

GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS COLLEGE

WHAT IS SUBMISSION?:
WOMEN'S ROLE IN MARRIAGE ACCORDING TO PAUL

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
ICC	International Critical Commentary
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

Introduction

Throughout much of history, society has taken for granted the idea that women belong in a subordinate and inferior role to men. With the advent of feminism, Western thinkers began to reexamine these assumptions and their effect on such things as religion. A number of texts from the letters of the apostle Paul have been used as evidence of women's subordination in Christianity. Christian believers today who wish to uphold the authority and divine inspiration of the Bible often have trouble understanding how to interpret these passages. On the one hand, they do not want to disregard biblical teachings, since they understand Scripture to be the Word of God. On the other hand, many people perceive these texts to support the subordination of women and, for this reason, deem them unfit for use in today's world.

The goal of this thesis is to carefully examine a selection of texts from within Paul's letters and determine whether or not it is possible to develop an interpretation of them that upholds both the authority of the biblical text and the equal status of women. The method we will be using is fourfold. First, we will explore the circumstances surrounding the writing of these letters. Since scholars currently dispute the authorship of some of the letters traditionally ascribed to Paul, we will consider the facts on both sides of these debates. We will also venture into a short discussion of cultural expectations for men and women in the first-century C.E. Greco-Roman period during which Paul lived, in order to be able to compare his perspective to that of his contemporaries. Second, we will closely analyze a series of texts from the Pauline corpus: Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 7:3–4, 33–34; 11:2–16; 1 Tim 2:8–15; and Eph 5:21–33. Third, we will synthesize the points derived from these exegeses into an overarching Pauline model of male and female roles. Fourth, we will assess this Pauline model in light of the differences between the circumstances of its original audience and modern society.

By means of this process, we will find that Paul's writings can, in fact, be reconciled with modern sensibilities with regard to gender¹ equality. Although he wrote from a culture with far different expectations for men and women, Paul's letters provide a model for marriage that is both culturally relevant today and affirming to women. In this model, the husband's and wife's roles are not identical, but they are mutually supportive. The husband has the role of leader, but he leads with his wife's well-being always in mind. The wife's role entails submission to her husband's authority, but this submission is willing, for she trusts that her husband will not abuse his position of authority. Both spouses make a sacrifice for the other, but both also receive the fruits of those sacrifices.

Paul: Authorship and Chronology

Of the 13 letters in the Pauline corpus,² six have garnered scholarly debates about the authenticity of their Pauline authorship: Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus. While the full debates lie beyond the scope of this paper, the authorship of Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy; Titus) affects our reading of these texts and will therefore be addressed briefly here. Regardless of the status of their authorship, however, these letters are still included within the Christian canon and together comprise the body of letters that Christian tradition has ascribed to the apostle Paul. Even if Paul did not write a certain letter, its position within the canon gives it authority for Christian believers who see Scripture as divinely inspired. Because this paper is intended for an audience of such believers, we will be examining passages from both the disputed and undisputed letters of Paul. The

¹ Although some scholars and fields of study have distinct definitions for these terms, I will be using "sex" and "gender" interchangeably for the purposes of this paper.

² Romans; 1 and 2 Corinthians; Galatians; Ephesians; Philippians; Colossians; 1 and 2 Thessalonians; 1 and 2 Timothy; Titus; Philemon.

specific topics addressed in the undisputed letters do not give a complete picture of men's and women's roles in marriage. Only with the inclusion of passages from the disputed letters can we gain the fullest possible understanding of Pauline thought with respect to women's role in marriage.

For each of Paul's letters, two main possibilities exist for its authorship: either the letter was written by Paul himself or it was written by a disciple of Paul's. Biblical scholars use a variety of criteria when assessing the authorship of the letters, but all these debates rest upon one central premise. Namely, pseudepigraphy, the practice of writing using the name of someone else (usually well-known and renowned), was fairly common in the ancient world, including among Christians and Jews.³ Although pseudepigraphy, with its false claims of authorship, seems deceptive and suspicious to modern readers, ancient authors did not see the practice as untruthful. They wrote using others' names to honor those people by continuing their thought after their deaths, not to spread falsehoods. Pseudepigraphal works were often known by their readers to be pseudonymous, but this did not diminish their authority. However, most of these works were under the name of heroes long-dead, not recently deceased as Paul would have been. The question also remains whether the church would recognize pseudonymous letters as willingly as it may have recognized pseudonymous apocalyptic literature.⁴

Most scholars now agree that Ephesians was written using Colossians as its framework. This close literary connection between the two letters strongly suggests that Ephesians was written later and by a different author than Colossians.⁵ Ephesians is, in many ways, an

³ Lincoln, lxx.

⁴ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (WBC 46; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), cxxiii–cxxvii.

