

Wynkoop Center Bible Studies on Women in Ministry

UNIT 1: The Creation Mandate	UNIT 3: New Testament Women in Public Leadership		
The Crown of Creation	Gen. 1:26-31	Anna	Luke 2:22, 36-40
The First Human, Almost	Gen. 2:1-17	Woman at the Well	John 4:1-42
The Human Race Completed	Gen. 2:18-25	Jesus' Women Associates	Luke 8:1-3; 23:55–24:11;
Broken Fellowship	Gen. 3:1-13		John 20:1-2, 11-18
Facing the Consequences	Gen. 3:14-24	Lydia	Acts 16:11-15, 40
		Priscilla	Acts 18:1-3, 18, 24-26; Rom. 16:3-4; 1 Cor. 16:19;
			2 Tim. 4:19
		Paul's Women Associates	Rom. 16:1-16; Phil. 4:2-3;
			Col. 4:15
UNIT 2: Old Testament Women in Public Leadership	UNIT 4: Difficult Passages in the New Testament		
Miriam	Exod. 2:1-10; 15:19-21; Num. 12:1-16; 20:1;	The Creation Order Understood	1 Cor. 11:2-16
	Mic. 6:4	Keeping Order in Public Worship	1 Cor. 14:26-36
Deborah	Judg. 4:1-10, 14; 5:1-3	Mutual Submission among Christians	Eph. 5:21-33;
Huldah	2 Kings 22:14-20; 2 Chron. 34:22-28		1 Pet. 3:1-7
Esther	Esther 2:5-11, 16-23; 4:13–5:8; 7:1–8:6; 9:29-32	I Suffer Not a Woman	1 Tim. 2:8-15
Jehosheba	2 Kings 11:1-21; 2 Chron. 22:10-12	The New Testament Understanding of Women	Gal. 3:23-29

Credits and Notices

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The Creation Order Understood—Exposition

Scripture Focus

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

Exposition by Kaza Fraley

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Who is the Head?

I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you. ³But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ. ⁴Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, ⁵but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head—it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved. ⁶For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear a veil. (vv. 2-6¹)

This passage is fraught with opportunities to misunderstand what Paul was saying to the people in the church at Corinth. The first thing that can be easily misunderstood has to do with the word “head” found in verses 3 and 4. Most people today automatically think in terms of the head of a company, someone in charge of or leading others, but that is not what is meant here in this passage. If so, Paul would be saying Christ is the boss of a man and a man is the boss of his wife. This is not what Paul meant in using this word. The problem with understanding this word as boss or leader becomes evident when Paul says God is the head of Christ (v. 3). God is not in charge of or the leader of Christ. Christ is not submissive to God. That belief was considered heresy by the early church.

The word “head” as Paul used it in this passage means “source.” He was speaking of a head or source, as in the head or source of a river, the place from which the river originates. If we understand “head” in this way, our understanding of these five verses falls into place. Christ is the source of man, in that man (all humanity for that matter) ultimately finds his source in Christ and His resurrection. Man is the source of woman, as seen in the Creation narrative when woman was created out of the side of the man. God is the source of Christ in that Christ shares the same substance with God, as the Church has believed down through the ages.

From here, Paul began to discuss the place of head coverings in the worship setting. Men were to pray and prophesy with their heads uncovered. This is a familiar idea for modern American readers—in American culture it is considered proper for men to remove their hats for prayer. However, a man removing his head covering for acts of worship was not common practice in Roman culture in Paul’s time. We know this by looking at carvings and statues found in Corinth and dated to this time, which portray men with their togas pulled up over their heads at sacrifices and while worshipping idols. For men to worship with uncovered heads, as Paul directed them to do in this chapter, thus was a way of shunning the practices of idol worship found in the world around them.

Paul then spoke to the women about covering their heads while they prayed and

prophesied. Artifacts found in Corinth, and dated to about Paul's time, portray women as Paul instructed, with their long hair covered. Writings of the time also instructed women to wear a devotional head covering when worshipping. Certain women in the pagan temples would not wear their hair covered; instead these temple women would wear their hair loose and uncovered, designating themselves as temple prostitutes (in many of the pagan cults in Corinth, intercourse with a temple prostitute was a common way to worship the pagan god). Paul wanted there to be no mistake about the honor of Christian women or what their role in worship was, so he instructed the women to pray and prophesy with their heads covered so no one could possibly get the wrong idea about them.

It is also important to note that in Paul's culture, it was considered very unfeminine and disgraceful for a woman to cut her hair short or to shave it. Women simply did not do that—it would have been embarrassing and shameful. No woman would have cut her hair off willingly. Paul said it was just as disgraceful for a woman to pray and prophesy with her head uncovered as it would have been if she had cut it off. For the women of the church to be mistaken for women of loose morals would have been dishonorable and shameful.

Reflection and Image of God

For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. ⁸Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man.

⁹Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man.

¹⁰For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. ¹¹Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. ¹²For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God. (vv. 7-12)

Paul argued here that men are the image and reflection of God and women are the reflection of men. This does not put women in a lesser position than men in relation to God—verse 12 does not allow that interpretation. Paul in fact was saying that since woman is the reflection of man, who is the image and reflection of God, she is *also* the reflection and image of God. She is a reflection of both, and therefore also is made in the image of God. Nowhere in this passage does Paul say women are not made in the image of God.

Paul told women they are to have a symbol of authority on their heads. Nothing up to this point in the passage has put women in a submissive role to men, and the authority here is not ascribed to men. In fact, since men are not mentioned in relation to this authority at all, we cannot conclude that the veil is a symbol of men's authority over women, but instead must understand it to be a symbol of her own authority. "For this reason" refers grammatically not to the "man" of verse 9, but to the phrase "because of the angels," a phrase whose meaning is obscure at best to today's readers. "Nevertheless" is our clue here—even though a woman has a symbol of her own

We need each other and depend on each other for the most important thing—life—and neither gender role is more important than the other.

authority on her head, she should not consider herself independent of all men, which might lead to a bitter, man-hating existence.

Women in Roman culture were not allowed to speak publicly—it would brand one who did as loose and dishonorable. But Christian women were allowed to get up and pray and prophesy publicly in worship. Just as the loose hair of the women in the pagan temple told everyone who and what they were, Paul wanted the head coverings of Christian women to symbolize the authority they held to pray and prophesy in the worship setting. The head covering not only maintained the modesty and virtue of the wearer, but proclaimed that modest Christian women had the same authority as the men to pray and prophesy in public.

Paul's discussion then moves to the interdependence the two genders have upon each other. Woman came from man, as the Genesis narrative states, and of course, no woman is born without the participation of a man. Men come through women, in that every man is born out of a woman. We need each other and depend on each other for the most important thing—life—and neither gender role is more important than the other. The most important thing to remember is that God is ultimately the source of all. We look to God as our creator and ultimate source of being.

Paul's Conclusion

*J*udge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled? ¹⁴Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, ¹⁵but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a

covering. ¹⁶But if anyone is disposed to be contentious—we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God. (vv. 13-16)

As Paul brought this discussion to a conclusion he spoke of the issue from the standpoint of nature—his first-century A.D. perspective of nature. People in that day believed it was unnatural for a woman to have short hair, and unnatural for a man to have long hair. The only men known to wear their hair long were homosexuals and barbarians (people who lived outside the boundaries of the “civilized” Roman Empire). Men within the Roman Empire who wore their hair long, often did so to be effeminate and intentionally to designate themselves as homosexuals. Thus, Paul concluded it was unnatural for men to wear their hair long, and definitely not something Christian men should do.

Conclusions

In this passage Paul told the Corinthians that Christian men were not to cover their heads while praying and prophesying, as the pagans did when they worshipped, nor were they to grow their hair long and be mistaken for homosexuals or barbarians. To appear in either of these ways would have dishonored God, by associating themselves with pagan cults or with persons who behaved in ungodly ways. Because they were the image and reflection of God, they would have been dishonoring God in the way they were reflected God's image to the world.

In the same manner women were told to present themselves in an honorable fashion when they prayed and prophesied. They were to cover their heads. To worship in any other way might have caused confusion and had them mistaken as women of dishonor and ill repute. This also would have reflected poorly on God. Both women and men were supposed to behave in a manner which would be seen as honorable to their society.

In the same way, Christians today should not act in ways that would be unseemly in the greater culture. We should dress modestly and behave in ways that will not scandalize the individual, the Church, and God himself. As individual Christians and as a community, we need to be aware of how we conduct ourselves in worship, as well as in the greater society, so we do not disgrace ourselves or our God in the process. This passage is not as much about heads, as it is about honoring or

dishonoring the community of God, as well as the source of that community, God.

We also can see from this passage how God intended men and women to relate to each other. One sex is not to be raised above the other and exercise authority over the other. Women and men are not to see themselves as separate or as enemies trying to gain their rights from or over each other. We need each other for our very existence, as well as needing each other to be in relationship with Christ. We are one in the Lord, not only as regarding individual pairs of husband and wife—for all are not married (in fact Paul saw singleness as preferable)—but all of humanity, all males and all females, are one in the Lord, together in a community called the Church, which is the body of Christ, in whom that community finds its source.

Notes

¹ All Scripture quotations in the Exposition section are from the NRSV.

The Creation Order Understood –Study Guide

Study Guide by Stefanie and Mark Hendrickson
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Notes for the Leader

A small group setting or class can use the following questions to guide the discussion of the biblical passage and exposition. Allow participants time to answer for themselves, making room for all group members in the discussion.

Discussion Questions

1. According to the Commentary section, what Roman, Hebrew, and Greek cultural “rules” are at play in this passage?
2. How does Paul address them?

3. Why are these issues important to our interpretation of the passage? How does considering these culture-specific issues inform our reading of the text?
4. A large part of Paul's letters to the church in Corinth has to do with the public worship of the local church, and this passage is no exception. In this passage, what roles do men and women play in worship? Does Paul assign these roles along gender lines?
5. Paul is not addressing the "what" of worship as much as he is addressing the "how" of worship in the Corinthian context. Why is that distinction important? In what ways does the "how" of worship vary from culture to culture?
6. In our time and culture, most of the considerations Paul addresses are *not* at play. What value does this passage have for our lives today?
7. How do some within the church use this passage to exercise authority over women?
8. How is that usage essentially a misreading of the text?

The Creation Order Understood –Commentary

Commentary by Wayne McCown
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Introduction

Most Christians simply disregard this passage. Because it addresses an ancient social custom, it is regarded as no longer relevant. Those who do study it seriously disagree on its interpretation. Understandably so, as the text is fraught with difficulties. Part of the dilemma is that we know too little about the Corinthian situation. Moreover, Paul's argument is difficult to follow. Some of his key terms are open to differing interpretations. Thus, not all questions raised by this passage can be answered, at least not dogmatically. But some essential points concerning the role of women in the church are very clear.

I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you. (v. 2¹)

All commentators agree this verse introduces a new section in this letter. In chapters 11-14 Paul addressed matters of decorum in worship: (1) proper dress for women in ministry (11:3-16); (2) proper conduct at the Lord's Supper (11:17-34); (3) proper exercise of the spiritual gifts (chs. 12-14).

The last-named topic is clearly introduced in 12:1 with the formula, "Now concerning spiritual gifts." This same formula is used multiple times in 1 Corinthians following 7:1, where Paul says, "Now concerning the matters about which you wrote." The same formula

("Now concerning") is used to introduce new topics at 7:25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1.

It appears the Apostle was addressing in this letter, for the most part, questions sent to him by the Corinthian church. Here in chapter 11, he attached to their question regarding spiritual gifts a couple of other points of personal concern about decorum in worship. As noted in this introductory verse (11:2), he based his appeal on the teaching he had delivered to them, and the traditional practice among Christian churches (see 11:16). It seems the Corinthian church was inclined to write its own rules and "do its own thing" (see 14:36). Paul called them to a broader consideration of the issues involved in these matters of proper decorum in worship.

