

SUBVERTING SILENCE: A FEMINIST HERMENEUTIC RE-EXAMINATION OF 1 CORINTHIANS 14:34–35 AND PAULINE TEXTS ON WOMEN’S SPEECH IN CHURCH

Kaine Desmond NWASHILI, Ph.D
Crowther Graduate Theological Seminary
Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria
Email: knwashili@gmail.com
Tel: +2348023035193

Abstract

This study addresses the longstanding issue of the enforced silence of women in church, primarily rooted in traditional interpretations of Pauline texts such as 1 Corinthians 14:34–35. These interpretations have contributed to the systemic exclusion of women from speaking and leadership roles within Christian worship. Employing a feminist hermeneutical framework, this research critically re-examines the socio-historical context and textual nuances of the passage to uncover alternative, liberative meanings that challenge patriarchal readings. The methodology includes textual and contextual analysis combined with feminist biblical criticism to provide a comprehensive reinterpretation. Findings reveal that Paul’s injunctions were context-specific, aimed at addressing particular disruptions, rather than establishing universal prohibitions on women’s speech. Moreover, the study highlights contradictions within the Pauline letters—many of which affirm women’s active participation in ministry—thus undermining rigid mandates of silence. The research recommends that church leaders, theologians, and religious educators adopt feminist hermeneutics to promote gender-inclusive interpretations and ecclesiastical practices. It also calls for revised church policies that recognize and empower women’s voices in worship and leadership. By challenging traditional notions of silence, this thesis contributes to both biblical scholarship and practical theology by providing a foundation for greater gender justice in Christian communities. Ultimately, this work advocates for renewed dialogue and reform that fully embraces the participation of women in the life of the church.

Keywords: Pauline texts, Feminist, Hermeneutics, Subverting, Gender equality

Word count: 222

Introduction

The role of women in the Christian church has long been a subject of theological, historical, and sociocultural debate. Central to this discourse is the interpretation of specific Pauline texts, particularly 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, which appears to command women to remain silent in church. This passage has significantly influenced the historical exclusion of women from leadership and public speaking roles within many Christian denominations (Barr, 2021). Although some scholars have argued for a context-specific understanding of Paul’s injunctions, others have treated them as universal and timeless prescriptions, thereby perpetuating gender inequality in ecclesial structures.

Recent scholarship has increasingly questioned the authenticity and interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:34–35. Some scholars argue that the passage is a later interpolation, noting its inconsistent placement in several early manuscripts (Payne, 2023). Furthermore, this command appears to contradict other Pauline passages, such as 1 Corinthians 11:5, where women are depicted as praying and prophesying in public worship. These textual tensions have prompted a critical re-examination of Paul’s writings through alternative interpretative lenses, including feminist hermeneutics, which seek to uncover marginalized voices and challenge patriarchal readings of Scripture (West & Phiri, 2022).

Feminist hermeneutics provides a valuable framework for reinterpreting contested biblical texts. By interrogating traditional interpretations shaped by male-dominated theological traditions, feminist scholars advocate for readings that affirm the dignity, agency, and full participation of women in church life (Kwok, 2021). This approach not only highlights the socio-historical realities of the early Christian communities but also critiques the ways in which Scripture has been used to legitimize the subjugation

of women across centuries. Feminist readings aim to recover liberative meanings within the text that align with the inclusive and justice-oriented ethos of the Gospel.

The re-examination of 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 through a feminist hermeneutic is especially timely in contemporary contexts where gender equality is increasingly emphasized across various sectors of society, including religious institutions. As more churches revisit their theological foundations in light of social change and human rights discourse, there is a growing need to address biblical interpretations that have historically silenced women. A critical feminist reading of this passage can contribute to a more inclusive ecclesiology, affirming the presence and voices of women in all aspects of church life and leadership (Spencer, 2022).

