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Who Wrote 1 Cor. 14:34-5? Paul or Someone Else? An Examination of the Manuscript Evidence

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DID PAUL OR SOMEONE ELSE WRITE 1 CORINTHIANS 14:34-5?

Determining the authorship of 1 Corinthians 14:34-5 presents a challenging and complex task. Did Paul write these verses or did someone else? This question has been the topic of lengthy discussion for decades, possibly even going back to two of the earliest, most important manuscripts ever recovered.¹ This Pauline, or possibly non-Pauline, text has issues within the manuscript tradition along with potential internal contradictions. Is this text from Paul or is this the work of an interpolator? My objective is to present the manuscript evidence and demonstrate that the more probable answer is that this passage was written by Paul and best preserved in its traditional position.

MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE

In 1995, P. B. Payne released his findings on Codex Fuldensis and Codex Vaticanus.² First, Payne argues based upon his research of Codex Fuldensis that verses 34-5 are an interpolation. Codex Fuldensis records 1 Corinthians 14 with verses 34-5 in their traditional position. However, there is the siglum “hā” between verses 33 and 34 indicating a footnote which contains verses 36-40 within the margin. However, verses 36-40 are still present in the main text following verse 34. Thus Codex Fuldensis has verses 34-5 in their traditional position but also has a footnote that puts verses 36-40 before verses 34-5. However, according to Payne, this footnote does not indicate that verses 36-40 should go before verses 34-5. Instead, they

¹ The two early, important manuscripts are Codex Fuldensis and Codex Vaticanus. P. B. Payne discusses them in his work found in P. B. Payne, “Fuldensis, Sigla for Variants in Vaticanus, and 1 Cor 14.34–5,” *NTS* 41, no. 2 (April 1995): 240–62.

² For much of what is to follow, I am indebted to P. B. Payne and his work in P. B. Payne, “Fuldensis, Sigla for Variants in Vaticanus, and 1 Cor 14.34–5,” *NTS* 41, no. 2 (1995): 240–62.

should replace them all together.³ Thus, according to Payne, Codex Fuldensis indicates that verses 34-5 are inauthentic. Payne notes that if this marginal note is not a replacement for the version of 1 Corinthians 14 that is written in the body of the chapter (which has verses 34-5), then the reader would have to discern where the text and marginal note start and end, which “would make it difficult for the reader to follow the flow of the text and, all in all, seems like an unnatural way to read the text.”⁴ Payne, with the help of B. Metzger, examined the handwriting of the marginal note and concluded that this probably was written by the original scribe, which Metzger believed indicates that Bishop Victor, the scholar who edited this manuscript, “ordered the rewriting of the text of 1 Corinthians 14:36-40 to replace all of vv. 34-40 in the text above and that this implies that Victor believed that 34—5 was an interpolation.”⁵

Next, Payne examined Codex Vaticanus. Like Codex Fuldensis, Payne found a marking in the margin which he believed to be an editorial symbol called a “bar-umlaut.”⁶ Payne looked through the Codex and found every time the bar-umlaut was used. By comparing those passages with NA26, he concluded that the evidence, which showed a great deal of overlap with understood textual variation, points to “bar-umlauts [signifying] awareness of textual variants.”⁷ So, he believes that the scribe who wrote this codex was aware of a textual variant with verses 34-5 (possibly indicating that verses 34-5 were not originally part of 1 Corinthians). He then began to answer possible questions, such as if the original scribe truly made these markings or not, to which he says, yes. “These gaps and the faded bar-umlauts are evidence that they were by the original hand of Vaticanus” and “some of these bar-umlauts appear not to have been traced

³ Ibid., 242.

⁴ Ibid., 244.

⁵ Ibid., 245.

⁶ Ibid., 251.

⁷ Ibid., 254.

over and to display the original ink of the codex. Thus, I conclude that this symbol goes back to the original writing of the codex.”⁸ But how could the original scribe know about the textual-variations? Payne points to the understood “similarities between the Vaticanus text and the Syriac tradition” and says that it is reasonable to think that the scribe had a document with some of these Syriac variants.⁹ Therefore he may have used a document with the variants to make such an editorial note in the margin of 1 Corinthians 14. If the scribe knew of a textual variation with verses 34-5, then by the c. 4th century there were questions of if these verses were authentic to Paul.¹⁰

G. Fee agrees with Payne.¹¹ In both his *First Edition* and *Revised Edition* of 1 Corinthians, Fee holds the position that verses 34-5 are an interpolation. In his first edition, he states that there are three ways to interpret the evidence. Paul either wrote verses 34-5 in their traditional position and someone moved them to the end of the chapter, Paul wrote verses 34-5 at the end of the chapter and someone moved them to after verse 33, or they are a marginal note that crept into the text. Fee does not believe that a scribe would move verses 34-5 to another location to give them a “better placement.” He also believes that the chapter makes more sense without verses 34-5. He notes, “even if one were to conclude that verses 34-35 are authentic, they would appear to be best understood as something of an afterthought to the present argument.”¹² Fee also notes the internal conflict that verses 34-5 presents when examined

⁸ Ibid., 260, 251.

