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Women in the New Testament: A Middle Eastern Cultural View

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The broader topic of the place of women in the family, in society and in the Church is now discussed over much of the Christian world across a wide spectrum of opinion. Few topics have held as much promise and pain, hope and despair, change and deep uneasiness about change as this topic and it is clear that the New Testament is critical to it. This essay focuses on the New Testament. Yet regarding the biblical witness there is a strong tendency to see Scripture through the eyes of traditional interpretation of it, or through the eyes of current ideologies. Here a rigorous attempt will be made to allow Scripture itself to control and correct our understanding of it.

As is known, the NT is deeply influenced by its first century Middle Eastern cultural setting. Trying to discern the fabric of cultural assumptions that underlie the NT has been my life-long focus in NT studies. As a supplement to other historical concerns, this lens will be utilized as we examine our topic.

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We will first expose what appear to be two opposing attitudes in the New Testament towards women in the church. We will then see if these two 'opposites' can be reconciled. The problem is simply this: one set of NT texts appears to say 'yes' to women while a second set appears to say 'no'. We turn first to the positives.

Positive attitudes

In the NT, women occupy a remarkable range of clearly identifiable positions. These include:

Jesus had women disciples

Four texts are significant. First, although occurring only once, the word 'disciple' does appear in the NT as a feminine. In Acts 9:36 Tabitha (Dorcas) is called *mathetria* (disciple). Secondly, in St. Matthew's Gospel,

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Jesus' family appears and asks to speak with him. Jesus replies,

'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?' And stretching out his hand *towards his disciples*, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother' (Matt. 12:46-50).

In our Middle Eastern cultural context, a speaker who gestures to a crowd of *men* can say, 'Here are my brother, and uncle and cousin'. He *cannot* say, 'Here are my brother, and sister, and mother'. The text specifically affirms that Jesus is gesturing to 'his disciples' whom he addresses with male and female terms. This communicates to the reader that the disciples before him were composed of men *and* women.

Thirdly, is the remarkable report in Luke 8:1-3. In this text the reader is told,

Soon afterward he went through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good news of the Kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women...who provided for them out of their means.

We note that Jesus is *travelling* through cities and villages with a band of men *and women* who are naturally known to be his disciples. This implies that they were spending night after night in strange villages. Today social customs are more relaxed than they were in the first century (as evidenced from the Mishnah and the Talmudes). Yet in the contemporary Middle East, in traditional society, I know of no place where the social scene presented in the text is possible. Women can travel with a group of men, but must spend their nights with relatives. Three points of amazement appear.

First, the story itself is very surprising for the reasons noted above. Secondly, the women are paying for the movement out of resources under their control. Finally, Luke (a man) admits all of this in writing.

Fourthly, in Luke 10:38 Jesus enters the house of Martha. Luke tells us, 'And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching'. In Acts Paul describes himself as having been 'brought up at the feet of Gamaliel' (Acts 22:3). To 'sit at the feet' of a rabbi meant to become a disciple of a rabbi. So Mary became a disciple of Jesus. Martha, we are told is 'distracted' (not burdened) with much serving. To be distracted one must be distracted from something or by something.

Clearly Martha is distracted *from* the teachings of Jesus by her cooking. In the account, Martha then asks Jesus to send Mary to the kitchen to help her. The point is not the need for someone to peel the potatoes. In our Middle Eastern cultural context, Martha is more naturally understood to be upset over the fact that her 'little sister' is seated with the men and has become a disciple of Rabbi Jesus. It is not difficult to imagine what is going through Martha's mind. She says to herself:

This is disgraceful! What will happen to us! My sister has joined this band of men. What will the neighbours say? What will the family think? After this who will marry her? This is too much to expect!

Jesus does not reply to her words, but to their meaning. In context his answer communicates the following:

Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about *many* things. I understand the *entire* list. One thing is needed. What is missing is not one more plate of food, but rather for you to understand that *I* am providing the meal and that your sister has already chosen the good portion. I will not allow you to take it from her. A good student is more important to me than a good meal.

The word 'portion' can mean a portion of food at a meal¹ Jesus is defending Mary's right to continue her 'theological studies' with Jesus as one of his disciples.

From these four texts it is clear that in the Gospels women were among the disciples of Jesus.

There are women teachers of theology in the NT

Acts 18:24-28 tells of Apollos' visit to Ephesus. Apollos is praised for his knowledge of the Scriptures and 'the things concerning Jesus'. But 'he knew only the baptism of John'. The text affirms,

...but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him *they* took him and expounded to him the way of God more accurately.

Clearly Priscilla is 'team teaching' theology with Aquila and the student is no beginner, no fledgling catechumen; rather he is the famous, eloquent preacher of Alexandria. Furthermore, Luke's Gospel was indeed sent/ dedicated to Theophilus. But there is little doubt that Luke also intended it to be read by the Church. Thus when he identifies Mary as the author of the Magnificat he indirectly presents her as a teacher of theology, ethics, and social justice for all his readers! The critical discussion about the composition of the Magnificat is known to me. Yet irrespective of one's view regarding sources and authorship, Luke *presents* Mary as the singer of this song and thus as a teacher of the readers of his Gospel. These two texts witness to the fact that in the early church women could (Mary) and did (Priscilla) teach theology to men.

The NT affirms the presence of women deacons/ministers in the Early Church

For this topic, two texts must be noted. The first is Rom. 16:1-2, where Paul writes, 'I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae.'

Phoebe is called a *deacon* (*diakonos*) not a *deaconness*. The evidence for the feminine use of this masculine form is slight.² Most likely this masculine ending is used

because Phoebe was ordained to a clearly defined ministry, that of deacon (*diakonos*). Thus the formal title appears. Another reason is that the Aramaic word is *shammash*, which is used to describe the High Priest officiating in the temple on the day of atonement (M., Yoma 7:5; B.T. Yoma 47a). But the feminine *shammasha* means a prostitute.³ The need for an honourable title would dictate the use of the masculine in a church where a significant number had Aramaic as a part of their linguistic heritage.

In any case, for centuries scholars have observed the official nature of Phoebe's position. Regarding this verse, John Calvin wrote,

He begins by commending Phoebe... first on account of her office, because she exercised a very honourable and holy ministry in the Church'.⁴

In the contemporary scene Cranfield concludes,

We regard it as virtually certain that Phoebe is being described as *a* or possibly, *the* 'deacon' of the church in question, and that this occurrence of *diakonos* is to be classified with its occurrences in Philippians 1.1 and 1 Timothy 3.8 and 12.⁵

We would add to this that in 1 Tim. 4:6 *diakonos* is applied to Timothy himself where it is usually translated 'minister.' While recognizing that Romans is written when the church's ministry was in an early and more undefined stage, Dunn feels that, 'servant' is inadequate. He writes,

diakonos together with *ousa* points more to a recognized ministry... or position of responsibility within the congregation.⁶

Paul refers to himself and to Apollos as *diakono*i in 1 Cor. 3:5.