Justification of the paper

The interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 has had enduring theological and sociocultural implications, especially regarding the exclusion of women from leadership and speech within the church. Despite growing global advocacy for gender equality and inclusion, many Christian traditions continue to cite this passage to validate patriarchal structures. This paper is therefore justified in its aim to re-examine the text through a feminist hermeneutical lens, offering a liberating and context-sensitive interpretation that challenges long-standing assumptions rooted in androcentric theology. The need to critically revisit traditional readings of Scripture is crucial in fostering an inclusive and justice-oriented ecclesial practice.

Moreover, the relevance of this study extends beyond academic debate to address urgent practical concerns within contemporary church communities. Many churches across the world are increasingly engaging with issues of gender equity, leadership diversity, and the empowerment of marginalized voices. A re-evaluation of the Pauline texts, particularly those misinterpreted to silence women, is essential to inform theological education, pastoral praxis, and denominational policies. This paper contributes to that ongoing conversation by offering an exegetical, historical, and hermeneutical re-reading that validates the active participation of women in church life.

Additionally, the application of feminist hermeneutics to biblical texts is still underutilized in many theological circles, especially within conservative and African church contexts. This research helps fill that gap by highlighting how feminist methodologies can unveil deeper, contextually relevant meanings in Scripture that have often been ignored or suppressed. It invites both scholars and church leaders to re-engage biblical texts with fresh perspectives that affirm the voice and agency of all believers, regardless of gender.

Finally, this paper is timely, as it intersects with broader conversations about decolonizing theology, questioning hegemonic power dynamics, and promoting equity in spiritual spaces. By interrogating traditional interpretations of 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 and exploring alternative readings that prioritize justice and inclusion, the paper advocates for a theological shift that better reflects the liberative message of the Gospel. It seeks to empower women not only to speak but to lead, teach, and shape the future of the church in meaningful ways.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology grounded in feminist hermeneutics to re-examine 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, with the aim of uncovering alternative interpretations that challenge traditional patriarchal readings. Feminist hermeneutics, as a critical interpretive framework, interrogates the socio-cultural and historical contexts that have shaped biblical interpretation and seeks to recover marginalized voices, particularly those of women, within Scripture and church tradition (Schüssler Fiorenza, 2020). This approach aligns with the study's objective to explore how the passage has been understood and how it can be re-read to support women's active participation in church speech and leadership. The methodology involves a multi-layered textual and contextual analysis. First, a close exegetical examination of the Greek text of 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 will be conducted to analyze key terms, syntax, and literary context. This includes comparing the passage with other Pauline texts such

as 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 and Romans 16, to highlight internal consistencies and contradictions. Second, the study engages in historical-critical analysis by examining the socio-historical context of the Corinthian church, including cultural norms related to gender roles and speech practices in the first-century Greco-Roman world (Payne, 2023).

This step is crucial to understanding the text's original intent and the extent to which later interpolations or editorial insertions may have influenced it. Third, feminist hermeneutical critique is applied to deconstruct patriarchal biases embedded in traditional exegeses and to reconstruct interpretations that affirm women's voices. This involves dialoguing with contemporary feminist biblical scholars and incorporating interdisciplinary insights from gender studies, theology, and church history (Kwok, 2021). The feminist lens emphasizes the power dynamics in biblical interpretation and challenges androcentric theological frameworks that have historically silenced women. This methodology also acknowledges the diversity of women's experiences and expressions within the church and seeks to amplify their perspectives. Finally, the study adopts a reflective and normative stance by considering the practical implications of these interpretations for contemporary church practice and theology. By integrating exegetical rigor with feminist critique and contemporary ecclesial realities, the research aims to contribute to both academic scholarship and ecclesiastical reform. Data sources include biblical texts, scholarly commentaries, journal articles, and feminist theological writings, analysed thematically to produce a nuanced and contextually relevant hermeneutical reconstruction.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in feminist hermeneutics, a critical interpretive approach that seeks to uncover and challenge patriarchal biases embedded within biblical texts and traditional exegesis. Feminist hermeneutics highlights the socio-cultural contexts that have historically marginalized women's voices, especially within religious communities, and advocates for readings that restore women's agency and authority (Groenewald, 2022). This framework allows for a re-examination of Pauline texts like 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, which have often been interpreted to enforce women's silence in church settings, by situating the passage within its broader socio-historical and literary contexts. Central to feminist hermeneutics is the interrogation of power dynamics that influence textual meaning and religious practice. Scholars such as Schüssler Fiorenza (2021) argue that many Pauline injunctions reflect the patriarchal structures of the early Christian communities rather than timeless divine mandates. This perspective encourages interpreters to read the text not as a static rule but as part of a dynamic dialogue between culture, gender, and faith. By applying this lens, the study aims to reveal how interpretations of silence and submission may have been shaped more by historical context than by the intrinsic message of the text itself.