⁹ Ibid., 255-6.

¹⁰ For the dating of Codex Vaticanus (4th century), see K. Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 3rd ed. (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1975), 15. Also, C. Niccum notes this as well. See C. Niccum, “The Voice of the Manuscripts: On the Silence of Women; The External Evidence for 1 Cor 14.34–5,” *NTS* 43 (1997): 242–55 (244-5).

¹¹ For much of what is to follow, I am indebted to G. Fee and his work in G. Fee, “Chapter 11,” Gordon Fee and F. F. Bruce and Ned B. Stonehouse (eds.), *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 699-708. and G. Fee, “Chapter 11,” Joel B. Green et al (eds.), *The First Epistle to the Corinthians. Rev. ed.* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 780-792.

¹² G. Fee, *First Corinthians*, 701.

alongside 11:2-16. Fee therefore concludes that “the case against these verses is so strong, and finding a viable solution to their meaning so difficult, that it seems best to view them as an interpolation.”¹³

C. Niccum disagrees with Payne and Fee.¹⁴ Niccum argues against Payne concerning the “bar-umlaut” markings found in Codex Vaticanus. Niccum says that Payne mistook the “bar-umlaut” as a single marking when they are really two distinct markings, “bar” and “umlaut” respectively. First, he discusses the “bar” marking and notes that these markings found within the codex are original to the “fourth-century,” but they indicate a new paragraph.¹⁵ The “bar” marking is called the “παράγραφος.”¹⁶ Therefore, the “bar” markings “have no value for determining the readings of other MSS.”¹⁷ So, the “bar” marking found in 1 Corinthians 14 is meant to indicate a new paragraph and not a note of textual variation. Niccum then turns to the “umlaut” markings and notes that these do indicate textual variations but are the product of a later scribe. His argument is based on where the markings are found within the codex. According to Niccum, the codex originally ended at Hebrews 9:15. However, in the fifteenth-century, a scribe finished writing the rest of the New Testament in the codex. He notes that “these ‘umlauts’ continue into this minuscule text through Heb 10:1!”¹⁸ Since these markings extend past the place where the codex originally ended, they must be a later addition. Therefore, since the codex was not finished until “a fifteenth-century scribe supplied the remaining of the NT,” it appears

¹³ Ibid., 705.

¹⁴ For much of what is to follow, I am indebted to C. Niccum and his work in C. Niccum, “The Voice of the Manuscripts: On the Silence of Women; The External Evidence for 1 Cor 14.34–5,” *NTS* 43 (1997): 242–55.

¹⁵ Ibid., 244-5.

¹⁶ Ibid., 244. In a footnote, Niccum cites the work of E. M. Thompson, *An Introduction to Greek and Latin Palaeography*, Oxford: Clarendon (1912): 58-9. Thompson notes, “the distinction of paragraphs was found a necessity at an ancient period... these paragraphs were separated from one another by the short dividing stroke, the παράγραφος...” 58.

¹⁷ Ibid., 245.

¹⁸ Ibid., 245.

that the “umlaut” marking in 1 Corinthians 14 does not indicate a “fourth-century” knowledge of a textual variation.¹⁹ “One can only conclude that some scholar after 1400 compared Vaticanus with another text, noting places of variation and/or agreement in the margin.”²⁰ Thus, Niccum believes there are reasonable explanations to the assertions of Payne concerning Codex Vaticanus.