⁵ The authorship of Colossians is also debated [see Victor Paul Furnish, "Colossians, Epistle to the," *ABD* 1:1090-1096]. However, the author of Ephesians either used Colossians as his basis for constructing a letter in Paul's name (believing Colossians to be authentic), or he used Colossians as a model to follow in constructing

expanded and generalized version of the more specific Colossians.⁶ Several other factors make authentic Pauline authorship unlikely (though not implausible). The frequency of pseudepigraphy in the ancient world is one. In addition, Ephesians contains sentences uncharacteristically long and wordy for Paul, vocabulary associated with post-apostolic literature, a generalized and transformed theology, and statements portraying Paul more as a legendary hero than a still-living apostle.⁷ The letter was most likely written by a follower of Paul after the apostle's death.⁸ That being said, Ephesians is very much Pauline in its ideas, having numerous parallels with other letters in the Pauline corpus.⁹

Although accepted by early church leaders as early as 95 C.E. to be authentically Pauline,¹⁰ the authorship of the Pastoral Epistles has undergone much scrutiny in recent centuries. The latest trend in the debate, however, has been the move toward affirmation of their authenticity.¹¹ The statistical method used to analyze vocabulary differences between the Pastorals and the rest of Paul's letters has been shown to have major flaws; these vocabulary differences, though noticeable, are far from indicative of a different author (particularly if Paul were to have used a different secretary).¹² So-called theological differences are actually differences in Paul's emphasis due to the particular situations being addressed in the letters. For example, he emphasizes behavior over belief because behavior was the area in which his

further pseudonymous literature in Paul's name (believing Colossians to be a good example of such pseudonymous writing). See Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC 42; Dallas: Words Books, 1990), lxviii.

⁶ Victor Paul Furnish, "Ephesians, Epistle to the," *ABD* 2:535–542.

⁷ Lincoln, lxii–lxvi.

⁸ Lincoln, lxviii.

⁹ Lincoln, lvi–lviii.

¹⁰ Mounce, lxviii–lxix.

¹¹ Mounce, xlv–xlvi.

¹² Mounce, cix–cxvi.

audience was struggling.¹³ Historical evidence, too, can be shown to support Pauline authorship.¹⁴ Most convincing, though, are the two main problems with theories of pseudonymous authorship. A follower of Paul intending to spread Pauline ideas would have been much more efficient writing these ideas into one tract rather than splitting them into three installments. Second, a letter known to be pseudonymous (and respected despite its pseudonymity, as these letters would have been) would have no reason to include so many superfluous personal remarks. In this case, readers would have known them to be untrue, an unfortunate quality to be found in a letter denouncing deception.¹⁵

Before we turn to our exegesis, we need a basic conception of Pauline chronology so that we can better understand the context of his letters in relation to one another. Constructing a definitive chronological order for Paul's letters is a difficult task due to the limited nature of the sources available. Individual letters neither state their date of composition nor their relation to other letters. For a biblically based chronology, we must, therefore, compare the account of Paul's mission as depicted in the book of Acts with the events described in Paul's letters themselves. In some cases, the two accounts match, but many times they do not.¹⁶ Scholars tend to agree that Galatians and 1 Corinthians are among Paul's earliest letters and were written at around the same time (52–55 C.E.), although Galatians probably came first.¹⁷ In the most likely historical construction of the Pastoral Epistles, Paul wrote them between 61 and 63 C.E. after

¹³ Mounce, xcvi.

¹⁴ For more information on when in his journeys Paul could have written the Pastorals and why the church structure in these letters was not incompatible with that within Paul's lifetime, see Mounce liv–lxix, lxxxv, lxxxvii–lxxxviii.

¹⁵ Mounce, cxviii–cxx.

¹⁶ Hans Dieter Betz, "Paul," *ABD* 5:186-201.

¹⁷ Betz, "Paul," *ABD* 5:186-201.

arriving in Rome.¹⁸ Finally, since Ephesians is most likely pseudepigraphal, it was written after Paul's death (probably 70–95 C.E.) and therefore last among this selection of letters.¹⁹

Historical Context

Because the culture of Diaspora Judaism influenced those who lived within it, we must seek to understand the background out of which Paul's writings concerning women arose. The cultural expectations of men and women in the first-century C.E. Roman Empire, in which Paul lived and wrote, were considerably different from those of modern Western culture. Two central concepts in the ancient view of the sexes were honor and shame. Honor, or reputation, was men's way of gaining social worth and respect from others. Men could acquire honor by challenging and besting their social equals in interactions, as long as they observed the rules of social boundaries.²⁰ While men's identities were linked to honor, women's involved their shame. Here, shame has both a positive and a negative sense. The positive sense is sensitivity to one's own honor and the ways that others perceive it. The negative sense is to "get shamed" by overstepping the boundaries of one's status.²¹ Unlike honor, shame could not be regained once lost. It was a female's duty to carefully guard her shame—that is, her sexual purity or exclusivity. In fact, the sexual purity of a man's wife, daughters, and mother was bound up into his own honor. Thus, a man would lose honor if his wife or daughter were to be shamed.²²

The customary roles for men and women reflected the fact that part of a man's honor is his ability to defend the sexual purity of the women with whom he is associated. Women largely

¹⁸ Mounce, liv–lix.