Furthermore, Phoebe is called a *prostatis* over/to many. This word was applied to the leader of worship in a Graeco-Roman temple as well as to a governor, a chieftain, and the leader of a democracy.⁷ Dunn argues for patron/protector, or leader/ruler.⁸ A ninth century Arabic version translated this phrase, '*qa' ima 'ala katherin wa 'alayya*', in authority over many and over myself as well.⁹

A second text relevant to women deacons is 1 Tim 3:8-11. Here the qualifications for deacons and for 'the women' appear. The two lists exhibit striking parallels which can be seen as follows:

1 Timothy 3:8-11

Deacons likewise must be:	The women likewise must be:
1. Serious (<i>semnous</i>)	1. Serious (<i>semnas</i>)
2. Not double-tongued (<i>dilogous</i>)	2. Not slanderers (<i>diabolous</i>)
3. Not addicted to much wine	3. Temperate
4. Not greedy for gain	4.—

5. They must hold fast to the mystery of <i>the faith</i> (<i>ekhontas to musterion tes pisteos</i>)	5. <i>Faithful</i> in all things (NRSV) (<i>pistas en pasin</i>) Better: <i>Believing</i> in all things with a clear conscience
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These two lists are obviously intended to be parallel. The critical item for our subject is number five. The deacons must hold onto *the faith*. As seen above, the parallel item for the qualifications of the women is '*pistas en pasin*.' The other six occurrences of this word in 1 Timothy are translated as referring to the *act of believing* in the faith. Here alone it is consistently translated 'faithful in all things,' referring to a character trait. Does not the parallel nature of the two lists make clear that 'believing in all things' is what is intended? These women can best be seen as engaged in activities directly related to the faith in the same way as the men. Deacons in Acts 6 appear in Acts 7 and 8 as *preachers of the word* (cf. Stephen and Philip). Regarding 'the women' here in 1 Timothy John Chrysostom wrote,

Some have thought that this is said of women generally, but it is not so, for why should he introduce anything about women to interfere with his subject. He is speaking to those who hold the rank of Deaconesses.¹⁰

The NT has women prophets

Eph. 2:20 affirms that the household of God is built on 'the apostles and prophets'. Thus, whoever they were, these early Christian prophets occupied a high place in the NT church. Furthermore, some of these prophets were women. In Acts Paul stays in Caesarea with Philip the evangelist whose daughters prophesied (Acts 21:19).

In 1 Cor. 11:4-5 Paul offers advice to men and women prophets on headcovering *while prophesying*. However one interprets this puzzling text, it is clear that both men and women were praying and prophesying. Praying could refer to private devotions. Prophesying is necessarily a public act.

A woman apostle

Rom. 16:7 reads,

Greet Andronicus and Jounian, my relatives and my fellow prisoners; they are notable among the apostles, and they were in Christ before me.

Two people in this text are called 'notable among the apostles.' Our interest focuses on the name Jounian which is the accusative singular of a first declension Greek noun. Unfortunately this particular accusative can be masculine or feminine. The question becomes: What is the nominative of this name Jounian? The first declension allows for two options. It could be Jounia, in which case the person is a woman. This option would mean that Paul was sending greetings to a man and a woman, both

apostles, probably a husband and wife like Priscilla and Aquila whom he has just mentioned.

On the other hand, if the nominative form is Jounias (a contraction of Junianus,¹¹ then the text refers to two men. Which of these options is more probable? Initially we observe that the witness of the Fathers is consistent.

Preaching on this text, Chrysostom said,

‘Greet Andronicus and Junia... who are outstanding among the apostles.’

To be an apostle is something great. But to be outstanding among the apostles just think what a wonderful song of praise that is! Indeed, how great the wisdom of this woman must have been, that she was even deemed worthy of the title of apostle.¹²

Jounian was also read as a feminine by Origen of Alexandria, Jerome, Peter Abelard and others. The Catholic scholar, Bernadette Brooten, quoted above, was unable to find any Latin commentary on Romans that had this name as a masculine before the late thirteenth century. The name appears as a feminine (Junia) in the Syriac Peshitta and in all the numerous MSS and published Arabic versions available to me stretching from the ninth to the nineteenth centuries. The male name Junias first appeared in the Middle East in 1860! In the English language the famous Authorized Version reads, ‘Salute Andronicus and Junia...who are of note among the apostles’.

The first noticeable shift from Junia to Junias was apparently made by Faber Stapulensis, writing in Paris in 1512. His work subsequently influenced Luther’s commentary on Romans. Luther then incorporated the masculine Junias into his German translation of the Bible which in time influenced other versions. However, the theoretical masculine name Junias has never been found in any Latin or Greek text. The name Junia, however, has appeared over two hundred and fifty times.¹³ Thus to insist on this being a masculine name is like finding a text with the name Mary in it and arguing that it refers to a man! Such an argument is theoretically possible but would surely hinge on the finding of at least one text where Mary is clearly a male name.

It appears that during the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries a name known by the Church, East and West, to be female gradually became the name of a man in the West. In the Middle East this shift of gender did not take place until the nineteenth century. The shift in both cases was made without reference to any evidence.

We must now ask, is the title ‘apostle’ significant? In the NT this title was primarily applied to the twelve. Paul, James, Barnabas and the two people in this text were also called apostles. From the shortness of the list and the prominence of the first three names, it is clear that they were a highly select group. In 1 Cor. the Apostles head the list of church orders (12:29). As noted, the Church is

built on them (Eph. 2:20). The title is best understood to have maintained its original meaning, which was an eye-witness to Jesus who had received a direct commission from him.¹⁴ Thus, the title of apostle (as applied to Junia) cannot be seen as a casual reference to an insignificant early Christian witness. With Chrysostom, the Early Fathers, Arabic and Syriac Christianity, and the Authorized Version translators, we can affirm with full confidence that Junia (feminine) was an apostle.

Women elders

There remains the question of elders. The central text is 1 Tim. 5:1-2. Initially, the widely-debated question of the authorship of the Pastoral Epistles can be set aside. The material is often called deutero-Pauline. I prefer the view of E. E. Ellis who argues that the Pastorals present Paul at the end of his life addressing new topics through an amanuensis.¹⁵ With a full awareness of the modern debate and the theological and linguistic issues involved, we will look at the text as Scripture handed down to us as a letter of Paul to Timothy, the pastor of the church in Ephesus. Our conclusions, we trust, are valid for our topic irrespective of a composition date from the sixties or the nineties.

The text under consideration is open to two interpretations. The first is reflected in the time-honored translation of these two verses, which is as follows:

Do not rebuke an *older man* but exhort him as you would a father; younger men like brothers, *older women* like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity (RSV).

This translation is built on the assumption that chapter five opens a new subject. At the end of chapter four there is specific reference to *the council of elders* who ordained Timothy. This *council* of elders, the *presbuterion*, was composed of the *presbuteroi*, the elders. That much is clear. The problem arises in 5:1-2, where the same word appears twice, first as a masculine singular (*presbutero*) and then as a feminine plural (*presbuteras*). These two words are usually translated as ‘older man’ and ‘older women’, as seen above. Support for this translation is found in the fact that ‘young men’ and ‘young women’ are mentioned in the text. Thus it is easy to see age references all through the verse. But this is not the only option.

It is also possible to argue as follows. (First, a word of explanation: the science of rhetorical criticism in biblical studies is more than one hundred and fifty years old.¹⁶ But it has only been given serious attention in the last two decades.) One of the frequently used devices, now found to be extensively present in both the OT and the NT, is chiasm, which we prefer to call ‘inverted parallelism’. This particular rhetorical device presents a series of ideas, comes to a climax and then repeats the series backwards. The ideas/units that repeat can be individual lines but often appear as paragraphs. This form of rhetoric is

common in both Greek and Hebrew literature. It is so extensive in the NT that Johanna Dewey has observed, 'The question has now become, where is it not found?'¹⁷

In regard to our text, if we observe the larger section in which 5:1-2 appears, the following outline emerges:

1. These instructions (as a minister) 4:6-11
2. Timothy and the Elders (and the young) 4:12-5:2
3. Older widows (and the young) 5:3-16
4. Timothy and the Elders 5:17-20
5. These rules (in regard to ordination) 5:21-22

Numbers 1 and 5 discuss 'instructions as a minister' and 'rules as regards ordination'. They form a pair. Paragraphs 2 and 4 form a second pair and are on the topic of 'Timothy and the Elders'. The widows form paragraph 3 in the centre. The entire passage discusses *ministry*. With this very simple outline in mind, a closer look at each paragraph is necessary. We will examine each of the 'pairs' of paragraphs. Paragraphs 1 and 5 will be examined and compared first. We will then skip briefly to the centre in paragraph 3 and finally observe the thrust of paragraphs 4 and 2 where our text is located.