As for Codex Fuldensis, Niccum notes that Bishop Victor used two Vulgate manuscripts. He relied on the first manuscript up until 2 Corinthians. Once he realized the second manuscript was better, he switched and used it for the remainder of the Pauline corpus. He then went back through Romans, 1 Corinthians, and 2 Corinthians, and made changes to fit the better manuscript. His work was finished in AD 547.²¹ Niccum observes that this “better manuscript” originated in northern Italy. In the first manuscript Bishop Victor used, verses 34-5 were in the traditional position while the second (better) manuscript had it at the end of the chapter. Niccum goes on to say that “90% of the corrections in Fuldensis conform its text to that of Reginensis. Furthermore, the marginal reading of 14:36-40 in Fuldensis exactly matches the text of Reginensis which has these verses[, verses 36-40,] preceding vv. 34—5.”²² So while Payne believed the siglum “hā” indicated that verses 34-5 were supposed to be removed by verses 36-40 (which was noted in the margin between verses 33 and 34), Niccum believes that the siglum indicated that verses 36-40 simply were supposed to go before verses 34-5. Niccum therefore concludes that while Victor was making corrections using the second manuscript from northern Italy, he reached verse 33 in his writings and realized that the better text had verses 36-40 next,

¹⁹ Ibid., 245.

²⁰ Ibid., 245.

²¹ Ibid., 246.

²² Ibid., 246-7.

so he wrote that rendition of the text in the margin. When he reached verses 34-5, he left them alone because they followed verses 36-40 in the better text. Thus, Niccum disagrees with Fee and Payne that either of these codices provide evidence of a manuscript lacking verses 34-5 or that they were in question when the codices were originally written. In Niccum's view, both codices have logical reasons for their marginal notes and markings, and therefore their inclusion in both codices points to the likelihood that the scribes believed the two verses were authentic to 1 Corinthians.

Niccum turns to other manuscript evidence. According to his research, the transposition of verses 34-5 to the end of the chapter is limited to mostly manuscripts and commentaries found "in northern Italy and Alpine regions."²³ He concludes that "the transposition is the product of a local text."²⁴ The vast majority of other witnesses around the Mediterranean region, including the Vulgate and possibly Augustine, has verses 34-5 in the traditional position.²⁵ Some of these witnesses even date to c. 1st century.²⁶ His conclusion is that "the external evidence argues for the authenticity of 1 Corinthians 14:34-5 in its traditional location."²⁷

While Niccum provides helpful research, he notes that his work is not meant to explain how or why the transposition occurred in the manuscripts and commentaries from northern Italy. He points to A. C. Wire's work and notes her conclusion that the transposition is most likely intentional.²⁸ For a more detailed discussion on this, Thiselton is helpful. In his commentary on 1

²³ Ibid., 251-2.

²⁴ Ibid., 252.

²⁵ Niccum notes that while Augustine does not quote vv. 34-5 directly, enough can be pieced together from his writings on 1 Cor. 14 that it seems likely that he knew vv. 34-5 in its traditional position, Ibid., 252.

²⁶ Ibid., 254.

²⁷ Ibid., 254.

²⁸ Ibid., 254. The work which Niccum references is A. C. Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric*, Fortress Press (1990), 149–58 (150-2).

Corinthians, Thiselton agrees with Niccum.²⁹ He argues these verses are Pauline and notes that scholars, like Metzger and Wire, do see reasons for why someone may move the verses to the end of the chapter. Thiselton notes three possible reasons for the shift to the end of the chapter. First, a copying error, such as haplography, and correction. This would mean that a scribe mistakenly skipped over the verses and corrected the error by writing them at the end. Second, perhaps the verses were moved to “improve” the text. Perhaps a scribe thought, like Fee, that the verses in their traditional location seemed to interrupt Paul’s argument.³⁰ Thus, in a scribe’s mind, a movement to the end of the chapter would allow the text to flow better. Finally, the transposition may have been promoted by the ideological interests of the scribe. Perhaps the scribe wanted to move the verses to the end where the verses held “less impact” on the female role in churches.³¹ Thiselton points to J. M. Ross’ work as being very important for this discussion.³² Ross states that if verses 34-5 are truly a non-Pauline interpolation, then they must be “very early, almost before any copies had been made, certainly before the writing of 1 Tim 2:11-13.”³³ According to Ross, then, ““we are bound to accept the unanimous testimony of the manuscripts.””³⁴

²⁹ For much of what is to follow, I am indebted to A. C. Thiselton and his work in A. C. Thiselton, “Chapter 11,” Anthony C. Thiselton et al. (eds.), *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1146-1162.

³⁰ As noted before, Fee states that verses 34-5 “would appear to be best understood as something of an afterthought to the present argument.” See G. Fee, *First Corinthians*, 701.