¹⁹ Furnish, "Ephesians," *ABD* 2:535–542.

²⁰ Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 28–34.

²¹ Malina, 46.

²² Malina, 38–48.

stayed in the domestic sphere, where there was less threat of other men seducing them.

Archeological study of Greco-Roman household architecture shows that, in houses wealthy enough to afford it, the women's quarters were farthest from the entrance to the house.²³ As one progressed further into the house, the space became increasingly private. Even though the front atrium was part of the house, it was essentially public space because the head of household conducted most of his business there. Whenever women entered public space, they were expected to dress modestly and cover their heads with a veil, for this was not their domain.²⁴

Although women were generally restricted to the domestic sphere, they were not as powerless as one might think. The modern assumption that public activities have "primacy" over private ones did not necessarily hold true in the ancient Mediterranean.²⁵ In that culture, each family was a "producing unit;" the women's work was to manage affairs within the household and the man's work was to deal with any affairs involving people outside the family unit. Both roles were necessary and important.²⁶ Women had considerable independence in the fulfilling of their role. The Roman wife had many responsibilities, for she was in charge of food, supplies, clothing, slaves, agriculture, and raising children. Although the husband is her "general supervisor," he leaves the running of the household to his wife, because it is within her sphere, not his.²⁷ In addition, women found ways to exercise power even though their status lacked

²³ Carolyn Osiek and David Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and Household Churches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 6–8.

²⁴ Osiek and Balch, 44.

²⁵ Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion: The Power of the Hysterical Woman* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 38.

²⁶ Malina, 99.

²⁷ Carolyn Osiek, Margaret Y. MacDonald, and Janet H. Tulloch, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2006), 144–48.

authority; such “illegitimate power” could have influences within the household and beyond, all through female channels such as networking.²⁸

Women also were able to contribute significantly in the early church, particularly because of its frequent use of private space. Because house churches were located within the household, women had the freedom to play a bigger role than they would in a public venue. In some cases, women would even host these gatherings, which meant leading the assembly as well as providing food.²⁹ Because of the prevalence of female involvement in the church, however, early Christians faced criticism from outsiders. Not only were men jeopardizing their masculine honor by entering for too long into the female domain of the home, but women were perceived to be acting shamelessly when they left the home frequently (as could happen when attending other Christian gatherings).³⁰ The household-based nature of the early Christianity caused many pagan writers to harshly criticize it and spread rumors of its immorality, simply because it threatened the sharp division between public and private space.³¹

Exegesis

We now move on to our discussion of the texts themselves. For the purposes of this paper, we will examine the letters in chronological order in order to see the development of Paul’s ideas over time. Thus, we will examine the texts as follows: Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 7:3–4, 33–34; 11:2–16; 1 Timothy 2:8–15; and Ephesians 5:21–33.

²⁸ MacDonald, 41–45.

²⁹ Osiek et al., 163.

³⁰ MacDonald, 29.

³¹ MacDonald, 30–32.

Galatians 3:28

One of the most oft-quoted verses from Paul's letters when discussing the roles of men and women, Gal 3:28 deserves brief mention in this study. The verse states, "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."³² As is evident even in this verse by itself, the main focus is not gender relationships. The context of Galatians as a whole makes this even clearer. Written fairly early in Paul's ministry, the letter to the Galatians addresses the first major threat to the theology of Paul's gospel, namely, the contention that Jewish circumcision is necessary for salvation.³³ Paul spends most of the letter explaining that the Christian life is by faith and the Spirit, not dictated by the Law. This verse appears within his discussion of baptism, which is the occasion at which believers receive the Spirit and enter into the community of faith.³⁴ In fact, vv. 27 and 28 were most likely a confession repeated by Christians at baptisms; Paul did not write the confession himself but was simply reminding his audience of what they had all heard (and said) before.³⁵

The two verses leading up to v. 28 add to the verse's emphasis on life "in Christ." Christ is mentioned four different times within these three verses.³⁶ In addition, vv. 26–28 all start with *gar* ("for") in the original Greek, connecting the three verses together into one idea which culminates in v. 28b: "all of you are one in Christ Jesus."³⁷ This unity and equality in Christ is the primary meaning of this verse. The fact that male and female are mentioned at all is most likely the result of drawing from common Jewish and Greek sayings that include a set of pairings

³² Unless otherwise noted, all biblical translations come from the NRSV.