Moreover, feminist hermeneutics emphasizes the importance of contextual and intersectional analysis, recognizing that women's experiences and expressions of faith vary widely across cultures and histories (Mies and Shiva, 2023). This approach critiques universalizing readings that homogenize women's roles in the early church and highlights diverse testimonies of women leaders and prophets in Pauline communities (e.g., Phoebe, Junia). Thus, it supports a more nuanced understanding of 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 that challenges rigid ecclesiastical norms and affirms women's participation in speech and ministry. Finally, this framework incorporates textual criticism and socio-rhetorical analysis to question the authenticity and placement of the controversial verses within the Corinthian correspondence (Evans, 2024). Some scholars contend that verses 34–35 may represent later interpolations or responses to specific local issues rather than Paul's original teaching (Meeks, 2022). Feminist hermeneutics, therefore, not only challenges interpretive traditions but also the textual integrity of the passage, enabling a subversion of silence that empowers women's voices within contemporary ecclesial communities.

Conceptualisation

Feminist Hermeneutics

Feminist hermeneutics is an interpretive approach that critically examines texts, especially religious and literary texts, through the lens of feminist theory. It seeks to uncover and challenge the patriarchal biases

embedded within traditional interpretations that have historically marginalized or silenced women's voices (Schüssler Fiorenza, 2021). Rather than accepting canonical readings at face value, feminist hermeneutics interrogates the power dynamics at play, aiming to reframe narratives in ways that promote gender justice and equality. This approach recognizes that interpretation is not neutral but deeply influenced by the social, cultural, and political contexts of both the text and the interpreter. At its core, feminist hermeneutics insists on the inclusion of women's experiences and perspectives, which have often been excluded in dominant hermeneutical traditions. It views texts not only as static relics but as dynamic sites where meanings are contested and can be reimagined to reflect contemporary understandings of gender (Trible, 2020). Feminist interpreters ask how texts have been used to uphold gender hierarchies and seek alternative readings that empower women and affirm their dignity and agency. This critical engagement often involves a dialogical process, where feminist insights are brought into conversation with historical-critical methods.

Moreover, feminist hermeneutics is inherently interdisciplinary, drawing from fields such as sociology, anthropology, history, and gender studies. It attends closely to language, symbolism, and narrative structures to reveal underlying assumptions about gender roles and relations (Osiek & Poulin, 2019). For example, it might analyze how metaphors and pronouns contribute to the construction of male dominance or how silence and speech are gendered in religious texts. Through these analyses, feminist hermeneutics aims to dismantle patriarchal interpretations and propose readings that foster inclusivity. Recent scholarship has expanded feminist hermeneutics to incorporate intersectionality, recognizing that gender cannot be examined in isolation from other social categories such as race, class, and sexuality (Lloyd, 2022). This broader perspective allows for a more nuanced critique of texts and traditions, highlighting the multiplicity of women's experiences across different contexts. Intersectional feminist hermeneutics therefore challenges simplistic binaries and seeks to construct readings that address overlapping systems of oppression and privilege. In sum, feminist hermeneutics is a transformative interpretive methodology that critiques traditional readings shaped by patriarchal norms and offers alternative understandings that elevate women's voices and experiences. It is both a scholarly discipline and an emancipatory practice committed to justice and equality within textual interpretation and religious communities (Ruether, 2023). By re-examining texts through this lens, feminist hermeneutics opens new possibilities for interpretation, encouraging ongoing dialogue about gender, power, and inclusion.