But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ. ⁴Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, ⁵but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head—it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved. ⁶For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear a veil. ⁷For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. ⁸Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. ⁹Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the

sake of man. ¹⁰For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. (vv. 3-9)

Paul's essential point here easily can be lost in the argument. Proper decorum in worship called for a woman who prayed or prophesied to have her head covered, and a man to have his head uncovered. Why? To do otherwise was "disgraceful."

Apparently, in the first century, women who conducted themselves with modesty wore a headdress in public. "Loose" women did not. This seems to have been the traditional practice among Jews, Greeks, and Romans. On the other hand, there is some evidence that in the pagan mystery cults, women worshipped with uncovered heads. Paul did not want Christian women to be perceived as "loose," or Christian worship to be likened to a pagan cult. Therefore, he advocated for Christian women—and men—to dress for worship in accord with accepted conventions.

This is consistent with Paul's approach elsewhere to such "social" issues as eating food that may have been offered to idols, the observance of particular days as "holy," and circumcision (cf. Timothy, Acts 16:1-2). He did not want matters of personal behavior to become the cause of offense, and detract from the gospel of Christ.

It is clear in this passage that Paul treated women as full partners with men in Christian worship and ministry. But he insisted that, for both women and men, such activities as praying and prophesying must be carried out with proper decorum.

The Apostle's *point* is clear; his *argument* is not. A great deal of controversy and uncertainty surrounds his use of "head," the

appeal to Creation (Genesis), the reference to "angels," and the description of the veil as a "symbol of authority."

Some commentators interpret "head" hierarchically. They use it to support their view of universal male domination over the female sex, supposedly as God's created order. Others have found the translation of "fountainhead" or "source" more in keeping with Paul's argument. "Head" is so used elsewhere in Greek literature.

On either interpretation, an over-emphasis on hierarchy is not supported by the context. Christ *may* be subordinate to God as His "head" (11:3), but He is not inferior. Orthodox theology insists Christ is God's equal (see Phil. 2:6).

Though woman comes from man, so man comes from woman (11:12). Thus, woman is not dependent on man as the subordinate sex, or an inferior being. Rather, men and women are equals before God and mutually interdependent (11:11).

Verses 11-12 interpret and qualify the appeal to Genesis in verses 7-9. Paul did not say only man is made in the "image of God" and woman is not. What he said is woman is also the "reflection" of man as well as of God. One author concludes the female, thus, is a fuller representation of humanity than the male, and better qualified to represent humanity before God.² Perhaps.

In an incidental comment, Paul referred to "angels" in verse 10. This further complicates our interpretation of his argument. Some scholars believe Paul was arguing the woman's head covering serves as a protective shield from evil, sexually predatory angels. Other commentators point to such texts as Psalm 148

and Revelation 5, as well as the Dead Sea Scrolls, where angels are evoked as participants in the worship of God. On this interpretation, which is much simpler, angels—as well as men—are present to witness the decorum of women in worship and ministry.

Finally, what is the significance of the head covering vis-à-vis “authority” (v. 10)? Some who hold to a hierarchical interpretation of this passage regard it as a sign of woman’s subordination to man. However, that is to turn on its head the Greek term used here. Throughout Greek literature, this term consistently refers to power and authority, never to subordination. It is found in such New Testament texts as John 1:12, “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave *power* to become children of God” (cf. John 5:27; 17:2; 19:10-11; Acts 1:7; 8:19; 9:14).

Interestingly, earlier in this letter, Paul used the same term extensively in teaching the proper exercise of our liberty or “rights” in Christ. The Greek term underlies the words italicized in the following texts:

- ❖ 8:9, “But take care that this *liberty* of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.”
- ❖ 9:4-6, “Do we not have the *right* to our food and drink? Do we not have the *right* to be accompanied by a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no *right* to refrain from working for a living?”
- ❖ 9:12, “If others share this *rightful claim* on you, do not we still more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this *right*, but we endure anything rather than put an

obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.”

- ❖ 9:18, “What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my *rights* in the gospel.”

In Paul’s usage, the term “authority” conveys with it certain “rights,” and the exercise of “liberty.” Thus, with strong support from the broader context, we may conclude that women have liberty and authority (i.e., “the right”) to function as ministers in Christian worship. However, the Apostle insisted that in so doing—and this is his primary point—they must meet one condition: modesty in dress.

Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. ¹²For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God. (vv. 11-12)

In these verses, Paul speaks more straightforwardly. His point comes through loud and clear: men and women are equals before God, and mutually interdependent.

The Greek term underlying “nevertheless” suggests to many commentators, including myself, that the Apostle here was qualifying his earlier arguments (vv. 3-10). He included these two declarations to guard against possible misinterpretation (over-interpretation?) of his previous comments on Genesis.

“In the Lord” means in the Christian church, among those who belong to Christ, both women and men.

The declarations here are consistent with Galatians 3:27-28: “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves

with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled? ¹⁴Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, ¹⁵but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. ¹⁶But if anyone is disposed to be contentious—we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God. (vv. 13-16)

These arguments are secondary and support his main points. Some commentators think they reflect Paul’s awareness that his previous arguments may not have “carried the day” with the Corinthians. Indeed, even after all is said and done, his last comment (v. 16) suggests his awareness that some in the Corinthian church still may “be contentious.”

In verses 13-15, the Apostle appealed to his readers’ own power of discernment. Again, at the outset, the primary point he was arguing in this passage stands clear: “Is it proper for a woman to pray with her head unveiled [or, better, “uncovered”]?” The larger context supports a broadening of the question, as follows: Is there such a thing as proper—and improper—dress (for both women and men) in worship and ministry?

Paul invited his readers to consider what “nature” teaches concerning the differences between men and women. This was a common appeal in the first century.

Contrary to some, Paul was not arguing that long hair represents a woman’s “covering,” or that a woman should not have her hair cut short. Rather, his implied point is

an analogy between what “nature” teaches and what he teaches: Men ought not to have a covering on their head in worship; women should. In the implied analogy, the term “glory” in verse 15 parallels the use of the term “authority” (or, “symbol of authority”) in verse 10. The Apostle attributed both “authority” and “glory” to women, without qualification, except for the matter of modesty and propriety in dress.

In his final sentence on the matter (v. 16), Paul appealed to “custom.” This serves as a bookend to the appeal in his opening statement (v. 3) to “the traditions.” The Apostle expected the Corinthians—even if they had a different opinion on the matter personally—to conform their behavior to that of “the churches of God.” They were not free simply to write their own rules, or “do their own thing.”

Assuming his authority as an Apostle, Paul stated he did not intend to argue further with those who simply wanted to “be contentious.” He had made his point, and argued the case. Later in 14:37, he would state more strongly than here, “Anyone who claims to be a prophet, or to have spiritual powers, must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord.”

Conclusion

Paul’s concern in this passage is that women who are participants in the ministry of the church be properly attired. Per the social convention of the first century (and the custom in other Christian churches), the Apostle did not believe it proper that women should pray and prophesy with heads uncovered. In a parallel argument, he stated that a corollary principle holds for men. They too should be

appropriately dressed when they pray and prophesy. No distinction whatsoever is drawn between the two sexes as participants and ministers in the church. However, a clear distinction is drawn between them regarding the attire that is appropriate and inappropriate for each in worship.

Thus, the Apostle treated men and women as equals, yet maintained a clear distinction between women and men. Women are “from God” (v. 12) and “in the Lord” (v. 11), just as much as men are. Spiritually, in Christ there is neither male nor female (Gal. 3:27-28).

“Nevertheless” (v. 11), though equal in Christ, not every physical difference between them disappears. Both have their origin in God and bear His image, and in that image were created male and female. That sexual distinction should be respected, and not blurred.

In arguing his case for propriety in worship on the part of both men and women, Paul employed a variety of appeals: 1) “the traditions” he had delivered to them via teaching; 2) the analogy of the relationship between Christ and God; 3) the order of Creation (Genesis); 4) the teaching of “nature” concerning what is seemly and unseemly; 5) the “custom” among Christian churches.

The appeal to custom is not a frivolous one. Though social conventions change from age to age, and differ from culture to culture, throughout history Christian believers have tried to avoid bringing offense to the gospel of Christ because of their personal behaviors. Thus, the Church has always taught that men and women of faith should reflect the

principles of propriety and modesty in their choice of dress (see 1 Pet. 3:3-4).

Both women and men are equals before God and mutually interdependent. Moreover, women are full participants in the Christian church. In this passage, the Apostle assumed throughout and specifically declared women’s “right” and authority to function as ministers in Christian worship. However, the Apostle insisted they meet one condition: modesty in dress. This principle applies equally to men.

Notes

¹ All Scripture quotations in the Exposition section are from the NRSV.

² Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 141-2.

For Further Reading

Bilezikian, Gilbert. *Beyond Sex Roles*. Third Edition. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006.
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Wynkoop Center Bible Studies on Women in Ministry

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			2 Tim. 4:19
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Huldah	2 Kings 22:14-20; 2 Chron. 34:22-28		1 Pet. 3:1-7
Esther	Esther 2:5-11, 16-23; 4:13–5:8; 7:1–8:6; 9:29-32	I Suffer Not a Woman	1 Tim. 2:8-15
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Keeping Order in Public Worship—Exposition

Scripture Focus

1 Corinthians 14:26-36

Exposition by Julia Roat-Abla

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Women or Worship?

At some point in most conversations about women in ministry this awkward little portion of 1 Corinthians pulls a snag in our equality carpet. It appears to be the anti-feminist's dream passage. What could be clearer than, "women should be silent in the churches" (1 Cor. 14:34, NRSV)? Can it really be the final answer to Paul's view of women in leadership, indeed, their place in the entire church?

And what do we do, then, with Paul's apparent contradictions between this passage and others? If you read just a few verses earlier, there is an interesting, but unmistakable given that women would be right there among the rest of the believers prophesying. In fact, Paul appears to have contradicted himself a lot when it comes to women and their role in the community (1 Cor. 14 and 1 Cor. 11:2-16, for example). Thankfully, we will find that 1 Corinthians 14 delves more deeply into issues of the faith community's relationships with one another and our relationship with the world than simply the surface issue of women in leadership.

Perhaps the real question with which we are challenged is not whether women should be involved in leading worship, but rather, what is appropriate worship at all?

This question presented itself to the early church, but is just as important today. Our perspectives on Scripture, doctrine, and worship practices are certainly scattered and diverse. But in the midst of worship wars,

denominationalism, and cultural change, these words from Paul remind us how important appropriate relationships and boundaries for ministry are to a worshipping community.

We'll look at two critical concerns within the passage and explore how they continue to speak to us today.

The Edification of the Church

Paul gave counsel to a Corinthian church caught in some very sticky situations. Yet in verse 26, where Paul said, "Let all things be done for building up" (NRSV), he provided the Corinthians the standard by which they could evaluate all their worship and life together.

So, what assumptions about worship were already in place when Paul gave this specific advice to the Corinthians? You'll recall other language from Paul indicating women actually had a regular and active role in public worship. They were not only prophesying, but also teaching, praying, reading Scripture, and speaking in tongues. In chapter 11, Paul immediately recognized the fact that a woman will speak in front of the gathered assembly. His specific interest was that she presented herself appropriately. Otherwise, Paul didn't pick and choose whom he instructed. His concern was for the entire body, Greek and Jew, male and female. His admonitions were not blanket prohibitions on groups of believers. Rather, they were socially conscious corrections to potentially objectionable behavior.

We're talking about both the women speaking improperly and the particular type of inappropriate speech invading the worship event. What exactly were they saying that was so bad? From what Paul already had said, we know it was not simply prophesying, or interpretation, or even tongues. There had to be something else.

And here's where we see Paul again addressing a very specific situation within a very specific context. These married women were not just talking amongst themselves. This was not idle gossip or dismissive chatter or disruptive whispering during a service. These women were questioning their husbands in the midst of the assembly. This was not only undermining the stability of the marital relationship, but destabilizing to the faith community as a whole.