1. *The outside pair* (1 and 5)

The first paragraph (4:6-11) opens with, 'If you put these *instructions* before the brethren you will be a good *diakonos/minister* of Jesus Christ'. This section most naturally ends with the words '*Command and teach* these things' (v 11). Paragraph 5 (5:21-22) is clearly parallel to this opening section. It charges Timothy to 'keep these *rules*' (v 21) and to 'not be hasty in the laying on of hands' (v 22). So the topic of '*rules* which relate to *ministry*' is again in focus.

2. *The centre* (3)

The centre section (5:3-16) opens and closes with references to 'real widows' (vv 3, 5, 16) and their *enrolment* (v 9). In between Paul describes *young widows* who should *not* be enrolled (vv 11-15).

3. *The second pair* (4 and 2)

We saw how the topic discussed in the opening paragraph reappeared in the fifth paragraph. The crucial question is, are paragraphs 2 (4:12-5:2) and 4 (5:17-20) intentionally composed as a pair? I am convinced that they are.

First observe paragraph 4, which is clearly discussing elders who are officials in the ministry of the Church, *not* old men. The material breaks into two sections, vv 17-18 and vv 19-20. The first two verses discuss the 'good elders' who are ruling well, busy at preaching and teaching and should be paid for their efforts. In vv 19-20 Timothy is advised about dealing with 'troublesome elders'.

We turn finally to paragraph 2 (4:12-5:2) where *presbuteroi* are also discussed. The early Greek paragraph divisions (*kefalaia*) left 5:1-2 standing alone. The Fathers

who made these divisions were honest enough not to relate these verses to what followed. Did they have a hidden agenda when they chose not to attach them to the previous paragraph?

Against the *kefalaia*, Archbishop Langton's thirteenth century chapter divisions (now in use), attach these verses to the discussion of widows which follow. But those instructions regarding widows have no mention of the *presbuteroi*. Is it not more appropriate to see 5:1-2 as a part of the previous paragraph which does mention *presbuteroi*? I am convinced that it is. Did Langton share the hidden agenda mentioned above?

We will examine 4:12-5:2 as a unit which focuses on Timothy and the *presbuteroi*.

Once again the *presbuteroi* are of two kinds. Paul first mentions the elders who have ordained Timothy (4:12-16). Granted, these verses focus on Timothy's duties as a leader of worship; but the context is that of Timothy's ordination by elders who are not criticized. He then discusses the *difficult* elders (5:1-2). These are obviously people whom Timothy is sorely tempted to attack. He is told, 'Don't do it'. Treat the *presbutero* like a father, he is advised, and the *presbuteras* (plural) like mothers. Thus the two topics of 'helpful elders' and 'difficult elders' appear in both paragraph 4 (4:17-20) and paragraph 2 (4:12-5:2). In each case the good elders are mentioned first and the difficult elders second. Thus paragraphs 2 and 4 can be seen as parallel discussions of *ministry*. If this is true, then the *presbuteras* in 5:2 are women elders ordained and engaged in ministry in Timothy's congregation. The NRSV places 'or an elder, or a *presbyter*' as a marginal note to *presbutero* in 5:1 but curiously not to *presbuteras* in 5:2. In regard to 5:1-2, Leonard Swidler, professor of Catholic Studies at Temple University (USA), writes,

...in [1 Timothy] 5:1-2 the words *presbytero* and *presbuteras* are usually translated as 'an older man' and 'older women', but in this context of discussion of the various 'officers' of the church, a perfectly proper translation—which, if not more likely, is at least possible—would be 'male presbyter' and 'woman presbyters'.¹⁸

What then can be said about the references to youth in 5:1-2? Aside from 5:1-2 under discussion, twice in the larger passage we have observed references to *youth* in texts that also discuss formal ministries (4:12-16 and 5:9-16). The same phenomenon occurs in 1 Pet. 5:1-5. The two cases in 5:1 and 5:2 fit easily into this pattern.

In summary, the NT has clear cases of women disciples, teachers, prophets and deacons/ministers. We have near certitude in perceiving Junia to be a female apostle. It is possible to see female elders in 1 Tim. 5:2. Thus women appear on nearly all, if not all, levels of leadership in the NT Church.

Negative attitudes

On the negative side are two critical texts. The first of these is 1 Cor. 14:33-36 which tells the women to be silent in church. The second is 1 Tim. 2:11-15 which adds that they must not teach or 'have authority' over men. These two texts seem to affirm the exact opposite of all that we have thus far observed. Faced with both the positives and the negatives, at least five alternatives are available to the reader of the NT.

1. Dismiss the biblical witness as contradictory and thus irrelevant.
2. Take the texts that say 'yes' to women as normative and ignore the others.
3. Focus on 1 Cor. 14 and 1 Tim. 2 and overlook the women disciples, teachers, deacons/ministers, prophets, and woman apostle.
4. Conclude that the NT is at loggerheads with itself and that the Church can only choose one biblical view against the other.
5. Look once more at the negative texts to see if their historical settings allow for more unity in the outlook of the NT than we have suspected.

To borrow a phrase, we will proceed to 'have a go' at alternative five. What can be said about 1 Cor. 14:33-36 and 1 Tim 2:11-15?

I have argued elsewhere that 1 Cor. 11-14 is a single essay.¹⁹ In these chapters Paul's outline is organized using the same inverted parallelism already noted in 1 Tim. The themes are as follows:

1. Disorders in worship:
 - a. Dress of women/men prophets (11:2-16)
 - b. Disorders in the Eucharist (11:17-34)
2. The spiritual gifts (ch. 12)
3. Love (ch. 13)
4. The spiritual gifts (14:1-25)
5. Disorders in worship:
 - a. Prophets all talk at once (14:26-33a)
 - b. Women talk in church (14:33b-36)

Disorders in worship open and close this four-chapter section of the epistle. The placing of the two discussions of spiritual gifts creates a second set of parallels. The chapter on love (ch. 13) forms a powerful climax in the centre. Thus, as noted, chapters 11-14 form a single unit. Our interest focuses on the discussions regarding women in the Church that open and close this four-chapter unit.

In 11:4-5 the men *and the women* are prophesying. Thus the reader knows that the prophets who interrupt one another in chapter 14 are comprised of *both* men and women. So when the women in 14:34-35 are told to be silent and listen to the prophets, it is clear that *some of those prophets are women*.

Also relevant is the fact that 14:26-36 lists three groups of people who are disturbing the worship. These are as follows:

1. The *prophets* are told:
Don't all talk at once.
Be silent in the church.
2. The *speakers in tongues* are told:
If there is no interpreter,
be silent in the church.
3. Married women with Christian husbands (who attend) are told:
Don't ask questions during the worship and don't chat.
Ask your husbands at home and *be silent* in the church.

Each of these groups is told to be silent when it disturbs worship. Paul is not issuing a command for perpetual prophetic silence! In like manner when they disrupt public worship the women are asked to be quiet. Thus Paul is saying to the women:

'Women, please keep silent in worship and listen to the female and male prophets. Don't interrupt them with questions, and don't talk/chat in church. If you can't understand what is being said, ask your husbands at home. They understand more Greek than you do and will be able to explain things to you.'