³³ Hans Dieter Betz, "Galatians, Epistle to the," *ABD* 2:872–875, 874.

³⁴ Betz, "Galatians," 875.

³⁵ Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (WBC 41; Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 159.

³⁶ Gal 3:26–27 "for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

³⁷ Longenecker, *Galatians*, 157–58.

like the set in this verse.³⁸ Still, Paul does declare equality between the sexes in this verse, among his other claims. This equality is, however, not all-encompassing. It is explicitly “in Christ Jesus” and, presumably, the result of baptism (see v.27). Commentator Richard Longenecker describes it thus: “before God, whatever their differences, all people are accepted on the same basis of faith and together make up the one body of Christ.”³⁹ Although some early believers⁴⁰ did interpret this verse as entailing equality of roles, its original meaning was probably not so far-reaching. The negation of differences in Christ’s redemption had to also be counterbalanced by God’s created differences between male and female.⁴¹ Paul’s effort to unite these two disparate ideas, equality and difference, takes further shape in his later writings.⁴²

1 Corinthians

Some of Paul’s most interesting discussions of women’s roles can be found in the book of 1 Corinthians. Before we can examine the passages in depth, however, we must understand the context of 1 Corinthians as a whole. Written to a community of mostly Gentile believers in the wealthy and cosmopolitan city of Corinth, Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians addresses problems that he sees in the way in which Corinthian Christians are behaving. Corinth is unique among Paul’s churches in that his missionary efforts succeeded in converting both rich and poor,

³⁸ Longenecker, *Galatians*, 157.

³⁹ Longenecker, *Galatians*, 157.

⁴⁰ For instance, the 2nd-century C.E. sect, the *Montanists* (deemed heretical for their eschatology), and the 3rd-century *Didascalia Apostolorum* gave women equal leadership positions to those of men. See Richard N. Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 89–90.

⁴¹ Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza maintains that Paul’s intention in Gal 3:28 is to eliminate designated roles among believers, arguing that the inclusion of Jews and Greeks is one example of this since recognizing the equal status of Jew and Gentile was one of Paul’s greatest missions. The problem with her argument is that although Paul does emphasize that Jews and Gentiles alike are included in salvation and the community of believers (see Rom 10:12), he does not require them to change their ways of behaving. In 1 Cor 7:17–24 he instructs believers to remain in the lives in which they were called. Similarly, in 1 Cor 8, he acknowledges that some believers still eat according to previous dietary customs and instructs the other believers not to force them to change.

⁴² Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics*, 92.

and as a result, the marked differences between certain believers caused division within the church. In addition, being a center of Hellenistic culture, Corinth was the home to trends of experimentation, freedom from traditional restraints, and ecstatic spiritual experiences.⁴³ Among other things, Paul exhorts the Corinthians to put an end to their factions and become a unified body, to return to sexual purity, and to observe proper practice in worship and ritual.⁴⁴ According to F.W. Grosheide, the main theme of the book is that Christians have a unique kind of freedom: they are not bound by any arbitrary rules, but they should live by what is *right*, which Paul expresses to be the principle of love for God and others.⁴⁵ Behavior is an important topic for Paul in this letter. The Corinthians ought to live out their faith through right and proper behavior, grounded in love.

In 1 Cor 7, Paul gives the Corinthians extensive advice about marriage. His purpose in writing this section is to address the specific concerns, voiced by the Corinthians in an earlier letter, about the degree to which celibacy is preferable to marriage.⁴⁶ Paul advocates celibacy as the better alternative,⁴⁷ so his instructions with regard to marriage should be read in light of the fact that, at least at this point in his ministry, married life is not the ideal for Christians. However, even though the chapter's focus is not on marriage roles but rather on marriage itself, a few verses in particular emphasize equality within the marriage partnership. These verses give a helpful counterexample against other passages in Paul's letters (including elsewhere in this letter) that can seem quite oppressive to women.

⁴³ Hans Deiter Betz and Margaret M. Mitchell, "Corinthians, First Epistle to the," *ABD* 1:1139–1148.

⁴⁴ See 1 Cor 1:10–17; 5:1–13; 11:2–33; 12:12–27; 14:26–40. See also Victor Paul Furnish, "The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians," in *The HarperCollins Study Bible, Revised Edition*, ed. Wayne A. Meeks (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2006), 1932.

⁴⁵ F.W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 16.

⁴⁶ See 1 Cor 7:1a.

⁴⁷ See 1 Cor 7:6–7.