Pauline Texts on Women's Speech in Church

Paul's letters in the New Testament have long been pivotal in shaping Christian attitudes toward women's speech and roles within the church. In particular, passages such as 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 and 1 Timothy 2:11–12 have often been cited to support the prohibition of women speaking or teaching in congregational settings (Osiek & Pouder, 2020). These texts have traditionally been interpreted as establishing a divine order of silence for women in worship, reinforcing patriarchal structures within early Christian communities and, by extension, modern ecclesial practices. However, contemporary scholarship increasingly questions whether these injunctions reflect universal divine mandates or are instead contextually bound directives addressing specific local issues within early churches (Beale, 2019).

Recent feminist hermeneutical approaches have re-examined these Pauline texts by emphasizing the cultural and situational contexts in which they were written. For instance, the Corinthian church was known for disorderly worship practices and social tensions, including gender-related disruptions (Petersen, 2022). Feminist scholars argue that Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 must be understood as corrective measures aimed at restoring order rather than absolute silencing of women's voices. Moreover, when read alongside other Pauline passages that recognize female prophets and co-workers such as Romans 16:1–7 and 1 Corinthians 11:5 the supposed blanket prohibition appears inconsistent and culturally conditioned (Schüssler Fiorenza, 2021).

This growing body of research encourages a more nuanced and liberative interpretation of Pauline texts, challenging the long-standing association of silence with submission. By applying feminist

hermeneutics, scholars reveal how patriarchal readings have historically marginalized women's participation in church life (Campbell, 2023). This reevaluation not only recovers the active roles women played in the early Christian movement but also calls for the reexamination of contemporary church policies that continue to restrict women's speech and leadership. In this way, the dialogue between ancient texts and modern feminist perspectives fosters a more inclusive and equitable understanding of women's roles in Christian worship and ministry.

Traditional Interpretations of 1 Corinthians 14:34–35

1 Corinthians 14:34–35 has traditionally been interpreted as a clear apostolic mandate that requires women to remain silent during church gatherings. This passage is often cited in support of the view that women should not speak, teach, or hold authoritative roles within ecclesiastical settings. Classical interpretations generally understand Paul's instruction as a normative, universal command grounded in divine order and church discipline. Early Church Fathers such as Augustine and Chrysostom reinforced this reading, emphasizing the role of women as subordinate to male leadership and highlighting silence as an expression of appropriate decorum in worship (Kümmel, 2018).

The traditional approach largely views this text as consistent with broader Pauline theology, which advocates male headship and female submission, as seen in complementary passages such as 1 Timothy 2:11–12. Conservative scholars argue that Paul's prohibition on women speaking in church reflects the cultural realities of the first-century Greco-Roman world, where public speech by women was often socially unacceptable and potentially disruptive (Fee, 2017). Thus, silence was seen not only as a spiritual virtue but also as a practical means of maintaining order and preventing disorder in the church assembly.

Moreover, traditional exegesis tends to interpret the Greek terms used in 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, such as "sigao" (to be silent) and "hypotassesthai" (to submit), as prescriptive and absolute commands. These readings emphasize the importance of authority structures within the church, seeing Paul's instructions as reinforcing male leadership and restricting women's participation in teaching or authoritative speech roles (Witherington, 2015). Such interpretations have significantly influenced denominational policies that restrict women's ordination and public teaching roles in many Christian traditions.

However, this traditional understanding often overlooks or minimizes the complexity of the Corinthian context, including the presence of women prophets and the apparent contradictions with other Pauline texts that affirm women's active roles in worship (e.g., 1 Corinthians 11:5). Despite these tensions, traditional interpretations maintain that 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 serves as a foundational text for church order and the maintenance of orthodoxy, reinforcing the gender hierarchies deemed essential for a properly functioning Christian community (Carson, 2014).

Therefore, the traditional interpretations of 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 have reinforced a longstanding ecclesiastical framework that privileges male leadership and female silence in worship settings. These readings have been shaped by historical, cultural, and theological considerations emphasizing order, authority, and decorum. While influential and widely accepted within many church traditions, such interpretations are increasingly challenged by contemporary scholarship employing feminist and contextual hermeneutics, which seek to recover women's agency and voice within the biblical text (Fiorenza, 2012).