³¹ Niccum, in his work, concludes that one possibility for the transposition is due to “the increasing power of women and the rise of female monastic communities in the Western churches during the third and fourth centuries, [resulting in] some... [perceiving] the collocation of women’s silence with ‘as in all the churches’ unfortunate.” See Niccum, “The Voice of the Manuscripts,” 255.

³² The work which Thiselton is referencing is J. M. Ross, “Floating Words: Their Significance for Textual Criticism,” *NTS* 38 (1992): 153–56.

³³ Ross as qtd. in A. Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 1149-50.

³⁴ Ross as qtd. in A. Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 1150.

ANALYSIS

Substantial scholarly work has been devoted to the question of the authorship of 1 Corinthians 14:34-5, and the discussion will undoubtedly continue. As I researched, many of the pro-interpolation arguments were helpful and I believe there may be a lot of validity to them. However, it seemed that the pro-Pauline arguments, by those like Niccum and Thiselton, were able to either answer them, or at least provide more information and evidence to the discussion.

The pro-Pauline stance is not without weakness. One of the weakest parts of the pro-Pauline stance is the question of transposition. Fee makes a strong statement: “If...these sentences[, verses 34-5,] originated with Paul in this letter, then one is faced with the *only* (emphasis mine) displacement of this magnitude in the roughly twelve-century copying tradition of the entire NT” and “the only other ‘displacement’ of any such kind in the entire NT is the reversal in some early MSS of the first two beatitudes of Matthew 5:4-5.”³⁵ Thiselton helps with his three possible reasons for the transposition (listed above). However, Fee is correct in noting that passages originally belonging to New Testament books rarely, if ever, shift in location. Do copyists of the New Testament ever become editors?³⁶ This is a difficult question. Niccum is right about the transposition: “its origin in a remote region only makes it more difficult.”³⁷

However, despite this important difficulty, the regional aspect of the transposition is helpful to note.³⁸ If Niccum is correct that the transposition is “limited” mostly to manuscripts and commentaries from “northern Italy and neighboring Alpine regions,” then there is

³⁵ G. Fee, *First Corinthians Rev. ed.*, (2014), 780.

³⁶ Ibid., 781.

³⁷ C. Niccum, “The Voice of the Manuscripts,” 254.

³⁸ For a discussion of the transposition and its regional aspect, see Niccum’s discussion in Ibid., 247-252.

geographical significance for the traditional position.³⁹ The geographical evidence points to the traditional position being correct. However, how did this transposition come about? That is an important question. Based on Thiselton's three suggestions, the explanation that appears most likely is haplography. The other two suggested by Thiselton, as noted before, do not seem as likely. It seems possible that a scribe in Northern Italy, as he wrote the text of 1 Corinthians 14, made an error. In trying to fix his error, he wrote verses 34-5 at the end of the chapter. Thus any manuscript which used this one would also have the same "error," which resulted in an alternate reading.

As for the manuscript evidence, there is no recovered manuscript which does not have the content of verses 34-5. If Paul did not write these verses, then someone did *very* early on because they are recorded in every manuscript we have. If Paul, or an early scribe, did not, then it seems reasonable to ask *why* there are no manuscripts which lack the verses. Perhaps there are manuscripts without verses 34-5 (since the earliest copies of 1 Corinthians are centuries after the original text), but they remain unrecovered.⁴⁰ Until any early manuscript is found which lacks verses 34-5, the manuscript evidence will continue to appear that it supports the pro-Pauline conclusion.

³⁹ Ibid., 251-2.

⁴⁰ The four oldest manuscripts which contain verses 34-5 in the tradition location are "P⁴⁶ & A B." P⁴⁶ is from the "ca. 200." Manuscripts & and B are from the c. 4th century. A is from the c. 5th century. For the list of manuscripts which contain the traditional location, see K. Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 3rd ed. (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1975), 611. The oldest manuscript which has the transposition is "D" and from c. 5th century. The next oldest is "F" from the 9th century. For the list of manuscripts which contain the transposition, see Nestle et al., *Nestle-Aland: NTG Apparatus Criticus*, ed. Barbara Aland et al., 28. revidierte Auflage. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 547.

CONCLUSION

There is much more to be said about this topic (including a discussion of the internal evidence, which is very difficult). However, based on my research, the more probable answer to the question of authorship is that these two verses, according to the manuscript evidence, were written by Paul in the traditional position. But this is not the end of the discussion. There is more work to be done, especially on answering the difficult questions posed by the arguments of those like Fee (and these arguments ought not be dismissed or overlooked). Until a final, definitive answer is discovered, Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 14:34-5 will continue to be read in their traditional location within modern Bibles.

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