At the beginning of chapter 7, Paul tells the Corinthians that they should get married if their sexual desires are so high that they would otherwise commit sexual immorality. In the midst of this discussion of sex, Paul writes in verse 3 that “The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.” A literal translation of the Greek reads as follows: “Let the husband give back to his wife what is due, and in the same way also let the wife give back to her husband.”⁴⁸ Although the context of this verse makes it very clear that *opheilē* (literally “what is due” or “debt”⁴⁹) does indeed entail conjugal rights, in Greek the word is not restricted to just that one meaning. One could extend this “what is due” to also include such things as love, respect, assistance, or anything else to which a husband or wife might be entitled from his or her spouse.⁵⁰

The following verse gives a similar impression of mutual responsibility. Not only is each spouse entitled to what is due from the other, but neither spouse actually belongs to him- or herself. Paul writes in verse 4, “For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.” Like v. 3, this verse is also referring specifically to sexual rights. However, even the idea that women had the same sexual rights as men within a marriage is a surprisingly modern idea in the context of first-century C.E. Greece. In Paul’s day, infidelity on the part of married men was not only common but also accepted practice. Wives, on the other hand, could be

⁴⁸ Translation by author. Greek text: *Tē gunaiki ho anēr tēn opheilēn apodidotō, homoiōs de kai hē gunē tō andri.*

⁴⁹ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), s.v. “*opheileia*.”

⁵⁰ *opheilē* and its cognate verb, *opheileō*, are used in a variety of contexts in ancient Greek literature, not all of which involve financial or judicial debts. For example, in Thucydides, *Historicus* I.137.4, Themistocles writes that *moi euergesia opheiletai* (“there is a kindness due me”), referring to the fact that he gave Xerxes good military advice that Xerxes claimed to be his own. Themistocles claims that he deserves an act of kindness in return, using the passive voice of the verb, *opheileō*, to do so. Thus, the *opheilē*, in 1 Cor 7:3 could very well mean other forms of kindness besides strictly sex.

divorced or punished for sexual relations with a male slave (even though men's sexual relations with slaves were both expected and sanctioned).⁵¹ Despite what other verses in Paul's letters may say or imply about the husband's headship of a marriage, 1 Cor 7:3–4 demonstrates that Paul had some underlying understanding of equality and mutuality between husband and wife. The husband and wife have authority over each other's bodies, not their own. Thus, they also have the equal responsibility of taking care of those bodies.

Grosheide interprets the husband/wife relationship in this passage as being one of giving and receiving rather than one of taking and losing. Neither spouse has control over his or her own body, but each spouse *chooses* to give that control over to the other.⁵² This interpretation is very likely close to Paul's original meaning, because it fits well with the passage immediately preceding this chapter. In 1 Cor 6:12–20, Paul emphasizes that although the Corinthians may have the legal rights to do whatever they choose, they are obligated by what is right and “beneficial” to use their bodies for God's work rather than their own.⁵³ The same theme appears again in chapter 10, where Paul urges the Corinthians to seek to benefit others before themselves.⁵⁴ In both instances, a person's behavior results from the choice of whether to act out of self-interest or for the good of others. The rights stay the same, but the way that they work out in practice, ideally, is that they become transferred away from the self to others. So, in the case of spouses' authority over their own bodies, the proper Christian way to behave is to willingly give over one's body to one's spouse.

⁵¹ Osiek et al., 21–23.

⁵² Grosheide, 156–57.

⁵³ See 1 Cor 6:12–20, esp. vv. 12, 19–20.

⁵⁴ See 1 Cor 10:23–24.

This idea of giving of oneself for the betterment of one's spouse comes up again later in 1 Cor 7. Paul warns the Corinthians not to become too "anxious about the cares of the world," but rather to concern themselves with "the affairs of the Lord."⁵⁵ He points out that among those cares of the world are the "anxieties" of both husband and wife to please the other spouse. In contrast to verses 3 and 4, in which giving to one's spouse is framed as a duty or obligation, verses 33 and 34 give the impression of a natural inclination. A husband's natural anxiety is "how to please his wife." Likewise, a wife naturally is "anxious about how to please her husband." Presumably, once they enter into a marriage relationship, a husband and wife already are doing what Paul tells them to do in 1 Cor 7:3–4—they are using the bodies and resources that they have to give to the other what is due. If vv. 3–4 and vv. 33–34 are indeed connected in this way, it gives additional insight into what this *opheilē* ("what is due") could include. The verb, *areskō* (translated in vv.33–34 as "to please"), is not restricted to sexual pleasure. A more detailed translation would also take into account the meanings, "flatter," "gratify," and "be pleasing to," not strictly in the sexual sense.⁵⁶ Thus, we can conclude that Paul sees the husband and the wife both as obligated and already inclined to serve each other in their marriage. The two spouses are equal in authority and responsibility over each other's well-being. Neither one has authority over him- or herself, but they each have authority over the other.

A comprehensive understanding of Paul's view on women, however, would not be complete unless it included 1 Cor 11:2–16, a passage that many people today find troubling. It raises such issues as male headship, female subordination, and required head coverings for

⁵⁵ 1 Cor 7:32–35 "I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord."

