

Christ and Gender Roles
Key Passages
John Launchbury

Recall how we analyze Scripture...

Jude :9 But when the archangel Michael contended with the devil and disputed about the body of Moses, he did not dare to bring a condemnation of slander against him, but said, “The Lord rebuke you!”

- We look at the details of the words
 - e.g. note that it is the “body” of Moses
- We look for echoes of other writings
 - **Zech 3:2** The LORD said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?”
- We connect with historical events
 - The re-establishment of the priesthood

We will apply our standard methods to the key passages on gender-based roles

The key passages

Speaking

1Cor 14:33-35 women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. [NRSV]

Speaking, Teaching

1Tim 2:11-14 Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. [NRSV]

Leadership

1Tim 3:2 Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach... [ESV]

At the end, ask ourselves whether we still think that these passages teach that women were not permitted to have a vocal/teaching/leading role in the first century?

1 Cor 14:34-35

[1 Cor 14:34-35](#) women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

If taken at face value, these verses would prove too much:

- “Silent” means silent – no questions, no discussions, no singing, no conversations
- “In the churches” – which would include any ecclesial gathering (not just communion)
- Questions are prohibited – which goes against the idea that men and women form a teaching parable about the relationship between Christ and the church (as some claim)

In this exact church in Corinth, spirit-gifted women were not silent in church services

- The context describes women praying [in a tongue] and prophesying ([1 Cor 11](#))
- These were vocal roles legitimized by the apostles and prophets ([Acts 2:17](#))

The immediate context requires us to look carefully at these verses

1Cor 14 is entirely about the flow of worship together

1Cor 14:28 When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God.

1Cor 14:30 If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first be silent.

1Cor 14:33 God is a God not of disorder but of peace.

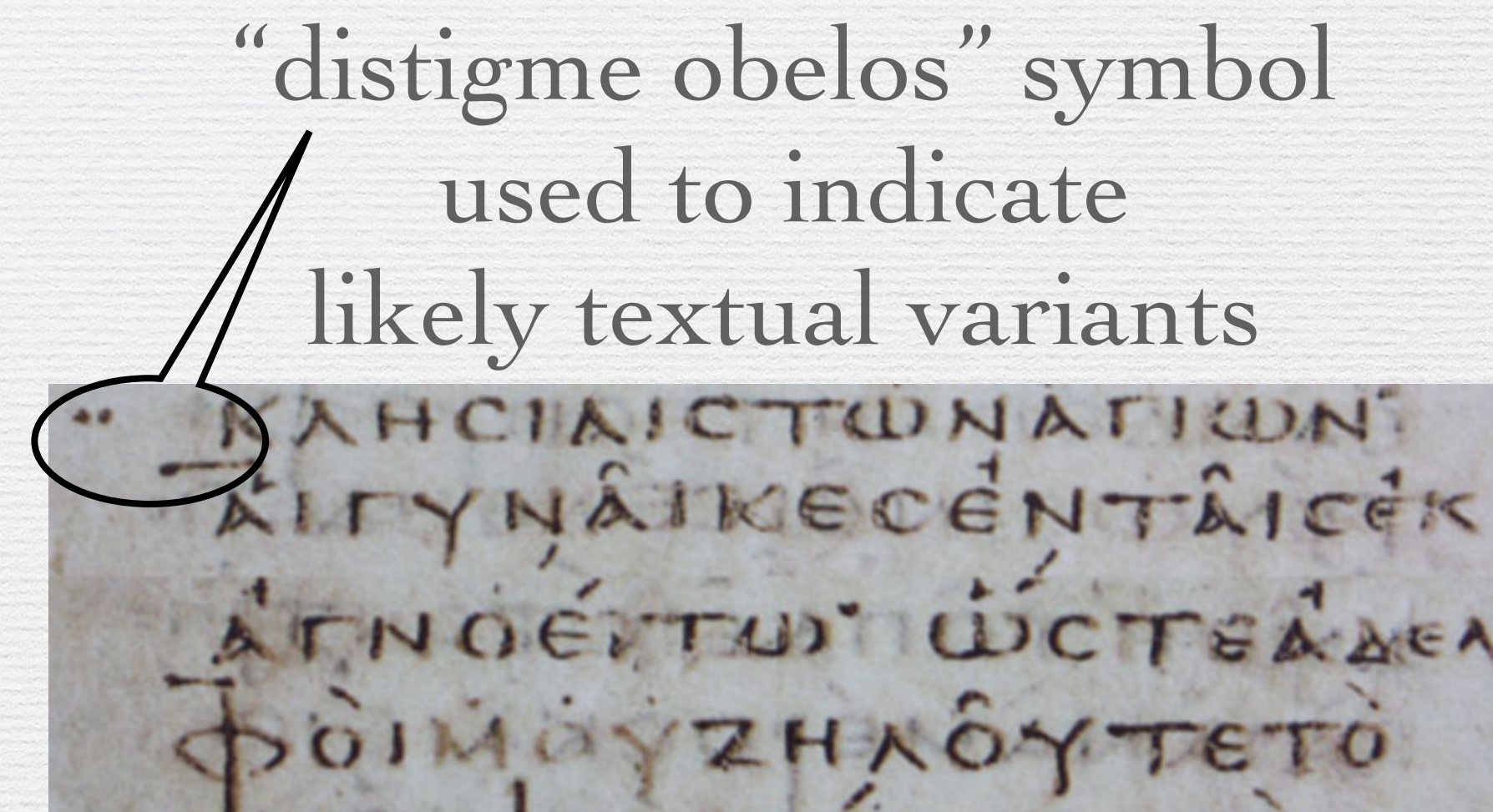
Having the flow of the meeting disrupted by called-out questions would be unhelpful