The scene is easy to reconstruct. Corinth was a tough immoral town. Transportation workers, porters and metal workers made up a significant portion of the population. It is easy to assume that the inhabitants came from different places and spoke different languages. Their common language was Greek. The men were naturally 'out and about' more than the women and thus were more likely to be at ease in that common language. It follows that in church the women could perhaps not easily follow what was being said and so would begin to ask questions or lose interest and start 'chatting'.

A documented case of this phenomenon is recorded in a sermon of John Chrysostom, preached in the cathedral of Antioch in the latter part of the fourth century. Stenographers recorded Chrysostom as follows:

Text: And if they (the women) will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home.

Chrysostom: Then indeed the women, from such teaching keep silence; but now there is apt to be great noise among them, much clamour and talking, and nowhere so much as in this place (the cathedral). They may all be seen here talking more than in the market, or at the bath. For, as if they came hither for recreation, they are all engaged in conversing upon unprofitable subjects. Thus all is confusion, and they seem not to understand, that unless they are quiet, they cannot learn anything that is useful. For when our

discourse strains against the talking, and no one minds what is said, what good can it do to them?²⁰

If this was the scene in the cathedral of the great city of Antioch in the fourth century, what can we imagine for Corinth in the days of Paul? Corinth was, no doubt, even more disorderly. (The present writer has personally experienced Chrysostom's predicament in isolated middle-eastern village churches!) The women of Corinth were told (when they disrupted worship) to be silent. Paul assumed that the readers remembered the women prophets of 11:5 when he wrote 14:35-36. He then reinforced the unity of this four chapter essay with a brief summary. It reads as follows:

1. If anyone thinks that he is a *prophet* (ch 11)
 2. or *spiritual* (ch 12)
 3. He should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a *command of the Lord* (ch 13). If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.
 4. So, my brethren, Earnestly desire to *prophesy* and do not forbid *speaking in tongues* (14:1-25).
5. But all things should be done in decency and in order (26-36).

If these four verses are (as we suggest) a summary of the entire essay, then the *command of the Lord* referred to in paragraph 3 is the command to 'love one another', which is definitively explained in ch. 13. If however, 14:34-40 is only read in a linear fashion, then the 'command of the Lord' becomes the command to tell the women to be silent in church, not the love command. If then the link with ch. 11 is forgotten, the women prophets are forgotten. Together these two misunderstandings of the text can and have been shaped by some into a club with which to threaten women into silence in the name of 'the command of the Lord'. More recently they have been used by many to attack the integrity of the Apostle Paul. Paul's intent is simply to solve a problem strikingly similar to Chrysostom's difficulties with the chatting women of Antioch.

Finally then, what is to be done with the *crux interpretum* of 1 Tim 2:11-15? As discussed above, whether 1 Tim. is history from the sixties or carefully written theological drama from the nineties, the Church was still in existence in Ephesus at the end of the first century and the temple of Artemis was also intact and functioning. I am myself convinced of the earlier date, but the following suggestions can, we trust, help clarify the text as Scripture in either case. What then can be said?

First the author speaks to Timothy as a young man and calls him 'my son'. Secondly, Timothy is ill with stomach problems and other 'frequent ailments' (4:23). Thirdly, he

is apparently under stress and wants to leave because now, for the second time, Paul urges him to stay (1:3). Finally, some form of a gnostic heresy has broken out in the Church. Chapter 4:1-3 offers details. The author warns against those who 'forbid marriage and enjoin abstinence from foods'. For these heretics the body was evil. Obviously someone was pressuring the Church in these directions. Who then was teaching such things?

We can only speculate, but there are a few helpful historical hints. In the early forms of gnosticism known to us, women teachers played prominent roles. Simon Magus is accused by Justin and Eusebius of having had a consort called Helena who was a prostitute from Tyre. She was called *ennois* (divine intelligence). The gnostic document, *The Acts of Paul*, adds a consort called Thekla to Paul. Montanus had Prisca and Maximilla as his female prophetesses. In 2 Timothy 3 the author sharply criticizes men but also mentions 'weak women who are swayed by various impulses and who will listen to anybody'. In 1 Tim. 5:15 the author specifically mentions 'women...who have already strayed after Satan'. To this another dimension must be added.

The great temple of Artemis in Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The roof was supported by 127 columns that were 65 feet high (roughly seven storeys). The building was 221 feet wide and 425 feet long. Within the temple as an institution, women exercised power on two levels. First, the temple was controlled by a group of virgins and castrated men. The latter were called *Magabizes*. Then second, under their control were thousands of female priestess-slaves called *hierodules*. There is specific evidence for priestesses, receptionists, supervisors, drummers, bearers of the sceptre, cleaners, acrobats, flute players and bankers. The economy of the town and province was profoundly linked to the temple as an institution (cf. Acts 19:23-29). The entire town set aside one month a year for ceremonies games and festivals connected to the cult.²¹ The focus of all of this was Artemis, a female goddess with rows of multiple breasts. Thus the Ephesians lived in a city and district where the huge seven-storey high temple, a wonder of the world, dominated the skyline. As an institution it was naturally a powerful force in all aspects of their lives. The focus of all this was a goddess whose worship was controlled by virgins who shared leadership with males only if they were castrated.

In such an atmosphere, what kind of female-male relations would have developed? What possibility would any male religious leadership have had for a sense of dignity and self-respect? What kind of female attitudes would have prevailed in such a city? How easy would it have been for the values of the society to have penetrated the Church? Castration being the ultimate violence against the male, would not anti-male sexism in various forms have been inevitable?.

No church is ever totally isolated from the sins of its culture. It does not take too much imagination to fill in the spaces between the lines of 1 Tim. and surmise what may have prompted Timothy's desire to leave. It is easy to assume that a group of women had asserted enough power to gain adherents to their heretical views. As noted, avoidance of marriage (and child bearing), along with abstinence from foods, appear to have been a part of the package which was damaging the social and theological foundations of the Church. As 2:12 makes clear (see below), these same women were brutalizing the men in the process.

Timothy was young, sick, depressed and male. He could not manage. Paul, or Paul through an amanuensis, or a student of Paul in Paul's name, was informed that things were going very badly in Ephesus. He wrote this stinging reply hoping to save the Church. With this as a possible scenario, we must examine the text itself. Each section requires scrutiny.

Paul writes, 'Let a woman learn in quietness with all submissiveness'. He opens with a command, 'Let a woman learn....' Judith Hauptmann, in an essay on 'Image of Women in the Talmud', notes Rabbi Eliezer's view that it is better to burn the words of the Torah than to give them to women.²² By contrast, other Talmudic texts make clear that some women *were* exposed to Torah and Talmud. However there is no command that they should learn. That was for the men. The general view was that the woman's task was to keep the house and free the men to study the tradition.²³ At least from the second century AD each male worshiper offered daily thanks to God for not having made him a woman. Greeks expressed similar views.²⁴ Misogyny was also a part of Roman society. Indeed it was a part of the times. Against this background Paul gives a clear directive that a Christian woman must *learn* the faith. He is obviously referring to women who need instruction. He does not say, 'Dismiss them from the classroom', or 'They are not capable of understanding'. Rather he commands, 'Let a woman learn!'