The verses that precede Paul's check to these particular women address anyone in the assembly with a word to speak. But, he warned, without an interpreter

the person who speaks in tongues should be silent, whether man or woman. Otherwise, the unrestrained expression of this unintelligible babble certainly would result in confusion and misunderstanding for the faithful and the faithless. Both instances exemplify inappropriate relationships with God and with people. This is not what worship is about.

In the same way, Paul determined the scrutiny to which these women were subjecting their husbands and others in public was of greater harm to the community than

having no prophecy, no teaching, or no revelation at all.

Even today, as more women assume leadership roles within the church, our task is not to create dissention and discord among believers. Indeed, even as we contribute to our faith community through our abilities, talents, and gifts, our goal is to empower everyone to embrace their function within the body.

The Witness of the Church

Paul's concern was not only for the stability of the body itself, but also that it be a faithful and reliable witness to the world. What would an unbeliever, seeing Christian worship for the first time, think of a woman not only speaking to the entire gathered assembly, but particularly questioning a man?

What do our worship practices say about who we are in Christ? Even with the unusual freedom women enjoyed within the Christian worship event, Paul wanted this community to see itself from the

inside out. The early church was and had to be particularly conscious of its impression upon society. They were already teetering on the line of social acceptability. For Paul, this admonition was a sad but necessary guideline. We still live in a world of sin, where institutionalized inequalities and injustice still exist. And Paul had the first-time, unchurched (pre-Christian) visitor particularly in mind. An unbeliever coming into the service would have seen a married woman audaciously interrogating her husband as going beyond the

Today's secular, unchurched nonbeliever may respond just the opposite of how the ancient Corinthian nonbeliever would have to this situation. Not allowing women to participate in leadership roles—such as teaching, preaching, etc.—may present a greater stumbling block to an outsider looking in.

bounds of respectability. The *unbridled* freedom of the believer would have (did?) become a social barrier to the spread of the gospel.

What could hinder a person coming to Christ? Those who don't know Christ or have a relationship with Him must rely on how we Christians display our love to one another. The exercise of power, authority, personality, or expertise within the body of Christ without humility, compassion, and grace no longer bears witness to the gospel itself. It is the respect, gratitude, and love toward one another that actually provides the context for true Christian worship. This is appropriate behavior for anyone in leadership, not just women during worship.

The commentator on this passage further suggests that in democracies and in first-world countries, an expectation of equality exists, even if it is not always there in reality. In fact, today's secular, unchurched nonbeliever may respond just the opposite of how the ancient Corinthian nonbeliever would have in this situation. Not allowing women to participate in leadership roles—such as teaching, preaching, etc.—may present a greater stumbling block to an outsider looking in.

Paul's hope was that any person in a position of leadership would/will remember how Christ leads us: as a shepherd, a brother, a servant. Submission is not just for women. It is for any leader, teacher, or preacher seeking to follow in the footsteps of Christ.

Even as the church empowers women in their varied gifts within the body of Christ, it is all to bear witness to the gospel of Christ. A broken relationship with our brother or sister in Christ serves only to weaken our relationship with God. And worship is only appropriate when done to the glory of God and not ourselves.

Conclusion

We still live in a world that harbors sin within its powerful social structures. This passage remains relevant precisely because of its common misinterpretation, which uses those structures to undermine our witness. This passage challenges us to read all Scriptural texts responsibly. Do we perpetuate these structures, in this case through our worship, or do we offer all our service to transform them according to the Kingdom?

Keeping Order in Public Worship—Study Guide

Study Guide by Stefanie and Mark Hendrickson
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Notes for the Leader

A small group setting or class can use the following questions to guide the discussion of the biblical passage and exposition. Allow participants time to answer

for themselves, making room for all group members in the discussion.

Discussion Questions

1. What dangers arise from basing doctrinal beliefs on the "plain meaning" of a text?

2. How can faithful biblical scholarship help the church to avoid those dangers?
3. What social values and practices exist today that could present a barrier to the unchurched or unbelievers?
4. What aspects or attitudes of your community's worship effectively bear witness to the gospel? What aspects or attitudes could be potential stumbling blocks to the unchurched?
5. How has the social and cultural situation changed over time from first-century Corinth to 21st-century America? How does that help women and men together in building up the entire church?
6. How does Paul's admonition to do everything for the building of the church provide perspective on dealing with social and interpersonal issues within your worshipping community?
7. How can submission be understood appropriately in the context of this passage?

Keeping Order in Public Worship—Commentary

Commentary by Andy Johnson
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Translation¹

Therefore, what is to be done, sisters and brothers? Whenever you come together, each has a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let everything come about for building up [the church]. ²⁷If anyone is speaking in a tongue, let there be two, or at the most three, with each taking a turn and let one person be interpreting. ²⁸But if there is no interpreter, let the person keep silent in assembly. And let them speak to themselves and to God. ²⁹And let two or three prophets speak and let the others [in the assembly] exercise discernment [about what they are saying]. ³⁰However, if something is revealed to another prophet while he or she is sitting down, let the first one keep silent. ³¹For you are all able to prophesy in turn in order that all may learn and all may be exhorted. ³²Indeed, the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. ³³For God is not characterized by disorder but by peace.

As in all the assemblies of the holy ones, ³⁴let the wives keep silent in the assemblies. For it is not permitted for them to be speaking. But let them be in subjection just as the Law says also. ³⁵And if any wishes to learn, let them ask their own husbands at home because it is shameful for a wife to be speaking [like this] in assembly. ³⁶Or [by allowing such practices in contrast to the rest of the assemblies, are you saying that] it was from you that the word of God came or that it reached you only?

The “Plain Meaning” of vv. 34-35

Anyone can see the “plain meaning” of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35: it forbids all women

everywhere to speak in public gatherings of the church. Women may not teach, testify, sing, pray, read Scripture, or say, “Amen,” because these are plainly forms of speech. At that time, there were no church buildings. All church gatherings took place in private homes. So Paul was not differentiating between “official” (inside the church sanctuary) and “unofficial” (in someone’s house) meetings. The obvious implication is that women are barred forever as leaders of any kind in the church.

I doubt anyone reading these words actually belongs to a church where this “plain meaning” is followed consistently. “Paul wasn’t really forbidding *all* speech by women,” some might say, “only speech that would put them in church leadership. Of course they can sing, testify and say, ‘Amen.’” But this turns Paul’s words into something like, “It is not permitted for them to speak *except* in ways which don’t have them exercising a leadership role.” Such an “except clause” clearly departs from the “plain meaning” of the text in order to avoid a blatant contradiction between common worship practices and Paul’s words.

However, every interpreter of this passage must supply some such “except clause” to avoid attributing a *blatant contradiction* to Paul. This is because the “plain meaning” of 11:5 is that Paul simply assumed women *would speak* prophetically and pray (11:13) in the public gathering. In the context of 11:2-16, Paul was only concerned to make sure a woman’s head was covered *when she did speak* in the gathered

assembly. In addition, in 14:23-24 Paul continued to speak of “all” in his audience engaging in public speech when the community gathered, when they spoke in tongues and prophesied (14:23-24). Paul clearly was capable of specifying parts of the audience when he wanted to address only them (e.g., 7:8, 10, 12). But here there is simply no textual signal that by “all,” Paul really meant only “some of you,” or more precisely, “you men.” Hence, if he was giving a blanket command, forbidding women to speak *at all* in the assembly in 14:34-35, he was blatantly contradicting himself.

The point is this: No one legitimately can claim the “high road” of simply believing what Paul “plainly said.” When one must make sense of *both* chapters 11 and 14, Paul isn’t “plain” at all. Everyone must try to bring coherence to Paul’s instruction in these verses.

Typical Ways of Relating 1 Corinthians 11:5 to 14:34-35

Solution 1: Women’s prophecy as only hypothetical in 11:5

Some have argued that in 11:5, Paul was using only a “hypothetical” example, with 14:34-35 being his “real” view. Therefore, he never would have allowed a woman to prophesy publicly in an “official” gathering. Nothing in the text supports this. In addition, it makes no sense at all for Paul to have spent so much time dealing with only a “hypothetical” situation. This “solution” solves nothing; it amounts to choosing to solve the difficulty by acting as though 11:5 does not exist.

Solution 2: Paul didn’t write 14:34-35

Others “solve” the dilemma by acting as though 14:34-35 does not exist. Pointing out that some manuscripts place it after verse 40, they maintain this is evidence these verses weren’t in the original letter as Paul wrote it. Rather, they were added by a later editor who wanted to limit the role of women in the church. *In the original letter*, then, there was no contradiction between 11:5 and 14:34-35.

At first glance, this view has some attraction but it is problematic for several reasons. First, it fails to explain why the later editor wouldn’t have attempted to “fix” chapter 11 to agree with his two added verses. Second, while some major manuscripts do have these verses after verse 40, none actually leaves them out or marks them as problematic. Third, since we have no access to any major manuscript of 1 Corinthians 14 that doesn’t contain these verses, we must assume they’ve shaped the communal life of the Church from the earliest days. Because of that, under the guidance of the Spirit, the church *canonized* these verses as a part of what constitutes the New Testament. Hence, no matter how one might wish they weren’t there, we must continue to struggle with them to determine, not whether, but *how* they should shape our life together.

Solution 3: Paul was quoting a Corinthian position in 14:34-35

A third “solution” also denies 14:34-35 are the words of Paul. Rather, it is argued, this is his quotation of a position taken by some of the Corinthians who wanted to “put women in their place.” He quoted these words only to refute them in verse 36. Although Paul does

appear to have quoted short slogans popular among some of the Corinthians (e.g., 6:12 and 7:1), nowhere did he quote such a lengthy position.

Solution 4: “Speaking” in 14:34-35 is something besides prayer and prophecy

This is in essence, the “except for” category with which most interpreters work, either because our actual worship practices press us in this direction and/or because we think Paul was not being blatantly inconsistent over the space of a few chapters. “It is not permitted for women to speak *except for* . . .” This is a broad category which appeals to background information from the social context of first-century Corinth, to provide a historically plausible explanation of what kind of “speaking” Paul might have been referring to in verses 34-35.

Proposals here include understanding such speaking as: something resembling ecstatic behavior, “disruptive female chatter,” or speech that might somehow be taken as threatening male authority or honor. The first two of these seem quite unlikely. The last category offers more explanatory power when it comes to helping us to understand the coherence of what Paul was saying in 14:34-35 with what he already had said prior to this. Below, we consider two recent examples of such an explanation when we engage these verses in more detail.

Concluding remarks about these “solutions”

We must remember all these are simply reconstructions, postulated backgrounds intended to help us make sense both of the verses in question and of the overall logic of the Epistle. But let us all acknowledge that unless we want to attribute a blatant contradiction to Paul, we cannot help offering some sort of reconstruction of the situation, some way of understanding what kind of “speech” Paul was talking about here in verses 34-35. The only question is whether or not our reconstruction will be historically plausible, and will account for as much as possible of what Paul actually said in 1 Corinthians.

The Literary Context leading up to 14:34-35

Our specific verses occur in the context of addressing a variety of problems in public worship (11:2-14:40). More specifically, they fall into a section in which Paul discusses the use of the gifts of prophecy and tongues (14:1-40). In 14:20-25, Paul puts forth a hypothetical, yet quite conceivable, scenario in which an

1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is *not* a blanket statement prohibiting all women in the gathered assembly of Corinth from speaking publicly. It clearly does not prohibit women from publicly speaking a prophecy/revelation or a prayer, and almost certainly does not prohibit them from speaking a psalm, a teaching, a tongue, or an interpretation. . . . The issue of whether a woman should be in a leadership role in the Church is simply not addressed in this passage.

unbeliever might come into their meeting and make a judgment about the proceedings (vv. 23-25). Their behavior in these meetings was, therefore, not “private” and could result in honor or shame being attributed to the entire gathered assembly. Should an unbeliever come in, the goal was that what she witnessed might lead her to conversion to the true God present among them (v. 25).