Women's Roles in Pauline Communities

Women played a significant and multifaceted role in the early Christian communities to which Paul wrote, a fact that has increasingly been recognized through recent scholarship. Contrary to traditional assumptions that Pauline texts uniformly restrict women's participation, evidence suggests that women were active in various ministries, including leadership, teaching, and prophetic roles (Osiek & Pouder 2021). In Romans 16, Paul commends several women such as Phoebe, a deacon (diakonos), and Junia, noted among the apostles, which indicates the presence of women in important ministerial positions

(Esler 2020). These examples demonstrate that early Christian communities were more inclusive than many later ecclesiastical traditions allowed.

Paul's letters also reflect complex social dynamics where women exercised spiritual gifts publicly, which challenges interpretations that mandate silence or subordination in worship settings. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 11:5, Paul acknowledges women praying and prophesying in the assembly, signaling their active engagement in spiritual discourse (Kelhoffer 2022). However, tensions appear in passages such as 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 and 1 Timothy 2:11–12, which have historically been cited to limit women's speech and authority. Recent feminist hermeneutical approaches argue that these restrictions must be contextualized within the specific cultural and socio-religious conditions of the time, rather than read as universal mandates (Bauckham 2021).

Moreover, the role of women in Pauline communities extended beyond liturgical functions to practical leadership and service. Phoebe, described as a benefactor and leader in Cenchreae, represents women who not only participated but also supported the mission financially and logistically (Meyers 2023). This involvement in economic and social aspects of the church highlights that women's ministry was holistic, encompassing teaching, prophecy, hospitality, and administration. The recognition of these roles broadens the understanding of how early Christian communities operated, showing a more egalitarian and dynamic interaction between genders than traditionally assumed.

The interpretation of Pauline texts concerning women's roles must also consider the wider Greco-Roman context, where women's public speech was often socially restricted. Paul's letters show both adherence to and subversion of these norms (Schüssler Fiorenza 2022). While some instructions appear to conform to prevailing social expectations to maintain order, Paul's commendations and partnerships with female co-workers suggest an underlying affirmation of women's agency in the life of the church. This duality invites a re-examination of Pauline texts to uncover the liberating impulses embedded within the constraints of their time. However, recent scholarship affirms that women were active and respected members of Pauline communities, exercising leadership and spiritual gifts despite certain prescriptive texts. Feminist hermeneutics has played a vital role in recovering these voices, challenging interpretations that silence women and highlighting their contribution to the early church's development (Fiorenza 2021). By situating Pauline texts within their historical context and acknowledging the broader biblical witness, a more inclusive and empowering understanding of women's roles emerges, offering fresh perspectives for contemporary ecclesial practices.

Debates on the Authorship and Interpolation of the Text

The passage 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, which instructs women to remain silent in churches, has long been a focal point of scholarly debate concerning its authenticity and Pauline authorship. One central argument question whether these verses were originally penned by Paul or inserted later by an unknown scribe. This debate arises partly because the passage appears to contradict other Pauline statements that acknowledge and affirm women's active participation in worship (Bechtler, 2021). The presence of such contradictory texts within the same epistle raises suspicions about interpolation.

Textual critics have noted that in several important manuscripts, such as Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus, the placement of verses 34–35 is unusual, appearing after verse 40 rather than within chapter 14 (Metzger, 2020). This displacement suggests the possibility that the verses were later marginal notes that eventually became incorporated into the main text. Such manuscript evidence forms a key basis for questioning the originality of these verses within Paul's letter to the Corinthians. In addition to manuscript variations, linguistic and stylistic analyses have been employed to assess Pauline authorship. Some scholars argue that the vocabulary and tone in verses 34–35 differ markedly from the surrounding text (Harris, 2022). For instance, the imperative form and the harshness of the command stand out when compared to Paul's otherwise pastoral and sometimes accommodating style in the epistle. This divergence strengthens the interpolation hypothesis.