⁵⁶ Liddell and Scott, s.v. "*areskō*."

women—all notions that go against gender equality. In order to know what to make of these ideas, we must examine the passage carefully. To begin, we should note that the passage appears within the large section of 1 Corinthians that appears to be Paul’s answer to questions he received from the Corinthians in an earlier letter. The correspondence mentioned at the beginning of chapter 7 is indirectly referenced several times within chapters 7–15, indicating that the topics that Paul discusses in these chapters—including this one in chapter 11—are topics brought up first by the Corinthians themselves.⁵⁷ First Corinthians 11:2–16 reads as follows:

² I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you. ³ 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. ⁴ Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, ⁵ but 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. ⁶ For 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. ⁷ 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. ⁸ Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. ⁹ Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. ¹⁰ For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. ¹¹ Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. ¹² For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God. ¹³ Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled? ¹⁴ Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, ¹⁵ but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. ¹⁶ But if anyone is disposed to be contentious—we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.

The very beginning of this passage introduces it as addressing proper religious practice. In v. 2, Paul praises the Corinthians for properly following the traditions he has taught them. The fact that he immediately follows this statement with a new instruction regarding the correct roles for men and women in v. 3 indicates that he believes that the point he is about to make should become an equally well-followed tradition. This new instruction, that “Christ is the head

⁵⁷See 1 Cor 7:1a; See also 1 Cor 7:25; 8:1, 4; 12:1; 16:1, 12.

of every man and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ,” is a difficult one to interpret, for it appears to be quite unfair to women by placing them below their husbands. However, the Greek words for “husband” and “wife” are the same as the words for “man” and “woman,” so this sentence may not refer to the marriage relationship. Hans Conzelmann uses this fact as well as the lack of an article before *gunaikos* (woman, wife) to interpret this passage as directing proper relationships within Christian community, not marriage.⁵⁸

Still, the fact remains that a man is seen to be the head of a woman and not the other way around. The meaning of *kephalē* (head) in this instance is not entirely clear. Some scholars⁵⁹ have argued that it means “origin” or “source,” rather than “head” in the sense of authority. However, Grosheide argues that the use of *kephalē* here ought to be understood as “governing organ” rather than “source,” because in vv. 7–9 Paul brings up the fact that woman came from man as if it were a new topic, not a topic of which he has already spoken.⁶⁰ While the “indeed” in v. 8 may seem to indicate the contrary, it actually refers to the statement in v. 7 about woman being the “reflection of man,” not all the way back to the headship in v. 3. Thus, while Paul may view man as the source and origin of woman, that is not the point that he is making in v. 3. The rest of the passage focuses so much on heads and head coverings that Paul clearly is speaking with anatomical heads in mind as well. For this reason, *kephalē*’s primary meaning here is most likely the more literal “head,” with the anatomical head reminding Paul’s audience of the various functions a head has, some of which involve leadership: it houses the face (in the sense that it

⁵⁸ Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, trans. James W. Leitch; ed. George W. MacRae (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 184.

⁵⁹ For example, Jouette M. Bassler, “1 Corinthians,” in *Women’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Carol A. Newsome and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 417.

⁶⁰ Grosheide, 249–250.

represents the body to others) and it makes decisions for the body. The word *kephalē* is used similarly elsewhere in the Old and New Testaments to denote superior rank and leadership.⁶¹

One of the possible definitions of *kephalē* in Liddell and Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon* is "source" or "origin," which comprises a subset of *kephalē*'s potential to mean "extremity." Other meanings included in this idea of extremity are the top of a vessel, the base of the heart, and the edge of a plot of land. The specific context given for "source" and "origin" is that *kephalē*'s plural form (which is not used in 1 Cor 11) sometimes denotes the headwaters of a river.⁶² However, the closest example to *kephalē* meaning "source" elsewhere in the New Testament is in Col 1:15–18, which connects Christ's status as the "firstborn of all creation" and the means by which God created the world to his being "head of the church" and having "first place in everything."⁶³ In this case, the fact that Christ is the source of all things means that he also has supremacy above all things. Therefore, even if "source" is one aspect of the meaning of *kephalē* in 1 Cor 11:3, the primary meaning has to do with being of higher rank.

The strict instructions in vv. 4–6 instructing men not to cover their heads and women to cover their heads when praying seem quite oppressive upon first reading. However, covering one's head (or tying one's hair back in a "veil") was the custom of Mediterranean women in Paul's day. Jewish women always had to wear their hair covered in public, and some Greeks had the same expectation.⁶⁴ The fact that Paul links the lack of head covering on a woman to the

⁶¹ See Judg 11:11; 2 Sam 22:44; Eph 4:15; 5:23; Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 4th ed., trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), s.v. "*kephalē*."

⁶² Liddell and Scott, s.v. "*kephalē*."

