



What difference does a period make in 1 Corinthians 14:33?

A lot! The original Greek manuscript had no punctuation - no commas, question marks, quotations, or periods. This linguistic detail may sound minor, but it can make a huge difference in translation and the meaning of a passage. For example, in 1 Corinthians 14:33, the period can change the meaning of Paul’s instruction to the church:

Key Term
No punctuation
Translators must choose

*“For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.
As in all the congregations of the Lord’s people, women should remain silent in the churches.”*

OR

*“For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people.
Women should remain silent in the churches.”*

Does Paul want all “women silent,” or all “congregations peaceful”?

Since no period (.) existed in the original, translators must choose where each one goes. Different Bible translations put the period in different places. In this verse, the phrase “As in all the congregations of the saints” links either to the previous section or to the following section. A period after “peace” means in all congregations women should remain silent. But a period after “people,” means that in all congregations God is a God of order and peace. The period makes a huge difference! But how can we know which is correct?

How we can know...

1. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul was silencing three groups: tongues speakers, prophets, and women, and he was releasing three groups: women, prophets, and tongue-speakers. (See the One-Pager *Is there a CHIASM in 1 Corinthians 14, and who is silenced?*) In this strict chiasm structure, Paul reminded the church in Corinth FOUR times of his main point - The Church must be strengthened (14:26), peaceful (14:33), not ignorant (14:37-38), and orderly (14:40). Therefore, “as in all the congregations” clearly links with universal instructions intended to describe the characteristics of every church. All congregations should be marked by God’s peace and order.
2. Aside from the logic of biblical grammar, in 1 Corinthians 11 Paul instructed women HOW to conduct themselves WHEN they prayed and prophesied. Paul certainly did not forget what he wrote a few chapters earlier! Paul was not out of his mind, telling women the proper etiquette for speaking in public worship, then soon after, commanding all women to be silent in every congregation.
3. In your heart, do you believe that God intends for *all* women for *all* time in *every* congregation in *every* nation and *every* generation to be silent? If so, women should NEVER sing solos, give testimonies, pray aloud, teach children, make announcements, and certainly never preach. Be consistent!

Paul emphasized “orderly worship” 4 times.

Conclusion

Paul emphasized orderly worship throughout the passage. When 1 Corinthians 14 is seen as a chiasm broken up by FOUR reminders to conduct peaceful worship, Paul’s point is clear. The period should be placed after “people,” not after “peace.” All churches should demonstrate God’s peace and order.

4 Crucial Questions

1. What does this teach us about **GOD**?
2. What does this teach us about **PEOPLE**?
3. What command should I **OBEY**?
4. With whom can I **SHARE** this?