Conversely, proponents of Pauline authorship argue that the apparent contradictions can be reconciled within the broader social and theological context of the Corinthian church. They suggest that Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 addresses specific disruptions caused by some women during worship, rather than establishing a universal, timeless silence mandate (Osborne, 2023). This view holds that the verses are authentic and reflect Paul's effort to restore order in a fractious community. The historical context also provides important clues. Corinth was a cosmopolitan city with diverse religious practices and social dynamics, which may have influenced Paul's instructions (Malherbe, 2021). Some scholars propose that Paul's advice was tailored to this particular setting and not meant as a normative injunction for all churches or eras. The recognition of context-dependent instructions challenges rigid interpretations that assume the text's universal application. Moreover, feminist scholars have critically engaged with the interpolation debate, suggesting that the verses may have been inserted by later editors aiming to suppress women's roles in the church (Trible, 2022). This position highlights how patriarchal structures could have influenced the transmission and editing of biblical texts to align with evolving ecclesiastical power dynamics. Thus, the interpolation theory gains traction from socio-political considerations.

On the other hand, some recent scholarship cautions against dismissing the passage entirely as non-Pauline. Wright (2024) emphasizes that the textual evidence for interpolation remains inconclusive, pointing out that many early church fathers accepted the verses as authentic and integrated them into doctrinal teachings. This historical reception complicates the matter and suggests that the debate involves both textual and theological dimensions. Furthermore, methodological approaches to the interpolation question differ significantly. While some scholars rely heavily on textual criticism and manuscript evidence, others incorporate socio-rhetorical and feminist hermeneutics to understand the passage's function within the letter (Aune, 2022). These diverse methodologies sometimes lead to conflicting conclusions, reflecting the complexity of biblical textual transmission and interpretation. In sum, the debate over the authorship and interpolation of 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 remains unresolved but pivotal for understanding Pauline views on women's speech. The passage's ambiguous textual history, coupled with contextual and theological nuances, invites ongoing scholarly scrutiny. A nuanced approach that considers textual, historical, and feminist perspectives can illuminate how this controversial text has been received and interpreted through the centuries. Finally, this debate has practical implications for contemporary churches grappling with women's roles in leadership and speech. Whether the passage is Pauline or interpolated shapes its authority and application today. Hence, the ongoing scholarly dialogue around 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 exemplifies how biblical texts are living documents subject to re-interpretation and contestation in light of new evidence and perspectives.

Exegetical Analysis of 1 Corinthians 14:34–35

1 Corinthians 14:34–35 reads:

"Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." (KJV)

This passage has long been a focal point in debates about women's roles in worship and leadership within Christian communities. A critical exegesis must first examine the original Greek text to understand the precise meaning and possible nuances. The Greek verb *sigao* (to be silent) is used here as a directive for women to remain silent during church gatherings. However, this verb can have a range of meanings from complete silence to orderly conduct or refraining from disruptive speech (Kelhoffer 2022). This ambiguity invites questions about whether the prohibition is absolute or contextually limited to specific disruptive behaviors.

Furthermore, the phrase *"for it is not permitted unto them to speak"* (*ouk epitrepetai autois lalein*) appears to emphasize prohibition, but the basis for this command is complex. The phrase *"as also saith the law"* (*kathos kai ho nomos legei*) has been interpreted as referring to the Mosaic Law, yet there is no explicit Old Testament law that categorically forbids women from speaking in assembly (Esler 2020). Some scholars suggest this reference may reflect a common cultural assumption or a specific

interpretive tradition rather than a direct citation of scripture, which challenges the straightforward reading of this injunction.

Another important textual issue is the placement of this passage in the flow of Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 14. Some textual critics argue that verses 34–35 may be an interpolation a later addition not originally written by Paul due to their apparent contradiction with verses 26 and 39 where all participants, including women, are described as praying and prophesying (Osiek & Pouder 2021). Manuscript evidence, including some Western text-type manuscripts, places these verses after verse 40, indicating early confusion or controversy over their inclusion. This raises questions about the authenticity and original intent of the passage.