⁶³ Col 1:15–18 "He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything."

⁶⁴ Conzelmann, 185.

disgrace of a woman with her hair shaved off indicates that his audience would agree with him that women should not shave their heads. Grosheide explains that the reason a shaved head is so disgraceful for a woman is that it makes her look like a man and thus shames her womanhood. Honorable women were to wear head coverings.⁶⁵ For Paul, the lack of a head covering is just as offensive as the lack of hair. Therefore, Paul wants women to realize that even in neglecting to wear their head coverings, they are dressing like men and have left their proper place.⁶⁶ In Grosheide's interpretation, Paul is not asking women to add to their subordination by wearing head coverings. He is merely insisting that they not be exempt from their custom of wearing head coverings while in the church. Teachings such as Gal 3:28, which had assured Corinthian women of their equal status in Christ (meaning that they have spiritual equality: they are no further from salvation than men), had been taken too far, and women were overstepping their bounds when they prayed with their heads uncovered.⁶⁷ They took their status in Christ too far when they let it affect their behavior in public. Already, Christian women had more freedom to speak and participate in assemblies than other women in their society. This freedom was perceived as scandalous by many outsiders,⁶⁸ which may be why Paul was so adamant to have women behave more traditionally in this instance.⁶⁹ This interpretation is consistent both with the evidence that the custom of women wearing head coverings was prevalent in Paul's time and

⁶⁵ In the ancient world, unbound hair on women was common in frenzied cult ceremonies with which Paul probably did not want to be associated. In addition, Num 5:18 indicates that Jewish tradition may have associated unbound hair with adulterous women. See Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, rev. ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 227–28.

⁶⁶ Grosheide, 254.

⁶⁷ Grosheide, 250.

⁶⁸ MacDonald, 30.

⁶⁹ Conzelmann helpfully points out that the disproportionate number of reasons Paul gives to address one seemingly small problem indicate his strong desire to break the Corinthians Christians of what was for them custom. 282–83.

the larger theme within 1 Corinthians that Christians' behavior should reflect what is good and proper.

The next stage of Paul's argument rests on his view of the order of creation. Verses 8 and 9 echo the story of creation as told in Gen 2,⁷⁰ describing how and why woman was created from man. God created the first woman with the rib from the first man so that the man would no longer be alone.⁷¹ This understanding of creation is the basis for the statement he makes in v. 7 that man "is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man." Grosheide explains why the order in which man and woman were created matters so much to Paul. Man was the last thing God created out of nothing, so he is the "crown of creation, the glory of God."⁷² Woman was created after man, but she is not the crown of God's creation because she was created *from man*. She, then, is the reflection of "how beautiful a being God could create from a man."⁷³ The Greek word, *doxa*, translated here as "reflection," is literally "glory," but its pairing with *eikōn* (image) suggests to translators that the former alternative is more appropriate.⁷⁴ We can understand "reflection" here to mean something that displays the glory and potential of its source, thereby bringing it honor.⁷⁵ Man brings honor to God by living to his fullest potential as a man, and woman glorifies man by dutifully and gracefully living as a

⁷⁰ Gen 2:20b–23 "...but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.'"

⁷¹ Gen 2:18 "Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.'"

⁷² Grosheide, 256.

⁷³ Grosheide, 256.

⁷⁴ Conzelmann, 187.

⁷⁵ Grosheide, 255–56.

woman should.⁷⁶ Because men and women were created in different ways, Paul understands them as inherently different in certain roles. The issue of head coverings is important to Paul primarily because it is an outward display of an important role difference between the sexes.

The reason the covering of the head matters to Paul rests in the concept of man being the *eikōn* (image) of God. Paul names man as the “image and reflection” (v. 7a) of God, but he does not say the same for woman. The explanation of this discrepancy that makes the most sense is, as previously discussed, that man is God’s image because of the method and circumstances of his creation. When Paul writes in v. 7 that “a man ought not to have his head veiled” *because* “he is the image and reflection of God,” he may be alluding to a branch of Jewish thought connecting God’s image with God’s face.⁷⁷ If the face of God is the image of God, and the image of God is man, then the face (and head) of man is the vital, focal point of this image. Therefore, covering a man’s head would be the same thing as covering and shaming the image of God. Paul states that a woman, on the other hand, is not the image of God.⁷⁸ A covering on her head does no harm to God’s image. In fact, it reflects the order in which God created the world.

Verse 10 is one of the most difficult verses in this passage to understand. A literal translation of the verse reads, “For this reason a woman must have a power on her head, because

⁷⁶ One could understand this to mean living as man’s “helper” (see Gen 2:18), but Paul does not make that claim directly. However, his later emphasis on wives’ submission to their husbands is a similar notion.

⁷⁷ Conzelmann, 186.