- Men and women may have sat separately in synagogue style
- Women would likely be the ones calling out questions (as they were less educated)
- You women, be silent and wait until you get home, i.e. submit to the needs of the meeting

Avoiding disruption would not prohibit the exercise of vocal spirit gifts

Evidence that 1Cor 14:34-35 started a marginal note

- A notoriously careful scribe marked these verses as likely additions in AD 325–350 (while copying the Greek Codex Vaticanus from older manuscripts)
- In roughly half of the western manuscripts, these verses appear in a different place (after verse 40), also evidence of them being a later addition
- “The Law” likely refers to Jewish tradition – the Law of Moses does not have anything like it – Paul rejects Jewish tradition
- Cultural echoes: Marcus Portius Cato criticized women for speaking up “Could you not each of you put the very same question to your husbands at home?” (Livy Book 34.2, published about 40 years earlier)



Payne, Philip B. “Vaticanus Distigme-Obelos Symbols Marking Added Text, Including 1 Corinthians 14.34–5.” *New Testament Studies* 63, no. 4 (2017): 604–25

This is enough evidence to make us want other verses

1Tim 2:11-15

1Tim 2:11-15 Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.

- At first, the reasoning seems to be...
 - A male should be in authority because Adam was created first
 - A woman should not teach because Eve shows that women are more easily deceived
- And yet...
 - God often turns natural order on its head
(the older shall serve the younger; Jesus, the second Adam; ...)
 - God repeatedly has entrusted women as teachers and witnesses

The detail of the verses themselves force us to look carefully

Silence → Peacefulness

- The word translated here as “silent” should be translated as “peaceably” — gentleness rather than striving.
[ESV] Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.
- Other examples of the same Greek word
 - [1Tim 2:2](#) that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.
 - [2Th 3:12](#) Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat.
 - [Acts 11:18](#) When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.”
 - [Acts 22:2](#) When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, [the crowd] became very quiet.

These verses are not about silence at all

The deception of Eve

- Elsewhere, Paul uses Eve's deception as a warning to the whole church (male and female)
 - [2Cor 11:2-3](#) I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.
- Also, Paul honors women as teachers
 - Paul's close friends Pricilla and Aquila together taught the gospel to Apollos (Acts 18:26)
 - Paul encourages Timothy to keep faith because he could trust the teachings of his mother and grandmother (2Tim 1:5, 3:13)
 - Paul exhorts older women to teach what is good (Tit 2:3)
- The Greek word "for" also means "indeed"
 - Passage: "... keep silent. For Adam ... first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived..."
 - It may be that Paul is not introducing a reasoning step, but a related piece of information

There seems to be context to Paul's train of thought we are missing

Artemis in Ephesus

- In Greek mythology, Ephesus was founded by the Amazons, women leaders who had slain their men-folk
- The Ephesian Artemis – virginal fertility goddess – was thought to have power to protect women through the trauma of childbirth
- Gnostic myths conflated Artemis with Eve

After the day of rest, Sophia sent Zoe her daughter, who is called Eve, as an instructor so that she should raise up Adam, who had no soul in him, so that those whom he would beget should become vessels of the light. When Eve saw her co-likeness lying flat, she showed pity upon him and said, “Adam, live! Rise up upon the earth.” Straightaway her word became a deed. For when Adam had risen up, he immediately opened his eyes. When he saw her, he said “You will be called ‘the mother of the living,’ because you are the one who has given me life.”