Secondly, we have traditionally translated the full command, 'Let a woman learn *in silence*'. The Greek can also be translated, 'Let a woman learn in quietness', which is perhaps more appropriate to the tense situation in the church in Ephesus. Angry students forced into silence learn little. But an atmosphere of 'quietness' encourages study and fosters understanding. In regard to this text Chrysostom writes, 'He was speaking of quietness...'.²⁵ This legitimate translation option appears in a variety of Arabic versions for a thousand years. In 867 AD Bashir ibn al-Siri translated 'let a woman learn in *tranquility*' (*tata'allim fi sukun*).²⁶ *Sukun* is a rich Arabic word that means 'calm, tranquility, peace'.²⁷ This word brilliantly picks up the nuances of the total scene in Ephesus to which Paul was writing. As we will see below, these women had become counterproductively aggressive.

The author asks them to calm down and to pursue theological instruction in tranquility.

Thirdly, they are to submit; but to what? We are not told. Yet in the context of the extended discussion of 'sound doctrine' with which the epistle opens, the natural assumption is that the author intends them to submit to the orthodox teachings of the Church. Paul has instructed Timothy in 'sound doctrine' (1 Tim. 1:10) and here a wayward part of Timothy's parish is told to accept the authoritative nature of the theological instructions Timothy has received.

Paul continues with:

I permit no woman to teach,
or to lord it over the men,
for she is to be in quietness.

It is possible to hear this text contradicting all of the positives observed above. But Priscilla taught Apollos, and every reader of Luke 1:46-55 was instructed by Mary. The women prophets of Corinth (1 Cor 11:5) and Caesarea (Acts 21:9) edified the Church. Each section of this verse requires comment. The first line can be understood as follows:

I permit none of these theologically ignorant women (in Ephesus) to teach, because they have brought their syncretistic religious beliefs with them into the Church.

We are obliged to ask, were all of the women in Ephesus heretics? Certainly not. However Paul *cannot* expect the young Timothy to administer theological exams in the midst of a crisis! The Gordian knot must be cut or its rope will strangle all of them. Paul cuts it with 'I permit *no* woman to teach!' *All* of them are asked to study the faith! Is this not an appropriate ruling, given the tensions of such circumstances?

The second line of this sentence illuminates the precise situation in Ephesus. The key word is *authenteo* (to lord it over) which appears only here in all of the NT. The noun form of this word (*authentēs*) entered the Turkish language as *effendi*, the title for the Sultan with his life and death powers over the people of his empire. It is a very strong word and can also be translated 'to commit murder' or 'assert absolute sway'.²⁸ Marcus Barth translates it with the King James Version as 'usurp authority'.²⁹

It is impossible to see this ruling as a general principle that everywhere governed the life of the NT Church. As a deacon/minister of the church in Cenchræe, Phoebe surely exercised *some* form of authority over men. Priscilla had theological authority over her student Apollos. The women prophets naturally carried the authority which their message gave them. Lydia is prominent in the founding of the church in Philippi. The weight which Mary the mother of Jesus carried in the Early Church is unknown, but it is impossible to imagine

that she had none! Older women in middle-eastern society are generally powerful figures. Are we to imagine that the Apostles totally disregarded her views? Did the one who 'kept all things in her heart' have no opinions on any aspect of the faith and life of the Church? So what is intended here?

I would submit that the overtones of this rare, very strong word, make clear the author's meaning. In Ephesus some women had acquired absolute authority over the men in the church and were verbally (and perhaps theologically) brutalizing them. Paul calls for a halt to this dehumanizing attack. Again our centuries-long middle-eastern exegetical tradition is instructive. The Peshitta Syriac (fourth century) translates with *mamraha*. The root of this word has to do with insolence and bullying. The early Arabic versions, translated from Greek, Syriac and Coptic, read either 'yata'amaru' (to plot; to be domineering; to act as 'lord and master'; to be imperious³⁰) or 'yajtariu' (to be insolent). The last two centuries have preferred 'yatasallat' (to hold absolute sway). Thus middle-eastern Christianity at least from the third century onward has always remembered that something dark and sub-Christian was involved.

As noted, the male leadership in the local temple was castrated. The author of 1 Tim. was perhaps saying to the Ephesian Christians, 'There is no place for any carry-over of these Ephesian attitudes into the fellowship of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord of women and men'. An expanded and interpreted translation of the intent of this verse might be:

I do not allow these ignorant women to batter the men.
They are to stop shouting and calm down.

Two wrongs do not make a right. The great standard set in Gal. 3:28 affirms that 'in Christ...there is no longer male and female' (NRSV). Progress towards that goal of full equality cannot be made if either gender is asserting de-humanizing power over the other. In Galatians Paul is very harsh with male heretics. Here he deals with female destroyers of the faith. It is only fair to observe that in some places in the English-speaking world today, anti-male sexism is sufficiently intense that men find themselves intimidated with leadership opportunities denied them because they are male, and under constant hostile monitoring for any failures in rigid linguistic conformity. Biblical theology is under attack by radical feminists and in some quarters academic freedom is on the verge of being threatened. Neither gender is completely innocent of mistreating the other and if Paul's vision in Galatians is to be followed neither gender has the right to absolute control over the other. This text can be seen as relevant to a part of this collection of problems.

Verses 11-12 are as follows: 'For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.' Difficulties continue: What is meant here? This text appears to be in direct clash with Gal. 3:28 on the one hand and Rom. 5

and 1 Cor. 15:21-22 on the other. Gal. 3:28 (as noted) says that in Christ there is no more 'male and female' (NRSV). Paul is quoting Gen. 1:27 and affirming that in Christ this order is no longer relevant.³¹ Here, apparently it is significant. This is indeed a *crux interpretum*. Yet in this text Paul is angry and is surely not attempting to write a calm dispassionate essay that can be critically compared to what he wrote decades earlier in another time and to another situation.

Furthermore, we can observe at least one other occasion of stress where Paul affirmed opposing views on a single topic. In 1 Cor. 12:4-11 he carefully states that God gives *different* gifts to different people as *he* wills! Then returning in ch. 14 to the subject of the spiritual gifts, and fully warmed to his subject, Paul blurts out, 'Now I want you all to speak in tongues!' (14:5).

In this latter text it appears that all must have *one* gift (tongues) which all are free to choose as the right gift for themselves! In this second statement Paul appears to affirm the exact opposite of what he has just said in 12:4-11! However, in our middle-eastern culture, people are expected to become emotional over the things they care about. When they do, they are permitted to make their point by exaggeration. No one presses the logic of these exaggerations. This rhetorical style may well be the key to 1 Cor. 12 and 14. It may also assist us with the text before us.

The second problem is as follows: In Romans Paul says, 'Sin came into the world through *one man*'. The same idea appears in 1 Cor. 15:21-22 which reads, 'by a man came death' But here, as in Ben Sirach (25:24), Eve is blamed for everything! If someone in the Pauline theological circle rather than Paul is the author, the problem remains. What can be said?

Chrysostom is again helpful. He makes a connection between Romans 5 and this text. He writes,

After the example of Adam's *transgression*... so here the female sex *transgressed*, not the male. As all *men* died through one (Adam) because that one sinned, so the whole *female* race transgressed because the woman was in the transgression.³²

Building on Chrysostom's insight, the following is a possible reconstruction of the situation in Ephesus. It is generally assumed that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians while resident in Ephesus. As noted, 1 Corinthians, like Romans, affirms '...in Adam all die.' There can be little doubt that Paul's second-Adam theology, set forth in 1 Cor. 15:42-50, was also proclaimed by Paul in the city of Ephesus. If any first century person was so inclined, Paul's views set forth in Rom. 5 and 1 Cor. 15 *could* have been understood as *very* bad news for men. In Rom. 5:12 the reader is told 'Sin came into the world through *one man*....' In vv 13-19 which follow, there is a total of eight further references to that *one man's sin*!