The “therefore” in verse 26 indicates that what follows, *including the issue of women speaking*, is directly related to the hypothetical situation just laid out. Paul’s primary concern in verses 26-40 was to promote proper “order” in public worship so that: (1) the church may be built up, and (2) *an unbeliever who comes in may not be offended needlessly, but rather be led to encounter the true and living God.*

In verses 27-33 Paul insisted on silence for both tongues speakers and prophets, depending on the circumstances. For prophets, such silence is possible because “the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets” (v. 32). The terms for both silence (*sigāō*) and submission (*hypotassō*) reappear in verses 34-35. Paul’s basic point is that both silence and submission may be necessary for orderly worship to occur. Without it the body of Christ cannot be built up, nor will an outsider encounter the true and living God.

Specific Issues in 14:34-35

The Greek word *Gynaikes* can refer either to “wives” or “women.” Paul used this word at the beginning of verse 34. Which is meant here? Paul assumed they had “their own husbands/men” at home (v. 35) and used an almost identical phrase in 7:2 of a woman having her “own husband.” It is likely, then, that here he was referring to *married women.*

Paul could have said directly, “Wives, be silent.” Rather, he addressed the whole congregation with, “Let the wives be silent.” In verse 36, Paul’s use of a generic (rather than a specifically feminine) word for “only” as in “to you only” indicates he was addressing the whole congregation. This suggests the “speaking” Paul was forbidding was not

“disruptive chatter” between women. It is public speech between married women and others.

The alternative to these wives “speaking” was for them to “be subordinate” (NRSV), “be in submission” (NIV). Paul supported this alternative with “just as the Law [i.e., the Pentateuch] also says.” It is striking how *general* this language actually is. Paul did not specify *to whom or in what way* these wives were to “be subordinate/in submission.” Since the Pentateuch never specifies this, the specific passage(s) Paul had in mind isn’t clear.

In verse 35, Paul said if these women wished to learn anything, they should “ask their own husbands at home because it is shameful for a wife to be speaking [like this] in assembly.” The word “shameful” would have carried very serious connotations in this culture. This type of “speaking” would have brought public shame upon a wife and, subsequently, upon all those with whom she was associated.

From the preceding context, it is clear such speech does *not* include praying and prophesying. Since prophecy includes receiving and voicing a “revelation” (v. 30), neither does the prohibited “speaking” include offering a “revelation.” In verse 26, a “revelation” is simply one item in a list of things *each* may have when they come together.” Hence, “each” in verse 26 is not gender-specific and nothing in the text indicates any other item in this list would be “off limits” to women. Thus, we can say further the prohibited “speaking” does *not* include having “a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.” What type of “speaking” then was not

permitted to wives in the public assembly? Two possibilities offer the most historically plausible explanations.

Scenario one: the “speaking” may have been ordinary public conversation between married women and men not their husbands. Such conversation would have been “out of bounds” socially and would have called into question publicly their relationships with their husbands. It would have endangered the honor not only of the women, but also of their husbands and of their entire households. Also, it would have brought shame upon the gathered assembly.²

Scenario two: this speech involved wives, as a part of the “others” in verse 29, passing public judgment on the prophetic speech of their own husbands. Typically, a woman would have incurred a great deal of shame if she spoke publicly in a way that included “discerning/passing judgment” on her own husband’s public pronouncements, religious or otherwise. Hence, Paul’s admonition was that they should ask (or even “interrogate”) their own husbands at home about their prophetic pronouncements.³

Given these scenarios, *to whom or in what way* were these wives to “be subordinate/in submission?” In scenario one, even if asking “their own husbands at home” (v. 35) would have demonstrated “subordination”/“submission,” this would not specifically have demonstrated subordination *to their own husbands*. Rather, it

would have demonstrated subordination to, *and for*, the whole gathered assembly. Maintaining “proper” social order in their gatherings would have kept the larger society from attributing needless public shame to wives, to their extended households (including the potential converts within them), and to the whole assembly.

In scenario two, if asking “their own husbands at home” (v. 35) demonstrated women’s “subordination/submission,” Paul would have been counseling subordination to their own husbands. However, this “subordination” would have been quite limited, in that it would have had to do only with each woman “discerning/passing judgment” on her own husband’s public prophetic pronouncements. Women were not told to be subordinate to other males in the congregation, nor were they prohibited from publicly “discerning/passing judgment” on other men’s prophetic pronouncements.

Paul and his audience could have hardly imagined the modern, egalitarian household of the Western world. But this is the society in which we must attempt to embody the gospel. If we insist on applying Paul’s words in this particular case in our own society, widening his specific instructions now to include “all women,” we will actually be moving in the opposite direction as Paul, because it will likely cause needless offense to most and make it more difficult for them to encounter the living God.

In addition, the very fact that Paul left open the possibility that a woman could “interrogate” her own husband in the “private” sphere of the home would have raised eyebrows in a patriarchal culture. The result in this scenario would have been no different from the first

scenario. It would have maintained “proper” social order in their gatherings and kept the larger society from attributing needless public

shame across the wives' spectrum of associations.

What Then Shall We Say?

First, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is *not* a blanket statement prohibiting all women in the gathered assembly of Corinth from speaking publicly. It clearly does not prohibit women from publicly speaking a prophecy/revelation or prayer, and almost certainly does not prohibit them from speaking a psalm, teaching, tongue, or interpretation. It only prohibits *a specific kind* of public speaking by *married* women in the gathered assembly. Second, the issue of whether a woman should be in a leadership role in the Church is simply not addressed in this passage. It is not even clear what it would mean to "be in charge" of the kind of spontaneous, yet orderly, worship Paul envisions here.

Where does this leave us? In the first place, we should note that a religious gathering in someone's private home was unusual enough, in and of itself. Furthermore, in this patriarchal culture, if women indeed were speaking publicly (praying, prophesying, teaching, engaging in discerning conversation), these gatherings already were regarded with suspicion. They represented an *implicit* challenge to the patriarchal assumptions of most in this society.

Even so, patriarchal assumptions continue to be operative in the way Paul argued. Scenario one relies on assumptions about female character (i.e., as weak and easily seduced) that make public conversation between married women and other men highly suspect. In scenario two, patriarchal assumptions make it shameful for a wife publicly to question her husband's speech. In

neither scenario was Paul *explicitly* calling these underlying assumptions into question. Rather, he simply assumed their existence as the larger social context in which this particular church was called to embody the "way of thinking produced by the cross" (1:18). Such a "scandalous" way of thinking already was considered foolish and shameful in this society (1:18-25). Hence, there would have been no reason to give needless offense to outsiders (10:32). His prohibition of a specific kind of public speaking by married women was Paul's attempt to avoid this very thing.

Paul and his audience were enmeshed in a social setting where the patriarchal, extended-family household was the norm (*the same structure that legitimized slavery*). Any Christian ought to be hesitant about "baptizing" it as the only structure that can be truly "Christian." Paul and his audience hardly could have imagined the modern, egalitarian household of the Western world. Nor is such a household structure the only one in which the gospel can be truly embodied. But this is the society in which *we* must attempt to embody the gospel. If we insist on applying Paul's words in this particular case in our own society, widening his specific instructions now to include "all women," *we actually will be moving in the opposite direction as Paul*. In an egalitarian society, this likely will cause needless offense to most and make it more difficult for them to encounter the living God.

Notes

¹ Unless otherwise marked, all Scripture quotations in the Commentary section are the author's own translation from the original languages.

² Though more complex, this basic view was recently put forth by Terence Paige, "The Social Matrix of Women's Speech at Corinth: The Context and Meaning of the Command to Silence in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 12.2 (2002): 217-42.

³ This basic argument is made by a number of interpreters, most recently Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1150-62.

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Wynkoop Center Bible Studies on Women in Ministry

UNIT 1: The Creation Mandate	UNIT 3: New Testament Women in Public Leadership
The Crown of Creation The First Human, Almost The Human Race Completed Broken Fellowship Facing the Consequences	Gen. 1:26-31 Gen. 2:1-17 Gen. 2:18-25 Gen. 3:1-13 Gen. 3:14-24
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	Anna Woman at the Well Jesus' Women Associates Lydia Priscilla Paul's Women Associates
	Luke 2:22, 36-40 John 4:1-42 Luke 8:1-3; 23:55—24:11; John 20:1-2, 11-18 Acts 16:11-15, 40 Acts 18:1-3, 18, 24-26; Rom. 16:3-4; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19 Rom. 16:1-16; Phil. 4:2-3; Col. 4:15
	The Creation Order Understood Keeping Order in Public Worship Mutual Submission among Christians I Suffer Not a Woman The New Testament Understanding of Women
	1 Cor. 11:2-16 1 Cor. 14:26-36 Eph. 5:21-33; 1 Pet. 3:1-7 1 Tim. 2:8-15 Gal. 3:23-29

Credits and Notices

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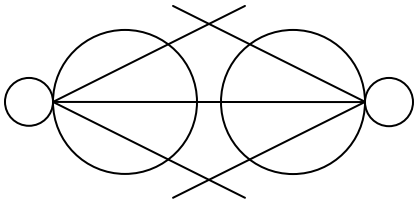
Mutual Submission among Christians—Exposition

Scripture Focus

Ephesians 5:21-33; 1 Peter 3:1-7

Exposition by Julene Tegerstrand

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Love Is Embrace, Not Drag

The concept of submission has taken on great baggage and has been the cause of abuse and misunderstanding. However, the idea of mutual submission as found in the Scriptures has the opportunity to give new life to our relationships and reveal a grand picture of the God who has created us for relationship. We've let submission be about power from the top down; we've let it dictate who is right and who is wrong. We've even let it dictate our ideas about the so-called weaker and stronger sexes.

However, when Paul and Peter spoke of relationships in their contexts, they moved the submission conversation beyond its normal boundaries of power, sex, and culture, and beyond the typical model of top-down power. Submission in Paul and Peter becomes mutual submission, a power model based on love which empowers.

Mutual submission isn't about the ones with the power ruling over the ones with less power. Mutual submission is about how we as a Christian people live in relationship with each other. It is about living in relationship with the other, as Christ lives in relationship with us. The power structures of the world are

turned upside down and there is a leveling of power in relationships. In mutual submission we see a God who values His creation, loves creation wholly, and enables us to love each other. In Ephesians 5 and 1 Peter 3 we see a model of mutual submission in which Christians live out their love for one another in mutually benefiting ways.

The foundation for mutual submission is other-benefiting love, so any talk about mutual submission must begin with a picture of how we are loved. Moms and dads talk about holding their children in their arms for the first time. You can picture Mom and Dad holding their child closely to their chests, their heads held close to the child with a look of wonder and joy. When a new mom shares her story of her first moments with her newborn, her eyes twinkle with amazement and pride. Mom and Dad are proud because of what they've created together. If they didn't believe in miracles before, they do now; their baby is a miracle. They are in love with their baby.

There is something very different between the love a new parent has for a child and the love we show to others in our marriages, workplaces, neighborhoods, and churches. Isn't it a wonder, how, when parents embrace their new creation, they love without condition? They value this newborn with their lives. A new parent doesn't place worth on the child based on what he or she has done, or on what the parents hope it will do in the future. The child has done nothing to deserve love, yet the parents love it intensely. The parents offer

their love freely. The child is believed in and valued, and the parents are proud because of *whose* the child is!

Isn't this how we are loved by God? We are loved, not because of what we do or don't do, not because we deserve it and not because we earned it, but because we are the beloved, the created and chosen children of God. God doesn't love us because He is transforming us and making us more and more new. God is transforming us and making us more and more new because He loves us. Also, God loves us wholly. He doesn't love part of us. It isn't like He loves our hearts but not our minds, or our souls but not our bodies. He loves it all because all of it is His beloved. His love isn't gender specific, economically specific, or even able-bodied specific. He doesn't love thin people more than fat people, single people more than married people, Asian people more than Black people. God loves the people of the world wholly because they are His beloved children, His own.

