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# The Textual Problem of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35

As in all the churches of the saints, 14:34 the women should be silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak. Rather, let them be in submission, as in fact the law says. 14:35 If they want to find out about something, they should ask their husbands at home. —NET Bible

In discussions taking place over the role of women in the church, most tension points focus on syntactical, contextual, and historical reconstructions. In recent years, however, the wording of the text has come into question in one of the major ‘gynecological’ passages. [First Corinthians 14:34-35](#) should be excised from the text, according to various scholars (principally Straatman, Fitzner, Barrett, Ruef, Fee, and Payne). This is because many of the Western witnesses have these verses after v. 40, while the rest of the tradition retains them here.<sup>1</sup> There are **no** manuscripts that omit the verses.

Why, then, would some scholars wish to excise the verses? Because they believe that this best explains how they could end up in two different locations, that is to say, that the verses got into the text by way of a very early gloss added in the margin. Most scribes put the gloss after v. 33; others, not knowing where they should go, put them at the end of the chapter. Fee points out that “Those who wish to maintain the authenticity of these verses must at least offer an **adequate** answer as to how this arrangement came into existence if Paul wrote them originally as our vv. 34-35” (*First Corinthians* [NICNT] 700). In a footnote he adds, “The point is that **if it were already in the text after v. 33**, there is no **reason** for a copyist to make such a radical transposition.” This is an excellent question, though the flip-side is also one that deserves pondering: an adequate answer needs to be given as to how this reading could show up in all the witnesses if it were not original.

Although it is not our intention to interact with proponents of the shorter text in any detail here, a couple of points ought to be made. (1) Since these verses occur in **all witnesses to 1 Corinthians**, to argue that they are not original means that they must have crept into the text at the earliest stage of transmission. How early? Earlier than when the *pericope adulterae* ([John 7:53-8:11](#)) made its way into the text (late second, early third century?), earlier than the longer ending of Mark (16:9-20) was produced (early second century?), and earlier than even “in Ephesus” was added to [Eph 1:1](#) (upon reception of the letter by the first church to which it came, the church at Ephesus [c. AD 60])—because in these other, similar places, the **earliest** witnesses do not **add** the words. This text thus stands as remarkable, unique—simply because **all** the witnesses add these words. Indeed, since this is so, the evidence points to them as having been

inserted into the *original* document. Who would have done such a thing? And, further, why would scribes have regarded it as original since it was obviously added in the margin? This leads to our second point.

(2) Following a suggestion made by E. Earle Ellis (“The Silenced Wives of Corinth (I Cor. 14:34-5), in *New Testament Textual Criticism: Its Significance for Exegesis* [ed. E. J. Epp and G. D. Fee; Oxford, 1981] 213-20 [the suggestion comes at the end of the article, almost as an afterthought]), it is likely that Paul himself added the words in the margin. Since it was so much material to add, Paul could have squelched any suspicions by indicating that the words were his (e.g., by adding his name or some other means [cf. 2 Thess 3:17]). This way no scribe would think that the material was inauthentic. (Incidentally, this is unlike the textual problem at Rom 5:1, for there only one letter was at stake; hence, scribes would easily have thought that the “text” reading was original. And Paul would hardly be expected to add his signature for one letter!) (3) What then is to account for the uniform Western tradition of having the verses at the end of the chapter? Our conjecture (and that is all it is) is that the scribe of the Western *Vorlage* (or one of its ancestors) could no longer read where the verses were to be added (any marginal arrows or other directional device could have been smudged), but, recognizing that this was part of the original text, felt compelled to put it somewhere. The least offensive place would have been at the end of the material on church conduct (end of chapter 14), before the instructions about the resurrection began. Although there were no chapter divisions in the earliest period of copying, scribes could still detect thought breaks (note the usage in the earliest papyri). (4) The very location of the verses in the Western tradition argues strongly that Paul both authored vv. 34-35 and that they were originally part of the margin of the text.<sup>2</sup>

Otherwise, we have a difficulty explaining why no scribe seemed to have hinted that these verses might be inauthentic (the scribal sigla of codex B, as noticed by Payne, can be interpreted otherwise than as an indication of inauthenticity). There are apparently no manuscripts that have an asterisk or obelisk in the margin. Yet in other places in the NT where scribes doubted the authenticity of the clauses before them, they often noted their protest with an asterisk or obelisk. We are thus compelled to regard the words as original, and as belonging where they are in the text above.

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<sup>1</sup> Fee gives the textual evidence as follows: “Most MSS (including P<sup>46</sup> A B K Ψ 0243 33 81 1739 Maj) include these verses here [after v. 33]; they are found after v. 40 in D F G 88\* a b d f g Ambrosiaster Sedulius-Scotus, thus the entire Western tradition” (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NICNT] 699, n. 1). A couple of comments are in order regarding this evidence. First, **x** seems to have been overlooked (it has the verses after v. 33). Second, that the ‘entire Western tradition’ supports the reading after v. 40 seems to be an overstatement, for it<sup>dem. x. z</sup> are Western witnesses, but are listed with the majority in the UBS text; the Nestle-Aland text even lists “lat”—indicating the *majority* of Old Latin witnesses (all of which are Western)—as having these verses immediately after v. 33. Further, it should be noted that d f g are simply the Latin side (or, in the case of G, the Latin line of an interlinear text) of the MSS D F G. Their testimony ought to be

discounted, for both the Latin and the Greek of the same manuscript would be expected to line up with one another. The evidence of the Western text thus appears almost evenly split.

<sup>2</sup> Fee mentions Ellis' view, but does not list it as an option to consider (ibid.).

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