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## Is the New Testament Text Corrupted on Questions of Gender?

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Bart Ehrman of the [University of North Carolina](#) and Darrell Bock of [Dallas Theological Seminary](#) engage in a vigorous on-line exchange over the question of the New Testament text at [Beliefnet.com](#).

Professor Ehrman, who has made rejecting the New Testament text a professional project, argues that the texts concerning women are corrupted and that scribes inserted words or changed the word order in order to strengthen their own arguments against the leadership of women in the church.

Here is his verdict on 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, for example:

*And so on the basis of a combination of evidence—several manuscripts that shuffle the verses around, the immediate literary context, and the context within 1 Corinthians as a whole—it appears that Paul did not write 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. One would have to assume, then, that these verses are a scribal alteration of the text, originally made, perhaps, as a marginal note and then eventually, at an early stage of the copying of 1 Corinthians, placed in the text itself. The alteration was no doubt made by a scribe who was concerned to emphasize that women should have no public role in the church, that they should be silent and subservient to their husbands. This view then came to be incorporated into the text itself, by means of a textual alteration. [To read his entire article, go [here](#).]*

Professor Bock counters that the New Testament text is both reliable and accurate:

*In reality, most scribes did their job—copying scripture—faithfully. The New Testament's meaning may strike us un-PC today, but that is no reason to believe that the original text was distorted. Some scribes certainly did make changes, but not of the kind Ehrman implies. Indeed, the Bible most of us have on our shelves is as accurate as any ancient text we have.*

Beyond this, Bock points to basic errors in Ehrman's argument:

*A more significant and complex example is 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, which says that women should be silent in church. Ehrman notes, again correctly, that the verses are shuffled into a different order in some manuscripts. Manuscripts D, F, G, and a few manuscripts from the Latin version have the "keep silent" verses after what is now v. 40: "all things should be done decently and in order." However, Ehrman fails to point out that: (1) most manuscripts, including the earliest ones, have the "keep silent" verse at the point of v. 34, and (2) no known manuscript that has this entire passage lacks the "keep silent" verse in chapter 14. So, while Ehrman infers that the "keep silent" passage was placed into the text early and in two different places by renegade scribes intent on suppressing women, he has no good external (that is, manuscript) evidence for his claim. He must infer that a change was made and made early—which is possible, but highly unlikely, since no trace was left in any manuscript we now have. [Read Bock's entire article [here](#).]*

In other words, the textual evidence just doesn't add up the way Ehrman suggests — and the words that are the center of his concern are found in *all* of the known manuscripts.

I must wonder about another question: What if Professor Ehrman was forced to conclude that the Apostle Paul really

*did* write these verses? Would he then be forced to accept these words as bearing the authority of God? Presumably not, given his rejection of historic Christianity. So, why is he so committed to this project in the first place? Why would he care? The reason is astoundingly simple — it is because what the church believes about these passages has social, as well as ecclesial significance. Why else could they care?

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