With this scope of God's love for people, how could we talk about submission based on the top-down, slave-master, boss-assistant, rich-poor, educated-not educated, able-disabled model of power? We can't. Mutual submission is based on the Christ-Church relationship and sharing the Kingdom together. As Peter wrote, we are "joint heirs." Our treatment of each other is based on God's wholly loving relationship with us and our shared life together with Christ. Mutual submission is not about putting up with one another or ruling one another; that ignores the

fact that we are all joint heirs to the kingdom of God. Mutual submission isn't about dragging someone along to accommodate our vision. Jesus doesn't do that with the Church. Mutual submission is caring for one another for the sake of the other and for the greater good of the Kingdom we share.

The difference between "submission" as we've known it and mutual submission is the difference between being dragged along by someone and being embraced by someone. We are often more used to being dragged or ruled than being embraced or loved. When many of us were young, we were dragged along by our parents and teachers; then when we got older, we were dragged along by our bosses and professors. Some find a new ruler in their spouse when they get married. We get into our first career, and the career rules us. As we get older and experience aging bodies, we are ruled by our limitations. As a people, we know how to be ruled and we know

Mutual submission is the beautiful embrace that results when people freely offer themselves to the other for the benefit of the other.

how to rule. In fact we even see ourselves as being ruled or dragged along by God into His will for our lives. I wonder how often we are the ones doing the "godly dragging." Mutual submission takes the dragging out of the relationship and replaces it with an embrace.

When we embrace someone with a hug, we reach for them and they reach for us. Someone initiates the embrace, but it isn't an embrace unless the initiation is reciprocated. When we embrace, it is a sign of mutual love. The embrace requires two parties who mutually agree to share a gesture of love; it is an opening of arms to reveal the opening of hearts. When we talk about mutual submission, we are

talking about a love-initiated embrace. It is because we love each other that we can offer ourselves to the other in embrace. It is because we desire the other to experience our gratitude that we extend ourselves, risk ourselves for and to the other.

As Paul suggested in Ephesians 5, the love that marks mutual submission is the same love Christ has for the Church. God in Christ has embraced the Church. That embracing love is a saving love, a giving love, a providing, sustaining, caretaking love; it is this love to which Christians mutually submit. It is a privilege to submit together to that kind of love! In fact the embrace is entered into freely. Husband and wife are to meet in an embrace. Husbands are to love their wives with this kind of love (Eph. 5:25) and wives receive their husbands as head, just as Christ is head of the Church. There is no dragging here. There is no pulling of the arm or coercion in the name of the Lord. When other-benefiting love is present no dragging is necessary. No pulling is needed

because respect for the other is present. When we love others as God loves us and as Christ loves us, we don't drag, we embrace. The way of Christlike submission, mutual submission, is to love, not rule, to embrace, not drag.

Mutual submission is the beautiful embrace that results when people freely offer themselves to the other for the benefit of the other. It is grounded on seeing the other as beautiful, worthy, valuable just the way a mother sees her newborn child for the first time, and modeled after the way God sees us and loves us. It isn't about a struggle with power, but about a type of relationship between people who share love, share Christ, and share the Kingdom. Mutual submission is grounded on a God who, in Christ, submitted himself and His love for the sake of every person. Mutual submission is a way in which we live out our calling as joint heirs to the Kingdom, to love each other as Christ loved us. He lives by embrace, not by drag; therefore, so should we.

Mutual Submission among Christians—Study Guide

Study Guide by Stefanie and Mark Hendrickson
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Notes for the Leader

A small group setting or class can use the following questions to guide the discussion of the biblical passage and exposition. Allow participants time to answer for themselves, making room for all group members in the discussion.

Discussion Questions

1. List the first word that comes to your mind when you hear each of the following words: relationship, submission, mutual, power. How do you define these words? How does your definition compare with your list of words?

2. What do you think mutual submission looks like?
3. What does love have to do with “mutual submission”? What part does love play in your picture of “mutual submission”?
4. How do you understand God’s love for us? What does this look like in your life? In your family? In your church? In your community?
5. What role does mutual submission play in your church? How is submission to each other play out in your community?
6. Is submission an excuse to seize and/or abuse power? Why or why not?
7. How does the world’s use of power and submission differ from God’s use?
8. What happens when we use God or Scriptures or guilt to make someone submissive? What do you think God thinks about this?

Mutual Submission among Christians—Commentary

Commentary by Kent Brower
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Introduction

The New Testament perspective on women is ambiguous. On the one hand, it was written by people of their time. They subscribed in a rather unconscious manner to the cultural constructs of the day. According to the consensus, a healthy society was hierarchical with patriarchal structures as a given. Men were privileged and responsible; women were considered inferior, by nature slaves to their senses, and needing protection from their emotions lest they bring dishonor upon the family. Judaism was the same. Two well-known Jewish writers, Philo and Josephus, took a rather jaundiced view of women on religious grounds. Thus, in addition to accepting the consensus, religion also determined the place of women.

On the other hand, the New Testament also shows how Jesus' life and the meaning of His death and resurrection challenged the usual patriarchal arrangements. Jesus taught women and had women followers; He touched and healed impure women; He refused to blame women for the problem of male lust; He talked to women in public. As the church came to understand the salvation offered in Christ, the language of 'new creature' and 'new creation' captured its radical nature. And yet, there are only glimpses of the societal implications of this: for example, slavery in the West remained for another 1,800 years. The seeds of change were there but had not yet emerged within patriarchal society.

Both Paul and Peter were familiar with 'household codes,' a sort of *Good Housekeeping* guide to efficient household management widely known in Greco-Roman society. In these codes, the state was at the top of society. The household was part of that hierarchy. The duties of slaves and masters, wives and husbands, children and parents all were spelled out. If the household was well organized, society would be ordered and secure. If not, potential disaster loomed. And men were the rulers. Both our passages are adaptations of these codes, built upon the norms of ancient society but tweaked in a distinctly Christian direction.

Ephesians 5:21-33

This version of the household code is set in the context of a wider discussion of godly living (5:1–6:9). "Be careful," Paul says, "how you live your lives, not living as fools but as wise people, . . . according to the will of the Lord" (5:15, 17¹). Paul's concern was two-fold. First, his readers are called to "imitate God, as beloved children, walking in love even as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us" (5:2a). Second, they are warned of the evil times and the need therefore to be on guard and to avoid any hint of impropriety (5:3-14). Their lives are to be exemplary to outsiders and well ordered within the community of faith. They are to "be filled with the Spirit" (5:18b), further described in the concluding

phrase, “being subject to one another in the fear of Christ” (5:21).

Paul gave examples of submission within the community in action: “Wives, submit to your husbands” (5:22a). Actually, the verse does not contain the word “submit” (or “subject”). Rather, the verb has to be inferred from the previous participle—“being subject” (v. 21). This is important. Paul insisted the submission of wives to husbands is a subset of mutual submission, a hallmark of Spirit-filled people. This is to be done “as to the Lord.” It is part of living in love (5:2).

Paul did not stop with wifely submission, however. He discussed the husband-wife relationship by focusing on two aspects of the Christ-Church relationship. First, he wrote the husband is “head of the wife as Christ is head of the church.” But what does “head” mean? The word is used elsewhere in the Greek scriptures to refer either to ‘source’ or ‘ruler.’

In this epistle, both connotations are possible (see 4:15 and 1:22, respectively). If Paul was following conventional household codes here, authority probably is primary. But the model of the husband’s headship is Christ’s, the

one who is servant of all. That is why Paul goes on to say, “for as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives [are subject] to their husbands in all things” (5:24). The Church freely submits to its head because Christ is “the Savior of the church” (v. 23) who “loved the church and offered up himself on her behalf” (v. 25) and

“nourishes and cares for her” (v. 29). The only headship in view here is of the head servant.

Paul then gave lengthy instructions to husbands. Note, Paul did not tell husbands to rule over their wives. Paul demanded they “love their wives.” Paul thereby transposed the usual convention to another level. Just as he earlier had argued for *reciprocal* rights in sexual relations within marriage rather than *male* rights (see 1 Cor. 7:4b), here Paul’s focus is on ‘love,’ not ‘rule.’ Just in case the point wasn’t fully grasped, he repeated it three times: husbands are to “love their wives” (vv. 25, 28, 33). The only coercion envisaged is the exercise of self-giving love.

This idea was not new for Paul. He already had written about the self-giving love of God in Christ. In Romans 5:8, he had said God’s love is demonstrated in that Christ died for us “while we were still sinners.” In Philippians 2:1-12, Paul urged his readers to look out for

each other’s interests rather than their own, thereby imitating Christ’s humble self-abasement and servanthood.

Throughout Paul’s teaching, Christ’s servanthood is the model for Christian

Throughout Paul’s teaching, the humble submission of Christ and His servanthood is the model for Christian living (see Phil. 2:1-12), with no hint that submission is gender-specific. All Christians are other-centered rather than self-centered. That is the kind of power and authority Paul had in mind here—no sense of rule or coercion, but only the winsome power of love.

living, with no hint that servanthood is gender-specific. All Christians are other-centered rather than self-centered. That is the kind of power and authority Paul had in mind here—no sense of rule; only the winsome power of love.

The second thread of Paul’s argument here is the unity of Christ and the Church. Not only

is Christ the head of the Church, the phrase “and the two shall become one flesh” points to Christ and the Church: “this is a great mystery—and I am applying it to Christ and the church” (v. 32). This application gives a profound meaning to marital unity. Marriage is more than a mere contract—the two parties become one unit: “the one who loves his wife loves himself” (5:28b). In that context, mutual submission becomes the dominant grid through which we must interpret this passage. The two are one flesh and mutual submission is the mark of this Spirit-filled union.

Care must be exercised, of course. Paul must not be made into a 21st-century writer. He remained firmly entrenched in the culture of his time. He saw no problem with a slave-based economy or a patriarchal society. His advice was developed from typical household codes, and behind this lay his unconscious patriarchal cultural construct. To take this text out of its cultural context is to do Paul and ourselves a disservice.

But here and elsewhere, Paul drove forward to a new-creation view of society based upon justice and love. Read in its broader gospel context, Paul’s language exposes the fatal flaws in the conventional, oppressive structures of society.

Paul’s adaptation here brings the gospel to bear upon convention in three ways. First, mutual submission is the primary context of wifely submission—all Christians submit to one another. Second,

husbands are to love their wives, and the model here is the self-giving love of Christ. Finally, husbands and wives are one flesh—and loving one’s wife is loving oneself.

1 Peter 3:1-7

The cultural context presupposed for 1 Peter is virtually identical to that for Ephesians. Conventional wisdom promoting good order in society is expressed in household codes. Once again, the subordination of women to men is a given rarely questioned.

Peter’s readers were part of a small sect in Asia Minor. His primary concern was that they live holy lives in the face of hostility. In general, he advised them to live according to the normal conventions of society, insofar as it was possible so to do.

Peter’s approach is somewhat different from Paul’s. Paul’s adaptation of the household codes has the usual three pairs; Peter’s doesn’t. Instead, he began with civic duties (2:13-14) and advice to slaves (2:18-25).

Peter began with civic duties and advice to slaves. He said little to masters and husbands, and nothing at all to parents and children. His concern was that all Christians exhibit good conduct in their contact with the wider community. Subordination of wives simply was part of conventional good conduct. But the reason for it was different. Peter thought an unbelieving husband might be converted through watching the holy living of his spouse.

He said little to masters and husbands, and nothing to parents and children. His concern throughout was that all members of this community, probably predominantly slaves and women, exhibit good conduct.

First, Peter urged wives to “be subject to your husbands” (v. 1a). This was part of conventional good conduct. But the reason was rather different. Peter thought unbelieving husbands might be converted to Christ simply

“through seeing the conduct of their wives, apart from a word” (v. 1b). Interestingly, Peter did not advise the dutiful wife to abandon her new faith because of the husband’s authority. That level of conventional submission would have been unthinkable for him.