On the basis of these texts, it is theoretically possible to accuse Paul of harbouring bitter anti-male biases! Trespass (*parabasis*) is the key problem and one man is held responsible for *all* of it. The question is not, what did Paul mean? Rather we would ask, could anti-male women have used such ideas for their own purposes? Obviously, they could have.

Thus perhaps some theologically illiterate women in Ephesus had been exposed to Paul's views in some form and had concluded that *men* had polluted the earth with their sin. Therefore the more innocent women must push them aside. The author of 1 Tim. may be responding by taking up the story of Genesis with a bold statement, '*Eve was a transgressor!*' meaning, she *also* is to be blamed, not only Adam. Chrysostom seems to have understood our text as the other side of the coin to Paul's first-Adam/second-Adam theology. Chrysostom's views turn the text into a thoughtful response to what appears to have been a critical misunderstanding.

The last section of the text is as follows:

...and she will prosper (*sozo*) through bearing children if *they* continue in faith and love and holiness and good judgment.

There are two attractive ways to understand this text. The first is to take 'the childbearing' as meaning one specific occurrence of childbearing, namely the birth of Jesus. In this case the text would need to be translated 'and she will be saved through the birth of the child.' The intent of the text would then be:

How can these heretics teach women not to bear children when God entered history to *save through childbearing!*

However, many interpreters argue from internal evidence that here the definite article refers to childbearing in general. If this be true, there is a second possible way to understand the text.

The verb *sozo* (save?), which is at the heart of this text, has a variety of meanings. In this same chapter Paul affirms that we are *saved* (*sozo*) through Jesus Christ 'who gave himself a ransom for all' (2:6). The reader is told that salvation is through the cross of Christ. Are we then to understand him, ten verses later, to say, 'Well, actually for women there is a second way to be saved, have a baby!?' This cannot be the intent of the author. A solution to this problem is available when we observe that *sozo* can refer to salvation, but it can also mean 'good health' and occasionally has a more general sense of 'to prosper'.³³ As noted, someone in the church in Ephesus was teaching the women that they should not get married, and thus naturally, not have children. Paul counters with:

Childbearing is not an evil act! It is an act blessed by God. A woman can *prosper* through childbearing, if *they*, (the husband and the wife) continue in faith and love and holiness with good judgment.

The text shifts from a singular 'she' to a plural 'they'. This plural is best understood to refer to the husband and wife and not to women in general. Children can be a blessing to the family. But if faith, love, holiness and good judgment (*sofrosune*)³⁴ are missing, the family will not necessarily prosper by having children.

In conclusion, when history is taken seriously, 1 Cor. 14:34-35 and 1 Tim. 2:11-15 tell women to be silent when they disrupt public worship and when they teach heresy. Special problems in Corinth and Ephesus were dealt with firmly for the sake of the upbuilding of the body of Christ in those places. I submit that these admonitions can be understood to be in harmony with the clear affirmations of the presence of women as disciples, teachers, prophets, deacons, (one) apostle, along with the possibility of women elders.

In this manner all the NT texts considered can be seen as supportive of the great vision in Gal. 3:28 where 'in Christ...there is no longer male and female for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.'

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The Women Prophets of Corinth: A study of aspects of I Cor 11:2-16

By Kenneth E. Bailey

Within the larger question of the place of women in the New Testament, this passage is of critical importance. All across church history various voices have found "regimental colors" or even "battle cries" in these verses. One quickly thinks of:

"the head of woman is man" and
 "any woman who prays...with her head unveiled,
 dishonors her head," or
 "man was not made for woman but woman for man."

In its stark blunt form the interpretation of these phrases is often summarized as follows:

"This passage tells women that they are to live under male authority, keep their heads covered in public, and understand that they were created to serve men !"

Such a reading of the text is of great antiquity and has dominated church life for centuries. But does it represent what Paul intends? It is the purpose of this brief essay to focus on this question with some care.

In the attached article we argue that I Cor 11-14 is a single essay. Paul opens with a discussion of disorders in worship (ch. 11), turns to the topic of spiritual gifts (ch. 12), and brings the essay to its climax in the hymn on love (ch. 13).

He then has a matching discussion of spiritual gifts (ch.14:1-25) and closes with a second discussion of disorders in worship, along with a summary statement (14:26-40). The great chapter on love is a river that is strategically placed in the center with the intent that it flow over what precedes (11-12) and over what follows (14). Thus our text is a part of the Apostle's discussion of disorder in worship. What then is the problem?

Clearly the churches of his time had male and female leaders. Here the focus of the text is on prophets. The reader is told that the men who "pray and prophesy" are to uncover their heads and that the women who "pray and prophesy" must cover their heads. It is easy to read these two verses (4-5) and focus exclusively on the problem of head coverings. When we do that we overlook the fact that *the women and the men are doing the same thing*. They are both praying and prophesying. It is possible to understand "praying" as here referring to private devotion. But the act of "prophesying" is a public function carried out in front of other people. It is impossible to prophesy in the seclusion of one's closet. Clearly St. Paul is talking about men and women who are leading public worship. This then gives us a clue to the problem of disorder that Paul is discussing.

From the NT records we know that Greek women of high standing were attracted to the preaching of Paul (Acts 16:14, 17:4, 12, 34). Such Greek women in that period were already struggling for a place in the sun and would not have been attracted to the preaching of a man who put them down. The church in Philippi met in the house of Lydia, a seller of purple cloth. The fact that Paul visited her (with the magistrates) on his way out of town indicates that she was the leader of the church (cf. Acts 16:35-40). One of the two ports for the city of Corinth was Cenchreae. The church there was led by Phoebe who is called a *deacon* (not deaconess) and a *prostatis* (leader). So how did these women dress as they led in worship, and did the fact of their presence in leadership roles cause waves?

It appears that some of these Christian women insisted on leading in worship with their heads uncovered. It is easy to imagine that they felt this to be their right as they affirmed their freedom in Christ where “all things are lawful” (as Paul had apparently taught, cf. I Cor 6:12; 10:23). The men led in worship with heads uncovered! So would they! But what signals did such an action give in the culture of the time?

In traditional Jewish culture (as evidenced in the Mishnah and the two Talmuds) women could be divorced if they uncovered their heads in public. A woman’s hair was to be seen only by her husband. (The Amish of Pennsylvania are a contemporary example of this ancient attitude. Conservative areas of the Middle East maintain these practices to this day.) On the Greek side the picture is not as clear. In museums in Greece I have examined the statues of women and most of them have their heads covered. Some do not, but it is impossible to know which of these were statues of women “at home” where their heads could be uncovered. In any case, the *dominant* pattern evidenced in these statues is for the women to have their heads covered. Even if this would not have been a problem for the Greek Christians, it would still have been a serious problem for the Jewish Christians. The *Jewish* Christian worshipers would certainly have seen the woman prophet, leading worship with head uncovered, as acting improperly. The outcry would have been:

What is this! Is she advertising her charms? How are we expected to concentrate on worship with this going on?

The problem is put to Paul in writing (cf I Cor 7:1). The easy answer would have been to say, “Let the women refrain from praying and prophesying when you meet in worship.” Rather, Paul affirms the rightness of having both male and female leadership in public worship. He then solves the problem by telling the women leaders to cover their heads in worship. The men are to conduct worship with heads uncovered. What then is his argument?

Paul starts with the general affirmation:

the head (*kefalia*) of every man is Christ,
 the head (*kefalia*) of women is man,
 the head (*kefalia*) of Christ is God.

