

God's Word in human words

I would take issue with one point of an otherwise excellent review of (Kenton Sparks' book) *God's Word in Human Words* in *J. Creation* 27(2), pages 33–36.

In the section “New Testament Turns” I believe the attempt to ‘defend’ the Apostle Paul is misguided. Obviously in today’s ‘politically correct’ climate, many of Paul’s views are ‘out of step’ with our culture. The question would be whether or not 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 is the teaching of the apostle, or merely a quote of something the Corinthians were saying. Paul is capable of quoting a Corinthian opinion then qualifying it, as in 1 Corinthians 7:1 where the saying “It is good for a man not to touch a woman”¹ is first introduced as a thing *they* had written to him. Paul follows the quote with a ‘nevertheless’ making it clear that he could not let that slogan stand as an absolute.

But certain things are true of 1 Corinthians 14:34–35. For one thing, there is no introduction that the verses came from the Corinthians. For another thing, there is no ‘nevertheless’ or qualification of the statement. I believe it is extremely important to derive the intention of the apostle by the words he actually uses, rather than imposing some other ‘real intention’ from outside sources.

Strong support that Paul meant what he said is found in 1 Timothy 2:11–15. We have a triple repetition in 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35:

“Let your women keep silent in the churches ... they are not permitted to speak

“... it is shameful for women to speak in church.”

If there could be any doubt we look at the pastoral epistle of 1 Timothy 2:11–12:

“Let a woman learn in silence with all submission.

“And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.”

Here the review article evades the force of the verse by calling it

merely a response to a hyper-feminist heresy in Ephesus. This is speculation about the ‘real intention’ of the apostle, which just happens to overturn what he actually said. Not only does the grammatical historical analysis of the text give us the real intention of the author (he meant what he said), but what follows is very important because it gives Paul’s real reason for making his (now controversial) statement. Upon what does he ground his statement? Is it on the supposed aberration of secular culture in Ephesus?

Paul grounds his views on the role of women in the church on three timeless truths: Creation, Fall, and God-created structure for society. These profound truths are neither temporary nor geographically limited:

1. The *order* of Creation is significant for Paul—“For Adam was formed first, then Eve” (1 Timothy 2:13).
2. The circumstances of the Fall—“And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Timothy 2:14).
3. To show that Paul is speaking particularly of governing or authoritative teaching, he continues in chapter 3 that the bishop/elder “then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2).
4. There is a God-given structure of authority—“But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Corinthians 11:3).

There is no reason to overturn the apostle’s clear teaching, just because it is unpopular in our society, just as it may have been in the Ephesian culture.

The example of the disorderly Corinthian church does not overturn Paul’s teaching. In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul is dealing with the seemingly unimportant issue of head coverings. He recommends that the Christian women of Corinth wear the head coverings. But Paul in verse 16 acknowledges that his advice is only a ‘custom’ and that it is not even a universal custom. He says “we have

no such custom, nor do the churches of God”. To translate the verse “we have no other custom” is a faulty translation as the Greek words clearly mean ‘no such’ custom. For the other churches that had no such custom, it seems that the woman’s long hair was all the ‘covering’ necessary (verse 15).

We would not suppose that there was an imposition of absolute silence. There is reason to think that only authoritative and governing offices are excluded of the women. It is to be expected that they should join in corporate prayer and singing. The consistent and clear teaching of the apostle is to be received as the Word of God, our rule of faith and practice.

I commend Mr Holding in his desire to defend the authority of Scripture. He is certainly on the right track in opposing the views of Mr Sparks. My criticism relates to only a small part of what I consider an excellent review. Very likely these new ‘interpretations’ of Paul seemed like a quick and easy way of defending from the charge of being anti-women. Paul (as written) was certainly not anti-women, he merely sets forth a God-ordained structure of authority. Nothing could possibly be a greater blessing for a woman, nor could anything demonstrate her value more perfectly than fulfilling her God-appointed role.

As Paul says in Titus 2:4–5 (KJV):

“That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children,
“To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.”

To say that this is less important than being a CEO is folly. Much more could be said, but this is not a book!

Donald D. Crowe
Canton, GA

UNITED STATES of AMERICA

References

1. Quotes taken from the New King James Version.