Can we be more precise about “good conduct” (3:1, 2)? In light of the subsequent reference to Sarah (3:6), Norman Hillyer thinks Peter was referring to faithfulness in conjugal relations. Just as Sarah had sexual relations with Abraham when she was well beyond childbearing age, despite her misgivings about the promise, so Christian wives should have normal sexual relations even with unbelieving husbands (see 1 Cor. 7:12-16).²

This is unlikely to be the whole meaning, but Peter certainly was concerned about sexual purity. Good conduct of wives extends to their attire. Such advice also is commonplace in the literature of the period. “Modesty of dress . . . is a socially approved mark of honorable female behavior that maintains the honor of the husband and the family.”³ This may assume special poignancy in the face of some newfound sexual freedoms being exercised by ‘the new Roman woman.’ But even if some women were enhancing their beauty in an immodest way, for Peter the beauty of the Christian wife comes from within. Instead of the extravagance of attention-grabbing attire, he said, “let your adornment come from within at the deepest level with that imperishable quality of a humble and quiet spirit – which is the appropriate extravagance before God” (3:4). This is how “the holy wives from the past who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, submitting to their own husbands” (3:5).

Peter also followed convention in most of his advice to husbands. But the omission of reference to ‘ruling’ and ‘controlling’ is significant. Instead, he told husbands to exercise care for wives “with consideration of the fact that a woman is someone weaker.” This notion of women as weaker was held, of course, without the benefit of 21st-century knowledge of human psychology, biology, physiology, and gynecology. But the duty of care within marriage stands the test of time.

More significantly and crucially, Peter reminded his readers that wives are “joint-heirs of the grace of life.” This explicit reference to the full participation of women as women in the Christian hope is a central Christian perspective and was profoundly counter-cultural for Peter’s readers. All this is brought to conclusion in the language of verse 8, where all are urged to be in unity and mutually supportive in community love.

Conclusion

What are we to make of these two passages? It would be foolish indeed to expect these texts to reflect 21st-century notions of social justice. We have had centuries of reflection on the implications of the gospel on society and individuals. How sad, then, to see some today make the conventions of the first century normative for Christians now, as though the gospel had no impact whatsoever on modern views of justice and love.

But even within the cultural constraints of their day, Peter and Paul have good news for women. First, women, as women, are full participants in the new community of believers. Second, women are responsible to respond to their own calling to be holy people,

and therefore to be counter-cultural in refusing to conform to some of the patterns of the world. Third, the overall emphasis upon serving and caring for the other moves the whole discussion to the place where the model of submission is no longer that of slave to master but of Christ's servanthood of all.

That kind of servanthood has nothing to do with gender.

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Notes

¹ All Scripture quotations in the Commentary section are the author's own translation from the original languages.

² See Norman Hillyer, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude*, New International Biblical Commentary 14 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1992), 92.

³ John H. Elliott, *1 Peter*, Anchor Bible 37B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 564.

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Wynkoop Center Bible Studies on Women in Ministry

UNIT 1: The Creation Mandate	UNIT 3: New Testament Women in Public Leadership
The Crown of Creation Gen. 1:26-31	Anna Luke 2:22, 36-40
The First Human, Almost Gen. 2:1-17	Woman at the Well John 4:1-42
The Human Race Completed Gen. 2:18-25	Jesus' Women Associates Luke 8:1-3; 23:55–24:11;
Broken Fellowship Gen. 3:1-13	John 20:1-2, 11-18
Facing the Consequences Gen. 3:14-24	Lydia Acts 16:11-15, 40
	Priscilla Acts 18:1-3, 18, 24-26; Rom. 16:3-4; 1 Cor. 16:19;
	2 Tim. 4:19
	Paul's Women Associates Rom. 16:1-16; Phil. 4:2-3;
	Col. 4:15
UNIT 2: Old Testament Women in Public Leadership	UNIT 4: Difficult Passages in the New Testament
Miriam Exod. 2:1-10; 15:19-21; Num. 12:1-16; 20:1;	The Creation Order Understood 1 Cor. 11:2-16
Mic. 6:4	Keeping Order in Public Worship 1 Cor. 14:26-36
Deborah Judg. 4:1-10, 14; 5:1-3	Mutual Submission among Christians Eph. 5:21-33;
Huldah 2 Kings 22:14-20; 2 Chron. 34:22-28	1 Pet. 3:1-7
Esther Esther 2:5-11, 16-23; 4:13–5:8; 7:1–8:6; 9:29-32	I Suffer Not a Woman 1 Tim. 2:8-15
Jehosheba 2 Kings 11:1-21; 2 Chron. 22:10-12	The New Testament Understanding of Women Gal. 3:23-29

Credits and Notices

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I Suffer Not a Woman—Exposition and Commentary

Scripture Focus

1 Timothy 2:8-15

Exposition and Commentary by Melanie Starks Kierstead

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Translation

I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument; ⁹also that the women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided, or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes, ¹⁰but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God. ¹¹Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. ¹²I permit no woman to teach or have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. ¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty. (1 Timothy 2:8-15, NRSV)

Why would Paul write to Timothy in Ephesus saying, “I permit no woman to teach or have authority over a man” (v. 12)? That is the biggest question we have as we consider our scripture passage. Either Timothy, a dear son in the gospel, who had traveled and ministered shoulder to shoulder with Paul, immediately understood why Paul would say this, or he was terribly confused after seeing Paul repeatedly affirm equal standing of women in the Church of God in general and, more specifically, commend particular women who worked right alongside him in his own ministry. At other times, Paul had allowed women to teach those who would become brilliant leaders; he had advised about how women should conduct themselves when

praying and prophesying before the congregation; and had commended women who had been his co-workers. What was all this about prohibiting women teachers?

Some current scholarship has made these same observations and come to a very different conclusion than I think Timothy did. Their shortsighted conclusion is that Paul simply had not written this letter to Timothy. Rather, someone later in church history, using Paul’s name, wrote this apocryphal correspondence restricting women’s place in the Christian Church in order to substantiate political leanings of the more and more male-dominated church. However, with a bit more study it is unnecessary to dismiss this letter as apocryphal or deutero-Pauline. If one begins with the premise that this is in fact an authentic correspondence between Paul and Timothy, one will use traditional methods of exegesis to uncover what Paul’s point was. One first must look at the literary context to identify Paul’s intended meaning.

The section preceding our particular passage urges the readers to pray for “all who are in high positions” so believers may “live a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity” (vv. 1-2). The author insisted this peaceable, quiet living pleases God and contributes to God’s desire that everyone be saved (vv. 3-4). Verse 5 refers to one God and the one mediator, Christ Jesus, to whom the author, a true and faithful “teacher of the Gentiles,” witnessed as His “herald and apostle” (v. 7).

The first emphasis seems to be that of prayer for those in authority. Because of: a) God's desire that believers live a *peaceable, quiet* life, and b) God's desire that *everyone be saved*, and c) God's desire that all people should know the truth of His monotheism and Christ Jesus' role as mediator, Paul (a truthful and faithful *teacher of Gentiles*) was appointed *herald* (announcer) and *apostle* (authorized agent of God). Paul urged the readers to pray for those who are in (secular) authority.

Verse 8 of our passage echoes Paul's urge to pray in verse one; and the godly, dignified, peaceable, and quiet living of verse 2 echoes here as well, when Paul calls believing men to "lift up holy hands" (participate in holy activities) in a peaceful setting ("without anger or argument"). The Christian's quiet, peaceful demeanor is echoed again, this time advising female believers to contribute to this peaceable, winsome environment by their "good works." Paul recommended modest, decent propriety, as opposed to flashy, expensive clothes and adornment. He suggested this quiet dignity is appropriate "for women who profess reverence for God" (v. 10).

Thus far, everything proposed seems to be for all believers, regardless of gender. Any recommendation specifically identified with one gender seems to be similarly applied to the other gender in a very balanced fashion. All that is recommended is in an effort to please God and present His believers attractively to those in authority over them so the authorities might also come to salvation. Standard exegetical tools seem to suggest egalitarianism.

So, it should be a surprise that the very next verse expresses anything but egalitarianism!

Other tools may be necessary to uncover answers to our question. Some tools of our study certainly have been underutilized. To be fair, although historical critical methodology long has raised questions about the historical setting in exegetical work, it is only fairly recently that all the stops have been pulled to incorporate many interdisciplinary applications useful in biblical research, including those of the social sciences.

Generally one can find something of an historical overview, including the *Sitz im Leben* (situation in life), when reading a commentary on New Testament books. It is interesting to

In this passage, Paul spoke out against the localized religious aberration where the principles of the cultic practices were contrary to Jewish and Christian ideals.

note, however, that usually brief references to the Ephesian temple of Artemis are made in almost any introduction to a commentary on the

Book of Ephesians, but much less mention of it is made when one reviews commentaries on the books to Timothy, pastor at Ephesus. One also may add that, even with a brief mention of the existence of the temple to Artemis, it is seldom that any particular *influences* of Mother God worship at the Artemesium upon the New Testament community are further developed.

One may wonder whether political, chauvinistic, or even sexist reasons could explain why available tools of social science have not been appropriated in search of answers to our question. I would propose that with those tools in hand, the context of this passage becomes much clearer. Here is a bit of background against which to read this passage.

In the first century, the “art” of feminine wiles, based in female sexual persuasion, had evolved to a social science in a matriarchal, matrilineal social structure in Asia Minor. I would propose it contributed to a religion of worship of the Mother God, known variously as Artemis, Cybele, Diana, or Eve (Hebat/Hepat). Obviously, at least the science and religion mentioned above was contrary to Judeo-Christian norms, and, under the best of conditions, the “art” of feminine wiles, although certainly not unknown to Jews and Christians, was best left unpracticed in the name of mutual respect and personal dignity.

I propose that in this passage, Paul spoke out against the localized religious aberration where the principles of the cultic practices were contrary to Jewish and Christian ideals. Specifically, dominance theology, ritual prostitution, and self-mutilation would have been soundly rejected.

In particular, the understanding of superiority of, in this Ephesian case, females over males is denied in

Christianity if not in all Judeo-Christianity. Ritual prostitution, by what one author calls “priestesses,” was for the purpose of celebrating sexuality, in honor of the Mother God. This practice served to focus the celebrants’ attention on the mysteries of sexuality and fertility.

The ultimate act of devotion to this cult, however, was public self-castration for the male adherents, thus making themselves “eunuchs” for the Mother God. It is not surprising, therefore, that women were the primary leaders in the worship of Artemis!

They were priests, theologians, teachers, liturgists, and worship leaders in the cult of Artemis. When Paul wrote to the Ephesian pastor, Timothy, he countered this prevalent culture with strict instruction to disallow to women any of these positions of authority in Timothy’s Christian churches.

In what immediately follows, there are several obvious clues to the culture-specific relevance of this prohibition. They are references first, to the creation of Adam and Eve, then to the deception of Eve, and then to the otherwise enigmatic (if not apparently completely irrelevant) comment about childbirth. Paul referred to the Mosaic account of the order of creation, “For Adam was formed first, then Eve” (v. 13). This rejected the local lore of Female Genesis, creation of all by the female god, Artemis/Cybele, etc.

There can be only one possible link between these supports for Paul’s pronouncements and the shocking prohibition of women teachers: Mother God worship.

Since the female in every species is the child-bearer, the natural conclusion in goddess worship circles was/is that biological genesis must

have originated with a female deity. Specifically, Eve, the “mother of all,” became, in Artemis theology, the mother of all creation, including Adam himself. Paul soundly rejected this theology in favor of the Mosaic account. Later Gnostic theology picked up on this notion and developed the concept of Sophia (“Wisdom”) as the female God, the Idea behind creation. For some Gnostic Christians, she became the leading, or at least the fourth, member of the godhead.