Our problem is the word *kefalia*. As a Greek word *kefalia* has three meanings. These are: (1) the cranium, (2) origin, (3) authority over. In English we can approximate these three with the phrases:

1. My head hurts (head = cranium)
2. The head waters of the Nile flow from Lake Victoria (head = origin)
3. The head of this company is Ms. Jones (head = authority over)

In our text the first meaning does not fit. Traditionally we have read the verse with *kefalia* meaning “authority over.” But it is fully possible to select the second meaning of *kefalia* and read “origin of.” In this case the text would then mean:

The origin of every man is Christ (i.e. Christ is the agent of God in creation. In I Cor 8:6 Paul has just affirmed that Jesus Christ is the one “through whom are all things.”)

The origin of woman is man (i.e. Gen 2:21-23. Woman [*isha*]) is “taken out of man [*ish*].”)

The origin of Christ is God (i.e. Jesus is Lord. Jesus comes from God. The origin of Jesus is God. The Greeks and the Jews talked about the “head of a river.”)

As noted, we use the similar phrase “the head-waters of a river.” This phrase does not affirm that the water which flows into the Nile is created by Lake Victoria but rather that it flows from Lake Victoria. In like manner, “origin of” can here be seen as an affirmation of the divine source from which Jesus has come and thus an affirmation of his divinity.

This raises the question of “the orders of creation.” Traditional exegesis of the second account of creation in Genesis 2 sees that man is created first and woman second and has concluded that “created first” means “of first importance.” The difficulty with this conclusion is that the creation stories begin with the lesser forms of life and move on to the more advanced forms. If created earlier = more important, then the animals are more important than people and the plants are more important than the animals and the primitive earth “without form and void” is the most important of all! In spite of this logical inconsistency, traditional views of the creation story have affirmed men as more important than women because Adam was created first. (We note in passing that in Gen 1:27, male and female are created *together*.) Here Paul starts his discussion with the *second* story of Genesis, which is where his readers have focused their thinking. How then does he proceed?

Paul offers a solution to the problem of the women prophets and their leadership in worship. I hear him saying:

Let the women continue to pray and prophesy—only ladies, please, be reasonable! Cover your heads as you do so! Don’t send the wrong signal to the worshipers, male and female. Do not distract the worshipers with a

fancy hair-do, or even with any hair-do. You don't like my solution? I have an alternative. Cut it all off (v. 6). Appearing bald will solve the problem. You would rather not go that route? Fine, then give my suggestion a try. You will preserve your rightful leadership role and will not distract or upset the congregation in the process. Cultural sensitivity is all I am asking for. You already *must* know that a woman's hair, exposed in public, is seen as an intended sexual come-on in sections of the society in which you live.

I would submit the above as the intent of St. Paul as he deals with the problem of men and women prophets and how they are to dress. The problem of why the men should remain hatless escapes me. In the Middle East a servant should cover his head in the presence of his master. Modern Jewish practice preserves this custom. What the issue was for the man is not clear. Morna Hooker takes the discussion as far as the evidence we now have, and her reflections are helpful (CF. Morna D. Hooker, "Authority on her Head: An examination of I Cor. XI.10," *New Testament Studies*, Vol 10 ('63-4), p 414). The literature on the problem is voluminous and most of it is not helpful. I prefer to suspend judgment until further evidence surfaces. But the problem we can investigate is: what is this bit about the angels in v. 10?

For this concern we are obliged to look at the inverted parallelism (chiasmus) exhibited in the text. Following well-known models set forth in the classical writing prophets, particularly Isaiah, the text is composed as follows:

1. For *man* is not from (*ek*) *woman*,
but (*alla*) *woman* is from (*ek*) *man*.
MAN - NOT FROM WOMAN
WOMAN FROM MAN (Gn 2:22)

2. For *man* was not created because of (*dia*) *woman*, but *woman* because of (*dia*) the *man*.
DEPENDENCE
Gen. 2:18

3. Because of (*dia*) this
the *woman* should have *authority* on the head,
because of (*dia*) the angels.
AUTHORITY

4. Specifically (*plen*), *woman* is not independent of *man* nor *man* independent of *woman* in the Lord;
DEPENDENCE

5. for as the *woman* is from (*ek*) the *man*,
so also the *man* is (born) through (*dia*) the *woman*.
And *all things* are from (*ek*) God.
WOMAN FROM MAN (2:22)
MAN THROUGH WOMAN
Gen. 1:27, 2:22

Just before the verses quoted above Paul affirms that the man and the woman are created in the image of God. He writes:

he (the man) is the image and glory/reflection of God
and woman is the glory/reflection of man.

The background to this verse is the *first* story of Genesis (1:27) rather than the second (2:18-23). As noted, in Gen 1:27 male and female are created together in the *image* of God. Here Paul tells us that the man is created in the image of God but he does not say that the woman is created in the *image* of man. This is because Genesis affirms and Paul assumes that they are *both* in the *image of God*. From this point onwards Paul builds on that equality. We must look at the high points of how he does it.

The material is set forth in a 1 - 2 - 3 - 2 - 1 pattern. No 1 is balanced and completed in No 5, and No 2 is balanced and completed in No 4 (the summary words on the right try to clarify the connections). The center in No 3 offers a climax or a central affirmation of the passage. These rhetorical styles were centuries old in the Jewish tradition and Paul's Jewish Christian readers could follow this kind of poetic logic with ease. For us to catch what he is saying we need to look at numbers 1 and 5 together and then examine 2 and 4 as a matching pair.

In No 1 Paul affirms that, yes, the woman was taken from the body of a man and is to that extent dependent on him. On the other hand (No 5), the man is taken (born) *from* the body of a *woman* and thus dependent *on* her. So what is the problem, he argues. We are dependent on each other! In No 5 he reaffirms what he has said in No 1, and then completes it by showing the interdependence of the two.

The climax of the entire passage from v. 2 - 16 comes in our numbers 3 to 5. The key is the Greek preposition *dia* which appears four times in a row. All four are in the same case and must be read together. The translator can render this preposition as "for" or as "because of." For centuries we have used "because of" in the last two cases of *dia* but have translated the first two as "for." Thus many translations give us some form of the following:

For man was not created *for* (*dia*) *woman*
but *woman for* (*dia*) *man*
because of (*dia*) this
the *woman* should have authority on the head
because of (*dia*) the angels.

It is this translation that has been used, perhaps more than any other, to shape the female self-understanding and the male understanding of the place of women in the Christian scheme of things. Why do we have women? God has created them, the argument goes, "for men." That is, the only reason God created women is for them to serve men. This understanding of the place of women (in the minds of men and women) has existed for centuries. In the contemporary scene I have read entire books (written by women) that take this as a touch stone for defining the

proper biblical place of Christian women in the church and in society.

The difficulty with this view is that it is built on a particular traditional *translation* of the text, not on the text itself. This traditional understanding of the verse twice translates the Greek preposition *dia* as “for” and then immediately afterwards twice translates the same word as “because of.” Traditionally these second two occurrences of *dia* are always translated “because of.” Thus we have for centuries affirmed that *dia* in this text can rightly be translated as “because of.” So, what happens if we use “because of” as a translation for all four occurrences of the preposition *dia*? When that happens the text reads:

for the man was not created *because of* the woman
but the woman *because of* the man.
Because of this
the woman should have authority on the head
because of the angels.