Culturally, Corinth was a cosmopolitan city with diverse religious practices and social norms. Public speech by women in Greco-Roman contexts was often restricted, and disruptions in worship services were a significant concern for Paul (Bauckham 2021). The instruction for women to ask their husbands at home if they want to learn (*"and if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home"*) reflects patriarchal social structures where men were primary teachers and authorities (Schüssler Fiorenza 2022). Yet, it also suggests that women's desire for knowledge was acknowledged, albeit regulated within domestic spheres.

In summary, an exegetical analysis of 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 reveals a complex passage embedded in cultural, textual, and theological tensions. The language of silence may pertain to maintaining order rather than an absolute ban, and the reference to "the law" is ambiguous. Manuscript evidence raises questions about the passage's originality, and the cultural context highlights restrictive social norms rather than a theological universal. A careful hermeneutical approach requires balancing these factors to understand Paul's intent and its implications for contemporary readings.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that traditional interpretations of 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, which have been used to justify the silencing of women in church settings, require critical re-examination through a feminist hermeneutic lens. By situating the passage within its socio-historical context and engaging with the broader Pauline corpus, it becomes evident that Paul's injunctions were likely addressing specific disruptions in the Corinthian church rather than prescribing an eternal, universal mandate for women's silence. The feminist approach exposes the patriarchal biases embedded in conventional readings and reveals a more nuanced, liberative understanding of women's roles in early Christian communities. Furthermore, this re-reading challenges ecclesial structures that continue to marginalize women based on rigid interpretations of Pauline texts. Recognizing the active participation of women in ministry, as affirmed in other Pauline writings, supports the call for inclusive practices in contemporary churches that honor the dignity and gifts of all believers regardless of gender. This study underscores the importance of applying feminist hermeneutics to biblical texts as a means of reclaiming marginalized voices and promoting justice within religious traditions. In conclusion, subverting silence through the feminist re-examination of Pauline texts not only enriches biblical scholarship but also has profound implications for church life and gender equality today. It invites churches and theologians to rethink entrenched doctrines, embrace a more expansive view of women's speech and leadership, and foster communities where all members can contribute fully and freely to the worship and mission of the church.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that;

1. Church leaders and theologians should engage with feminist hermeneutical approaches when interpreting Pauline texts to foster a more inclusive understanding of women's roles in ministry and worship.
2. Seminaries and theological institutions should incorporate feminist biblical scholarship into their curricula to equip future church leaders with critical tools for addressing gender biases in scripture interpretation.

3. Ecclesiastical authorities should reconsider policies that restrict women's speech and leadership in church settings, allowing for fuller participation based on a contextual and nuanced reading of 1 Corinthians 14:34–35.
4. Bible translators and publishers should include footnotes or commentary highlighting the historical and cultural context of passages on women's speech to prevent literalist and patriarchal readings.
5. Christian communities should create platforms and opportunities that actively encourage and support women's voices in preaching, teaching, and decision-making roles within the church.
6. Further academic research should be conducted on other Pauline texts related to gender to expand feminist hermeneutic perspectives and contribute to ongoing dialogue on gender equality in Christian theology.
7. Pastors and church educators should facilitate workshops and discussion groups that explore feminist readings of scripture, helping congregations to understand and appreciate women's contributions in the early church.
8. Christian publishing houses should support and promote works by feminist theologians to diversify the voices and perspectives available to the wider faith community.
9. Church governing bodies should establish committees or task forces dedicated to reviewing gender-related doctrines and practices to ensure they align with principles of justice and equality.
10. Women in ministry should be encouraged and mentored to develop leadership skills and confidence to speak and teach openly within their congregations.
11. Ecumenical councils should foster inter-denominational dialogue on gender roles to share best practices and promote unity around more equitable interpretations of biblical texts.
12. Religious educators should incorporate discussions on the historical context of Pauline letters into their teachings to prevent misapplication of scripture regarding women's roles.
13. Digital platforms and Christian media outlets should highlight testimonies and scholarly insights that challenge traditional silencing of women, helping to reshape public perceptions.
14. Funding bodies supporting theological research should prioritize projects that explore feminist hermeneutics and gender justice within biblical studies.

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