Secondly, in regard to the deception of Eve (another name by which Artemis was

worshipped), “Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became the transgressor” (v. 14). Paul assumed Christians should recognize that the influential and widespread doctrines of the predominantly female teachers of the Goddess Artemis were, in fact, similar to the deception of Eve, herself.

A bit later in the letter (4:7) there is a reference to “profane myths and old wives’ tales.” These were not just folksy ideas that come out from time to time, but “wisdom” passed on by the lay adherents to the Artemis cult. In support of his prohibition of women teachers, Paul countered the common local practice of invoking Artemis/Cybele’s presence during childbirth for protection, asserting that Christian women “will be saved through childbearing” (v. 15), if they remain true to their Christian faith, relying on the true God’s faithfulness, instead of any hope of the Mother God’s comfort.

To the first-century Ephesian Christian, “saved through childbearing” would not have meant women would *earn their salvation by bearing children*. Rather, they immediately would have related it to the Mother God lore that Artemis was present during childbirth. One myth was that the Artemesium burned in the fourth century B.C., while Artemis was attending the birth of Alexander the Great! Paul challenged the Christian women, “Don’t be so silly as to expect that Artemis or Eve will be around to provide or protect during childbirth. Rather, you believers, put your faith in God himself who will protect you!”

There can be only one possible link between these supports for Paul’s pronouncements and the shocking prohibition of women

teachers: Mother God worship. The serpent deceived Eve, and her worshippers were continuing to spread her deceptions, threatening to infiltrate the Ephesian congregations. Paul challenged Timothy, “Not on your watch!” It was God who did the creating, not Eve. Furthermore, contrary to the old wives’ tales/myths of Artemis worshippers, it was not Eve, but Adam who was created first! Clearly this was a local prohibition in response to the role of women in that society in the worship of the Mother God, Artemis.

Notes

¹ All Scripture quotations in the Exposition and Commentary sections are from the NRSV.

For Further Reading

For further exegesis and comment, the editors would like to refer readers to Catherine and Richard Clark Kroeger’s excellent book:

I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Light of Ancient Evidence. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992.

I Suffer Not a Woman—Study Guide

Study Guide by Stefanie and Mark Hendrickson
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Notes for the Leader

A small group setting or class can use the following questions to guide the discussion of the biblical passage and exposition. Allow participants time to answer for themselves, making room for all group members in the discussion.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the first emphasis in verse 8? Why is this the first thing the writer emphasizes (see 1 Tim. 2:1-7)?
2. How can misunderstanding and distorted theology cause chaos and damage to people? What theological issues does Paul address in this passage? How is it possible that his intention—clearing up distorted understandings of theology and religion—itsself be distorted?
3. What did “Mother God worship” entail during Paul’s time? What is the link between this cult and what Paul wrote in his letter to Timothy?
4. Think about your spiritual journey. What people gave you greatest guidance and influenced your life?
5. If the Mother God cult was the reason to caution women about teaching, how does that affect women in the church today?
6. When you read this passage, what do you do with a woman who is called by God and ordained by the Church?
7. What does being faithful to God’s desire that all might be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (in verse 4) look like in the Church? How does that happen in the Church today?
8. Read Galatians 3:28, also written by Paul. How does this verse compare or differ from this scripture passage? Why?
9. Luther Lee, cofounder of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, said:
 - a. *If males may belong to a Christian church, so may females; if males may preach the gospel, so may females; and if males may be ordained, so may females; “There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).*
10. Was Lee on the right track? Why or why not? How does his argument fit the 1 Timothy passage? How does it fit other passages, such as Galatians 3:28?
11. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit descends on the followers of Jesus Christ, just as He had promised. Peter preaches the good news to the crowd and at one point reminds them of God’s promise: “I will pour out my

Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (v. 17). Why would the Holy Spirit fulfill God's promise that men *and* women will prophesy, if we are supposed to believe women must remain silent? What do the Holy Spirit's teachings indicate here?

Wynkoop Center Bible Studies on Women in Ministry

UNIT 1: The Creation Mandate	UNIT 3: New Testament Women in Public Leadership		
The Crown of Creation	Gen. 1:26-31	Anna	Luke 2:22, 36-40
The First Human, Almost	Gen. 2:1-17	Woman at the Well	John 4:1-42
The Human Race Completed	Gen. 2:18-25	Jesus' Women Associates	Luke 8:1-3; 23:55–24:11;
Broken Fellowship	Gen. 3:1-13		John 20:1-2, 11-18
Facing the Consequences	Gen. 3:14-24	Lydia	Acts 16:11-15, 40
		Priscilla	Acts 18:1-3, 18, 24-26; Rom. 16:3-4; 1 Cor. 16:19;
			2 Tim. 4:19
		Paul's Women Associates	Rom. 16:1-16; Phil. 4:2-3;
			Col. 4:15
UNIT 2: Old Testament Women in Public Leadership	UNIT 4: Difficult Passages in the New Testament		
Miriam	Exod. 2:1-10; 15:19-21; Num. 12:1-16; 20:1;	The Creation Order Understood	1 Cor. 11:2-16
	Mic. 6:4	Keeping Order in Public Worship	1 Cor. 14:26-36
Deborah	Judg. 4:1-10, 14; 5:1-3	Mutual Submission among Christians	Eph. 5:21-33;
Huldah	2 Kings 22:14-20; 2 Chron. 34:22-28		1 Pet. 3:1-7
Esther	Esther 2:5-11, 16-23; 4:13–5:8; 7:1–8:6; 9:29-32	I Suffer Not a Woman	1 Tim. 2:8-15
Jehosheba	2 Kings 11:1-21; 2 Chron. 22:10-12	The New Testament Understanding of Women	Gal. 3:23-29

Credits and Notices

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The New Testament Understanding of Women—Exposition

Scripture Focus

Galatians 3:26-29

Exposition by Tom Umbel

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Introduction

The annual assembly had arrived. District leadership had envisioned a gathering from two major urban areas and parts of four different states, where the diversity would be highlighted and affirmed. Some lacked enthusiasm that this undertaking would work. Others wanted the assembly to proceed as it had in years past. Still others were uncomfortable with trying to “mix” so many different people in one setting. But over all the objections and limited vision, the plans moved forward.

During the course of three days we heard prayers, music, and testimonies in Haitian French, Korean, Spanish, English, and perhaps a few other languages spoken by those in the audience. Churches reported on reaching out to people groups different from them or hosting groups of other ethnic or racial identities in their facilities. For the first time, some realized they could be blessed by music from another culture and by prayers spoken in another language. Signs of walls cracking and friendships forming despite the many differences were evident everywhere. District mission strategies and local church visions emerged to give more life and clarity to reaching, accepting, and including *all* people.

The high points of the gathering were the ordination service and the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. The ordinands included (among others) a Hispanic man, reflecting the cross-cultural dimensions of our denominational mission, and a woman,

affirming the core value of Nazarenes from the beginning, of opening every position of ministry and leadership to both men and women. In the sacrament of Holy Communion we were reminded of Christ’s sacrifice and promise of new life for all people. We all realized in a visible way that at the foot of the Cross, the ground is level. The assembly was noticeably mixed and yet demonstrably one in Christ.

Though removed by time and context, this is what Paul had in mind in writing to the believers in Galatia. First-century culture was deeply divided along ethnic, class, and gender lines. A Jewish morning prayer common in Paul’s time thanked God that “thou hast not made me a Gentile, a slave, or a woman.” The apostle’s main theme of “freedom in Christ” enables God’s children to break down the barriers between us. When a person places his or her faith in Christ and unites with Him through the sacrament of baptism, this person becomes part of the family of God. This new family identity, Paul wrote, makes us equal and enables us to eliminate everything else that may distinguish or divide us.

Many local congregations and organizations today, like Christians in the first century, increasingly witness diversity across gender, ethnic, racial, economic, and religious lines. This raises important questions. What does it mean to be the church? In relating to those who are different from us, what beliefs and practices best reflect what it means to be

the people of God, to be like Christ, and, as Wesleyan-Holiness believers, to be a holy people? What walls of ethnicity, status, or gender divide us today? How do we avoid constructing these walls, or go about dismantling them once they are in place? In response to these questions, this passage gives us helpful guidance.

Preparing to Build

The analogy of building a house is a helpful way to think about Paul's message in Galatians 3. Saving faith in Jesus Christ brings us into the family of God. But what kind of house are we building? The initial reluctance in the story above illustrates the fact that building walls comes quite naturally to us because of the consequences of the fall (Gen. 3). Someone has written that sin is a "denial of human destiny as appointed by God." Sin, self-centered pride, broke humankind's relationship with God; sin is a denial of our dependence on the grace of God.

Sin also separated all human beings from one other. Sin leads us to reject our fellow human beings, especially those who are different. The first human act outside the Garden was Cain's murder of his brother Abel (Gen. 4). Our relationships show how our sinful human tendency is to fear others, to dominate others, to judge others without knowing them, and to believe others are inferior to us. We even go to great lengths to justify our destructive attitudes and behavior toward others. However, the biblical story is about God's actions in reconciling the human race to himself *and* us to each other.

We harm the building process when we prohibit persons from positions of service or leadership for any reason other than their spiritual maturity.

Before beginning to build a house, the contractor removes all the things that stand in the way of the work and gathers all the necessary materials. Paul talked about "enemies" and how their view of the gospel undermined what God had in mind for His family. As Christians, we often think of enemies as forces that attack us from the outside to tear us apart. But remember the old saying that a "tree trunk can be picked apart as much by termites from within as by woodpeckers from without." To build God's house we must, as Paul did, identify and root out the "enemies" from within. In fact, we can't begin building until this is done.

So, what are some of these "enemies?" We harm the building process when we label or stereotype others in a negative way. We harm the building process when we regard others as inferior or we treat them with intolerance; when we fail to open the door of God's house and accept others into the family because of their color, their ethnic background, their country of origin, their politics, their past, their class in society, their medical or emotional disabilities. We harm the building process when we prohibit persons from positions of service or leadership for any reason other than their spiritual maturity.

We harm the building process when we plead ignorance or remain silent about the enemies of injustice, prejudice, or judgment in our midst; when we "blame the victim" or refuse to come alongside those who suffer under the weight of these forces. We harm the building process when we take steps to establish our own position and power to the

neglect or exclusion of others. We harm the building process when we fail to answer adequately the question put to Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:25-37¹). We harm the building process when we fail to look any different from the world in these areas or work for reconciliation after we are made aware, by the Holy Spirit, of our shortcomings and sins. We harm the building process when we fail to love unreservedly in the same way God loves each one of us without condition. These harmful termites, among others, eat away at the character and the mission of the church. Will we turn a blind eye to them or will we kill them off?

Working Together on God’s House

After preparing the property for building, the contractor assembles the materials necessary for the building. Above we saw that barriers to building the house of God result from sin and brokenness. Even within the church this sinful tendency can give life to attitudes and behaviors that keep the building of God’s house from moving forward.

However, as Paul pointed out in Galatians 3, there is good news! Because of God’s redemptive work in Jesus Christ, all the walls we have made can be taken down, allowing God’s people to accomplish His design for the church in the world.

Paul used the powerful symbol and spiritual event of baptism to demonstrate what happens when we are delivered from the dominion of darkness and “put on Christ.” Further, the apostle wrote elsewhere that Christ has “broken down the dividing wall . . .

the hostility” (wall of separation) that existed between Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:14). Jesus’ mission was to transform human hearts, enabling us to “[take] off your old self *with its practices*” and to “put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (Col. 9-10, TNIV). This is the spiritual dimension of God’s plan of redemption.

Jesus’ mission was also to form community in which “there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian [lower class], Scythian [cruel, warlike people], slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!” (Col. 3:11). Jesus sought to bring peace and reconciliation to all peoples. This is the social dimension of God’s plan of redemption.

