes next:

**[SLIDE]** *36 Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? 37 If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. 38 But if anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored.*

The small Greek word translated “OR” is often pronounced  $\bar{\alpha}$  - and it can be described as an “Expletive of Disassociation” – It’s similar to places where Paul says, “May it never be!” In other words, it’s not just the meaning of “this OR that” it’s an **emphatic refutation** of what came before. Listen to verse 36 again, but instead of “Or” I’ll supply the vernacular:

*36 **Wait a minute!** did the word of God originate with you? **Hang on,** are you the only people it has reached?*

This small expletive at the beginning of 36 gives us a clue that Paul may be refuting something he said before. While Paul has placed temporary **boundaries** around these women asking questions for the sake of order, he’s not silencing them permanently – which makes even more sense as we continue in the text.

**[SLIDE]** *39 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.*

Paul affirms that while he established boundaries for the sake of order, he’s not limiting them altogether.

**[SLIDE]** **BOUNDARIES in the BODY are for the COMMON GOOD so that the Church is BUILT UP.** **\*\*PRODUCTION TEAM—KEEP THIS SLIDE UP UNTIL IT’S REPEATED BELOW (until Dawn moves to the Pat Schneider section)**

I know I’ve geeked out on the academic side of this text and shared a lot of Greek tidbits, and some of you want to learn more—if that’s you, reach out via e-mail and I’ll forward some of my sources or let you know the next time Karl and I teach a class on the topic. But honestly, many of you may be thinking—how in the world does all this matter to me?

I understand your frustration, and believe me, as much as I love the theology side of these conversations, where the rubber meets the road, where it really matters in the church, what I really care about, is how is this theology going to affect our practice?

How is it going to change how we treat one another? How is it going to affect the way our local congregation welcomes people and seeks the common good? How can we encourage every person to use their gifts **so that the church is built up?**

**In 1 Cor 14, Paul reminds us that:**

- Tongue speakers are welcome in the **body**,
- Prophets are welcome in the **body**,
- Women are welcome in the **body**, and every person's gifts **BELONG**.
- The goal is to **build up the Body of Christ**, and the priority is **LOVE**.

**[SLIDE] BOUNDARIES in the BODY are for the COMMON GOOD so that the Church is BUILT UP.**

**[SLIDE]** In her book, *How the Light Gets In*, Pat Schneider asks "What is saved or redeemed or ransomed in the act of writing?" She believes writing saved her life. By writing memoir, she ransomed her life from silence and found her voice. She writes "Something in me that was broken, cracked, becomes whole. The cracks, if I write them with utter honesty, are where the light gets in. The present meets the past, and healing begins." **Red light moment**

In many ways, I've seen study and writing and teaching and preaching save my own life. It ransomed my life from **silence** and helped me find my **voice**. What was **broken** became whole. The cracks allowed **light to get in** and healing to begin. I started to feel like **my gifts could fit in**.

Maybe my healing becomes a piece of someone else's redemption. Maybe it allows a **woman** in the room to feel seen **and** heard. Maybe it invites a **man** in the room to wonder how his wife might be invited to use her gifts. Maybe it **cracks open a door** for a young person who needs someone else's **light to get in**, to help them see **how they fit**.

**[MOSAIC SLIDE]** It's not unlike the mosaic we saw in the beginning. **Each piece broken**, marred, lost, discarded. Seemingly **random pieces** joined together by an **artist** who had a larger, beautiful picture in mind. That's a beautiful picture of the church as well. Broken people, often discarded, lost in their sin, marred with pain and loneliness.

- Imagine if each one of us realized how much we **need each other**.
- Imagine a church where **every person** offers their spiritual gifts in **love** and **mutuality**. One body seeking the common good **to build up the church**.

- Joined together by the master **Creator** who has an **orderly**, more **beautiful**, and **eternal** picture in mind. [prayer]