Nag Hammadi Codex, II, Tractate 5, 115

Paul’s letter to Timothy seems to be addressing the early stages of this heresy head-on

- Watch out for teachers of false doctrines and devotees of myths (1Tim 1:3-4)
- Eve was not the originator, and she was not perfect — she was the one deceived
- Do not rely on Artemis to save you through childbirth, but trust in Christ who can truly save
- Turn away from what is falsely called “gnosis” (knowledge) (1Tim 6:20-21)

Further observations

- The word for “usurp authority” [KJV] or “have authority” [NIV] is difficult to translate
 - It does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament (or in the LXX)
 - In Greek literature it suggests abusive or grossly insubordinate behavior
 - Louw & Nida Greek Dictionary translates it “to domineer”
- The whole passage is likely set in a marriage context
 - References to Adam and Eve and to childbearing both suggest a marriage context
 - “She will be kept safe through the childbirth if they [the couple?] remain in faith...”
- Paul may well be addressing specific teachings and practices of cult worship of Artemis
 - “I don’t permit a wife to instruct or domineer over her husband, she must be peaceful.”

Paul’s injunction seems specifically targeted to addressing pagan influence in Ephesus

1 Tim 3:2

1Tim 3:2 Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach... [ESV]

[NRSV] Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher,...

- The literal Greek is, “a one-woman man”
 - Does he mean to exclude someone who is unmarried?
 - What about someone who is widowed?
 - What if a widower had remarried?
 - The feminine version of the phrase is “a one-man woman” is translated as marital faithfulness
- 1Tim 5:9** No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband,... [ESV]

... Paul is probably not
intending to be so specific

Paul intends simply to require that an overseer be faithful in marriage

Deacons

- The same language is used of deacons
 - 1Tim 3:12 Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. [ESV]
[NRSV] Let deacons be married only once, and let them manage their children and their households well
- Women were deacons
 - Paul wrote positively about Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchrea (Rom. 16:1)
 - Pliny the governor of nearby Bithynia writes to the emperor Trajan about two Christian deaconesses whom he tortures for information (Letters 10.96-97, 112AD)
- In both cases (overseers and deacons) Paul is following standard language norms of using a masculine form of language simply as representative of all people

The use of masculine language does not imply females are not included

The key passages have been severely misunderstood

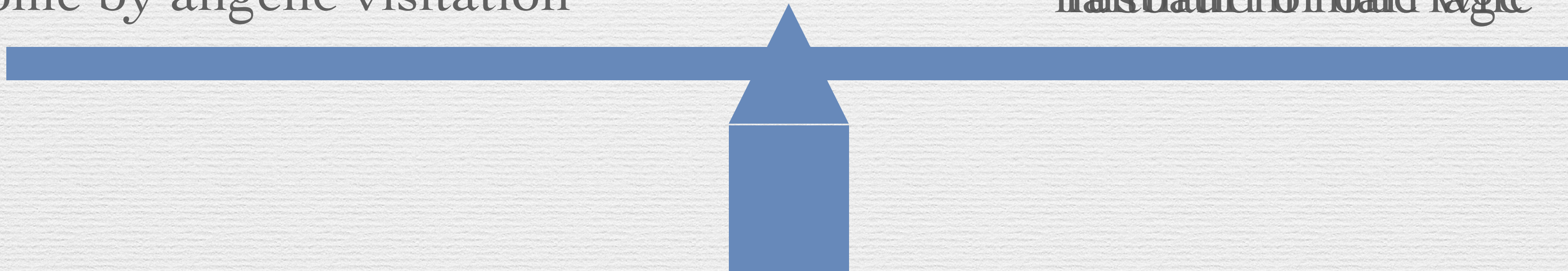
	1Cor 14:33-35	1Tim 2:11-15	1Tim 2:11-15
Speaking	don't disrupt the meeting with your questions	learn with an attitude of peace	
Teaching		reject pagan teachings to instruct and domineer over your husband	
Leading			church officers must be faithful in marriage

None of these prohibit women in general from vocal, teaching, or leadership roles

Does God prohibit women from speaking/teaching/leading?

At multiple times in history
God appointed women as
prophets and religious leaders;
some by spirit inspiration;
some by angelic visitation

Key passages:
~~do not speak;~~
~~do not teach;~~
~~head of the church~~
~~husband of the church~~



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Key passages:
don't disrupt;
don't domineer;
faithful in marriage

Women spoke, taught, and led in the first century churches with God's blessing

There are still questions that remain to be addressed

- How do Adam & Eve fit into all of this? Didn't that set the framework from the start?
- What does Paul mean when he says the man is the head of the woman?
- What is Paul's intent with the teaching on head covering?
- What should we learn from the Law of Moses about women's religious roles?
- Why were the apostles all men? And most of the prophets and the writers of Scripture?

For those that want to dig deeper, we will address these questions too

So, what should my ecclesia do?

- That's up to each ecclesia
- We are a community...
 - ... bound by shared understanding of God, of Jesus, of our nature, of sin, of our future hope, and of our need for commitment to discipleship
 - ... of assemblies who explicitly allow for independent judgment on disputable matters, while pursuing mutual harmony and support

Rom 14:3-6 Those who eat [anything] must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand... Let all be fully convinced in their own minds... those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.

Faithful ecclesias may arrive at different conclusions about these practical matters