So, what do we do with this central biblical teaching? We support the building process when we grasp fully and subject ourselves completely to the abundance of biblical teaching on these matters of loving others, overcoming barriers, and working for peace and reconciliation. We support the building process when we take the risk of both seeking

forgiveness from those we have hurt and offering it to those who have hurt us, even when we have no

assurance of what the results may be.

We support the building process when we boldly confront and root out the enemies, when we actively construct the framework for truly *being* the family of God; showing the world who we are by our love (John 15; 1 John 3); resisting “selfish ambition” and “in humility regard[ing] others as better than [our]selves” (Phil. 2); working for healing of

Building the solid foundation requires us to be diligent about providing opportunities for women to fulfill God’s call on their lives.

divisions among us (1 Cor. 1); realizing God shows no partiality or preference for one person over another (Acts 10); creating an inclusive family where all persons are held in equal regard (Gal. 3). We support the building process when we individually and corporately do something we have never done before to cross boundaries, to tear down walls, accept those on the sidelines, love the unlovable, and learn about those who are different and invite them into our Christian family.

We support the building process when we pray for God to work a miracle in fulfilling the high priestly prayer of Jesus, “that they may all be one. As you, Father, you are in me and I am in you” (John 17:21). We support the building process when we persist in a lifestyle of the Christlike qualities of humility, peace-making, reconciliation, and unity in the face of increasing diversity. Supporting this building process in a redemptive way requires our deliberate intention. What will we decide?

Witness to the World

What do we want unbelievers to see when they look at the church? Many church buildings in the United States and Europe are given “landmark status” so visitors can tour them to learn more about their architectural and cultural significance. Real estate professionals in the process of selling a home “show the house” to prospective buyers. These buyers may purchase on the basis of what the house looks like on the outside. However, they also will examine how well the house is constructed deep within.

The people of God will achieve “landmark status” as we ask God by His grace to deliver us from the “enemies” among us. Local

congregations and church organizations will show themselves truly to be a sign of the Kingdom as they pray for the building materials needed to reflect His design for what it means to be the family of God. As a holiness people, we cannot be content with mere “window dressing.” Rather, we must allow the grace of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to cleanse us of all that works against God’s perfect design and build a solid foundation for the future.

Building the solid foundation requires us to be diligent about providing opportunities for women to fulfill God’s call on their lives; responding with compassion to the diversity of people groups coming to our shores; and inviting with complete acceptance into our Christian families those in our communities who don’t quite fit our mold. This is God’s family, and by God’s grace, this is our family. Let’s respond with courage and obedience to be a compelling and transforming witness to the world.

Notes

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations in the Exposition section are from the NRSV.

The New Testament Understanding of Women—Study Guide

Study Guide by Stefanie and Mark Hendrickson

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Notes for the Leader

A small group setting or class can use the following questions to guide the discussion of the biblical passage and exposition. Allow participants time to answer for themselves, making room for all group members in the discussion.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think “sin” means? How does your definition compare to that of the lesson writers, others in your group, or your church?
2. What effect has sin had on creation? What have been some of the consequences of sin?
3. How does life now, affected by sin and the Fall, compare or differ to God’s plan for creation?
4. What are some of the way we build walls in our lives? What are ways we build walls in the church?
5. In the Exposition section, Dr. Umbel compares this Galatians passage to building a house. How is it like building a house?
6. What do you think the “house” of God looks like when it is being built? Why?
7. What are the similarities and differences between the house of God you described and your church community? How can you personally help your church become more like the community Paul describes?
8. List barriers you think occur in Christian community. With which of these do you struggle? Which barriers are not something with which you struggle?
9. How does Christ help us with our barriers? What is the Spirit’s role in this? The Father’s role?
10. What is the importance of Paul listing such different people in this passage? How does this compare with Jesus’ ministry? The power of the Holy Spirit?

The New Testament Understanding of Women—Commentary

Commentary by Lisa Bernal

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For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷For as many were baptized into Christ, you put on Christ. ²⁸There is not (cannot be) Jew nor Greek, is not slave nor free; not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you (are) of Christ, then you are a seed of Abraham, even heirs according to promise. (Gal. 3:26-29¹)

“**I**n but out.” This is how the Galatian believers must have felt when they first heard the “other” gospel some visitors brought to their church after Paul left them. These visiting preachers were questioning Paul’s authority as an apostle and rejecting his gospel. These “agitators,” as Paul called them, claimed he was not preaching the true gospel because he did not pressure the Galatian believers to observe Mosaic regulations, like circumcision and the celebration of Jewish holidays or months. Paul responded by writing this highly emotional letter to the Galatian church, accusing them of being misled to accept a “different” gospel (1:7).

Galatians 3:26-29 forms part of a long argument Paul presented to the Galatian believers in order to “set the record straight,” so to speak. As a conclusion to a multipart argument, these verses are best understood in light of the whole letter.

Paul wrote this letter to warn the believers against what he saw as a “different gospel” being spread by his enemies. These “enemies” of Paul were most likely Jewish Christians of Palestine, who insisted non-Jewish Christians

should observe circumcision and other Jewish practices. They are sometimes called the “Judaizers.” Paul wrote the letter to warn the Galatian believers there is no other gospel than the one he preached to them: the gospel of Jesus Christ. He insisted the Christian has won his or her freedom in Christ and is no longer subject to the Law. This “freedom in Christ” became the basic theme of Paul’s letter to the Galatians. In chapters 3 and 4, he emphasized that in God’s plan, humanity is saved by faith and not by the Law (3:1-4:31).

A brief summary of Paul’s main arguments in the preceding chapters will help clarify the claim he makes in verses 26-29. Indeed, these verses form a sort of conclusion to the arguments presented earlier in the letter. First, in chapter 1, Paul insisted his apostolic authority was based on a personal encounter with Jesus Christ himself (1:1). He was bold enough to claim equality with The Twelve because of this encounter with the risen Lord (Acts 9). Paul did not doubt God called him. His “calling” to preach was not based on human custom (such as obedience to the Law), but was of divine origin. More importantly, God had called not only Paul, but also the Galatian believers themselves (1:6, 15). The heart of the gospel, therefore, is that salvation is possible for all who believe. This means, too, since salvation is by faith, believers no longer are enslaved to the demands of the Jewish law.

In chapter 2, Paul continued to defend his gospel by claiming his Jewish background did not give him religious privilege and did not make him superior to the “Greeks and pagans” who did not possess the Law. Both Jews and Gentiles were sinners before God (2:15-21, cf. Rom. 3:9, 23). The Judaizers worked against the grace of God by insisting believers fulfill Jewish legal obligations, thereby suggesting the work of Christ is not sufficient to overcome sin.

In chapter 3, Paul supported his claim that God’s plan is for humanity to be saved by faith and not by the Law. He did this first by referring to the experience of the Galatian believers themselves, “Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?” (vv. 2-3). In these verses, Paul criticized the attempts of the Galatians to live according to the “flesh,” by making observance of the Jewish law the basis of their spiritual experience, in contrast to a life lived in “the Spirit.” Next, Paul gave them the example of Abraham, pointing out the Galatian believers, as Gentiles, were like Abraham, who was made righteous by God on the basis of faith and not by “deeds.” Paul proclaimed his gospel is the same gospel Abraham believed (3:6-9).

Verse 26

The Christian now is related to God in a different way. Through baptism, believers now are adopted to “sonship” and are made

one with Christ through faith. In the previous verses, Paul used the plural “we” to refer to the privilege he shared with the Jews. Beginning in verse 26, we see a shift in the pronoun, as Paul now focuses on the privileged position of the Galatian believers: as “you are all sons” (v. 26); “you . . . put on Christ (baptized) (v. 27); “you are all one in Christ” (v. 28); “you are a seed of Abraham” (v. 29). Although Paul used the term “sonship” to describe this relationship, it is clear he included the women of the Galatian churches in this baptismal unity.

Verse 27

Baptism is a sacramental rite by which the believer is united with Christ in a public witness. There was a practice among early Christians in which a white robe or garment was put over a newly baptized believer to symbolize the “putting on [of] Christ.” It is possible Paul either borrowed a practice from Greek mystery religion or used an Old Testament expression for the adoption of another person’s moral disposition (Job 29:14; 2

Chron. 6:14). In the Old Testament, there are several references to a person “putting on” righteousness, salvation, or glory like a garment. In this verse, Paul asserted that every believer “puts on” Christ. This is the “new creation” (6:15) that matters, not circumcision or uncircumcision. Christians should regard each other from this point of view (2 Cor. 5:16-17).

There is no higher criterion by which people’s inclusion in the church and its ministry should be judged. Any criteria besides faith in Jesus Christ, were, for Paul, nothing but foolishness.

Verse 28

The baptismal experience that brings all believers into faith makes them one in Jesus Christ. Therefore, secondary differences among people such as race or rank or gender disappear as an effect of the primary “incorporation” into Christ’s body. The new relationships brought about by faith in Christ are both spiritual and social in nature.

Although some interpreters would argue Paul was not really concerned about social or political equality among believers, this line of interpretation seems to ignore the situation that occasioned Paul’s writing of the letter in the first place. Paul was responding to a doctrinal and social crisis threatening to divide the church in Galatia. Gentiles were being forced to become Jews in order to become full participants in the church. Paul strongly rejected this claim by the Judaizers, instead arguing that any expression of social discrimination within the body of Christ violates the truth of the gospel. This is why he emphasized that all cultural and social divisions are abolished in Christ, and that the Christian church should be the primary model of this “new creation” in Christ.

Paul repeated this position at the end of the letter, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any strength, but faith working through love” (5:6). We also find similar formulae in Romans 10:12 and Colossians 3:11. One does not have to be born a Jew, and a male, in order to be part of God’s

Gentiles did not have to become Jews, and women do not have to become men in order to participate fully in the life and ministry of the church. It was not his Jewishness or maleness that qualified Paul for the ministry; it was his faith in Jesus Christ. The truth of this unity and equality in Jesus Christ should not be overcome by human traditions.

covenant community. If circumcision were necessary for membership in Christ’s body, obviously women would have to be excluded as a matter of course.

It was not only important for Paul to make the Galatian believers understand that all believers are equal in Christ. It was also important to him personally. Paul faced opposition by those who accused his gospel of being inferior because he was not part of the original Twelve apostles. If his gospel was inferior, then his ministry was inferior too. Paul therefore had to defend his claim to apostolic ministry.

Paul had to make the Galatian believers and his enemies understand his gospel was rooted in Jesus Christ. It was not a watered-down version of the other apostles’ gospel. Because his gospel was rooted in Christ, his ministry was also rooted in Christ. Through the gospel of salvation, he responded to God’s call to be the apostle to the Gentiles. His gospel made his ministry equal to those of the original Twelve apostles. There is no higher criterion by which people’s inclusion in the church and its ministry should be judged. Any criteria besides faith in Jesus Christ were, for Paul, nothing but foolishness.

When Jewish Christians excluded Gentile Christians from significant participation in the life and ministry of the church because of the “law,” they violated the truth of the gospel. They also ignored the unity and equality of all believers in Jesus Christ. Gentiles did not have to become Jews, and women do not have to

become men to participate fully in the life and ministry of the church. It was not his Jewishness or maleness that qualified Paul for the ministry; it was his faith in Jesus Christ. The truth of this unity and equality in Jesus Christ should not be overcome by human traditions. Paul made these claims fully aware of the advantages and disadvantages a person's birth brought upon him or her in that society. But he concluded that all the advantages birth and social rank can bring do not make us more qualified for salvation.

Verse 29

Paul came to his conclusion with this verse, which is really a conclusion of the argument started in the beginning of chapter 3. In Christ and through "one Spirit," all believers share equal rights and privileges as "children of God," and equal blessings as "heirs to Abraham's promise." There is no need to rely on human laws and practices to gain special privileges or to maintain special status. As heirs and recipients of God's promise to Abraham, all receive their full inheritance without regard to racial, social, or gender ranks.

Notes

¹ All Scripture quotations in the Commentary section are the author's own translation from the original languages.

For Further Reading

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