This translation lets us see that Paul is referring to the Genesis story of Adam and Eve. It is not *Eve* who is lonely, unable to manage and needing help. No indeed! It is *Adam* who is lonely, unable to manage and needing help! Eve is then created as an “*ezar*.” The word *ezar* in Hebrew is often used for God when God comes to help/save Israel. It appears in the name El-ezar which in Greek becomes Lazarus, i.e. “the one whom God helps/saves.” This word does not refer to a lowly assistant to the boss but rather to a powerful figure who comes to help/save someone who is in trouble and cannot manage alone. In this light the image of the place of woman in the New Testament vision of things is transformed. Women, in Paul’s mind are not created “for men,” i.e. for their bed and board. Rather women, as descendants of Eve, are placed by God in the human scene as the strong who come to help/save the weak (the men). In this reading of the text, Paul, the gruff, old, unregenerate Middle Eastern male Chauvenist, disappears. In its place the real Paul emerges as a compassionate figure who boldly affirms the equality and mutual interdependency of men and women in the new covenant. I would submit that this latter is the real Paul whose views women of high standing found attractive and whose message caused them to flock to his banner.

When No 2 and 4 are reflected on together as two sides of a single coin, this same theme of interdependence surfaces again. Often translated as contrasts, these two sections affirm the continuation of a single theme. No 4 is introduced with the Greek word *plen* which usually means “more specifically.” The common Greek word for a contrast is *alla* and that word appears (introducing a contrast) in the second line of No 1. Here at the opening of stanza No 4, *plen* introduces more details of the same idea set forth in No 2. This is the primary meaning of this particle. Thus Paul is saying

(No 2) woman (like Eve) was created because the man
(like Adam) needed help. More specifically (*plen*) what

I mean is (no. 4), in the Lord (that is in Christ) men and women are mutually interdependent.

Finally, what on earth is to be made of the bit about the angels in the center? Many options have been proposed. Many are without evidence. With Morna Hooker of Cambridge it is clear that the background is rabbinic. (pp. 410-16). How does the rabbinic background help us?

To summarize, the rabbis argued that creation was such an astounding event that there must have been an audience to praise God for this wondrous accomplishment. But there were no people. Who was there to do it? Answer: The angels. The Angels were there to applaud. Even so, the authors of the New Testament affirmed the presence of angels gathered around the new creation of God, the Church. They were there for the same reason—to applaud this wonderful event. (We can recall that each of the seven churches in the Book of Revelation had an angel watching over it.) Furthermore, a part of this new creation is the restoration of the equality and mutual interdependence between men and women in Christ (as seen in this text). Thus Paul says to the women of Corinth (and the whole church, cf. 1:2b; 11:16):

Do not be upset if I urge you to cover your heads when you lead in worship (i.e. pray and prophesy). Do not for a moment see this as a put down. Quite the opposite, let this be a sign of your authority (v. 10) to exercise your prophetic gifts in leadership along with the men. Do it “because of the angels.” Let them applaud the wondrous fact of your restored status in the new creation and let the image of God that is within you shine forth.

How then might this directive regarding dress for women in leadership be lived out in the 21st century in the Western world? We are not living in first century Corinth. Yet great theological principles are here being affirmed. To men and to women, I hear Paul saying:

When leading in worship, do not dress in a manner that leads to any misunderstanding or in any way detracts from the task of bringing the faithful into the presence of God. You are created in the image of God—let that wondrous fact *alone* determine your dress code.

In conclusion, we can here see a finely tuned theological discussion on the place of men and women in Christian leadership that needs to have some very old barnacles scraped from its surface so that its original intent can once again shine forth with all of its grace and power.

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Bible Study of the Book of Revelation

Study 3: The Book of Revelation The Symbolic Meaning of Biblical Numbers

By Rev. Mark Atkinson, The International Church of Warsaw, Poland

We have completed our study of the first of the eight scenes of the book of Revelation. Chapters 2 and 3 address the church in the World. The second scene, Rev. 4:1 - 8:1 has as its theme the suffering of the church in the world. The dominant image of this scene is that of the Lamb of God opening the *seven seals* of the scroll of history.

Before we look at the text, we need to think together about the symbolism and meaning of biblical numbers. For the most part, the numbers we find in Revelation need to be understood symbolically, not literally. For example, in the previous study we noted how Revelation was addressed to the Seven Churches of Asia (1:7). We know historically that there were at least ten churches in existence in Asia Minor at the time of John's writing. The number seven in this context is symbolic for *all* the church.

Stop and think a few moments about the most common biblical numbers. Think perhaps of the numbers one, three, seven, twelve, and forty. Jot down on a piece of paper any associations in your mind between these numbers and any biblical persons, events, or themes. What conclusions can you draw as to the symbolic

meaning that may be associated with any of these numbers?

The following is a brief overview of the general symbolic meaning of the most common symbolic biblical numbers as well as a few that are less common, but bear upon our study of Revelation.

The numbers *one* and *three* are God's numbers. The singular affirmation of the Hebrew Scriptures is that God is one (Dt 6:4). The profound revelation of the New Testament is the triune nature of the one God (Matt 28:19). Drawing on the imagery of the compass, east, west, north, and south, the number *four* symbolizes creation, the earth and world as God has made it. *Seven* symbolizes the perfection of God's creative activity in the world. God made the world in seven days. At the end of his labor we are told that he looked upon it *and indeed it was very good* (Gen. 1:31). Drawing on another nuance from the creation story, the number *seven* can at times symbolize completion, or totality. God **completed** his work in *seven* days.

It is the number *seven* that gives to us the key to the meaning of the number *six*. If *seven* symbolizes perfection, then *six* symbolizes falling short of perfection. It is the symbolic number for sin. Here we can see the great value of understanding the symbolic meaning behind many biblical numbers. There have been many fanciful interpretations of Rev. 13:18: *Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is*

666. Some interpreters mistakenly apply methods of numerology to the names of historical persons seeking a literal identification of this man of wickedness.¹ In contrast, I believe this number is best understood not as a numeric code but as a symbolic indicator. What does it mean that six is repeated three times? The thrice repetition is for intensification. We sing in the hymn that God is *Holy, holy, holy*. He is thrice holy. He is intensely holy. This intensity represented by the triplet is the meaning of the Beast's number 666. He is the embodiment of sin. He is thrice sinful. He is intensely sinful.

There are other biblical numbers of importance. *Ten* symbolizes the completion of a period of time. *Twelve*, obviously, refers either to Israel (the Twelve Tribes) or the Church (the Twelve Apostles). Often it should be understood as God's salvific activity in the world, symbolizing one or the other (or both) of the two major epochs of redemptive history. If we add the numbers of those two major epochs together (Twelve Tribes and Twelve Apostles) we find ourselves at the number *twenty-four*. In Revelation 4:4 we see the first of several

references to the twenty-four elders seated upon thrones worshipping the Lamb of God. Throughout Revelation therefore the number twenty-four signifies God's elect, his faithful followers from both the old and new covenants.

There is another symbolic number that plays a significant role in the book of Revelation: *forty two* (cf. Rev. 11:2 and 13:5). Note that Rev. 3:11 and 12:6 speak of a time period lasting 1,260 days, which is the equivalent of *forty two* months. The key to understanding the meaning of this number is found in the aptly named book of Numbers. In Numbers 33 Moses lists the *forty two* encampments of the people of Israel between their departure from Egypt and arrival on the plains of Moab. The number forty two (=1,260 days), therefore, is the period of time between God's promise given and its fulfillment. It symbolizes the in between time. It is the time in which we live by faith, the time between our release from slavery and our entry into the Promised Land.

¹ When I teach Revelation, I illustrate the imprecision of a numerological interpretation by showing that, given the right presumptions, the number of Barney the Dinosaur is 666!

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