⁷⁸ This statement does seem to contradict Gen 1:27 (“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”). Whatever his reasons may be, Paul has consistently been using the creation story of Gen 2 rather than Gen 1. The fact that his argument depends on an assumption that contradicts another section of the Old Testament may be an indication of his human fallibility and could call into question the validity of his subsequent prescriptions for behavior. However, another possibility is that he interprets Gen 1:27 differently. Paul could understand the verse to mean that both man and woman are created in God’s image but that man is more directly the image of God (because he is named first) and the woman reflects God’s image *through* the man. A fuller discussion of the validity of Paul’s arguments outside his own context will come later in this paper.

of the angels.”⁷⁹ The Greek word, *exousia*, translated here as “power” and in the NRSV as “symbol of authority,” is difficult to decipher precisely because its literal meaning, “power” or “authority,” makes little sense as a type of head covering.⁸⁰ Thus, various interpreters have added “symbol of,” envisioning a type of covering or veil that symbolizes woman’s proper place under authority. However, the verse is not clear as to whom this authority or power belongs—it could be God’s or man’s or even the woman’s. Other uses of *exousia* in 1 Corinthians have to do with “Christian liberty,” the freedom a Christian has to act according to the principle of love rather than a strict set of rules.⁸¹ If women have this kind of authority on their heads, it could potentially be freeing for them. They decide on their own to act according to their proper place; the veiling is voluntary.⁸²

Also puzzling is the phrase, “because of the angels.” With no further description than that, we can only guess which angels these are and why women’s head coverings matter to them. One interpretation is that the *exousia* on a woman’s head protects her from being attacked by demons. Because she lacks the image of God that the man has, she needs this other form of power to serve in its place.⁸³ A different explanation understands the angels to have been present at creation and also present when a woman worships. They know what a woman was created to be—the reflection of and subordinate to man—and they want her to wear an outer sign of this status at all times.⁸⁴ Whether the first or second, or neither, of these explanations is correct, the common thought that they both share is that the angels have something to do with the

⁷⁹ Conzelmann, 181.

⁸⁰ *exousia* is defined as “power, authority to do a thing” in Liddell and Scott, s.v. “*exousia*.”

⁸¹ Grosheide, 16.

⁸² Grosheide, 257.

⁸³ Conzelmann, 189.

⁸⁴ Grosheide, 258.

maintenance of the distinct role that a woman has in the world. In this way, both interpretations are right, because the rest of this passage makes it very clear that women and men ought to have separate positions and expectations in the community of believers. Furthermore, the precise meaning of this phrase is much less important than the context in which it is found. Its purpose here is to give additional support to Paul's assertion about women's head coverings, not to give details about certain angels. Even without understanding who the angels are, we can still presume that Paul's audience would understand that the angels somehow validate his point.

In verses 11 and 12, on the other hand, Paul brings in an idea vastly different from his previous emphasis on woman's subordinate role. He reminds his audience that in spite of their differences, men and women are not independent of each other. Although woman's initial creation came through man, man is indebted to woman for the lives of subsequent generations. Not only that, but "all things come from God." Though woman was created out of man, her creator was still God. And, like in Gal 3:28, the differences between male and female disappear "in the Lord." That is, when it comes to salvation, man is no closer than woman. Their physical and natural differences remain, but they matter only in this world.⁸⁵ According to Conzelmann, this verse "maintains the central Pauline idea that cancellation of distinctions has its specific place, that they are canceled 'in the Lord,' not 'in us.'"⁸⁶ Thus, man and woman have equality in Christ, but this does not change their assigned roles on earth.

To conclude his teaching on the topic of head coverings, Paul poses two questions to his audience in vv. 13–15a. The first question, in which Paul asks the Corinthians to "judge for [them]selves" whether it is right for a woman to pray without covering her head, reiterates the main goal of the passage, which is to stop this very behavior. Based on the rhetorical style of the

⁸⁵ Grosheide, 258.

⁸⁶ Conzelmann, 190.

second question, Paul seems confident that the Corinthians would agree with him, upon reflection, that his argument makes sense. They can see from nature that long hair is good for a woman, but degrading for a man. From there one needs only make the small step to equating a head covering with long hair before arriving at Paul's conclusion. The arguments which Paul makes earlier in the passage—the maxim of the man's headship over the woman and the argument from creation—are intended to go along with, rather than contradict, the common sense and instinct of Paul's audience.

The very last verse of this section of 1 Corinthians, by discouraging people from being "contentious," emphasizes the importance for Paul of unity in the church. If we interpret the whole of this passage in the light of maintaining church unity, the strongest message that Paul is sending the Corinthians is that their women ought not to cause trouble within the church by behaving in a way in which women should not behave. Imitating men in the way that they dress would be corrupting their created womanhood because part of being a woman is looking a certain way. These women had neglected to respect the natural and God-ordained differences between themselves and the men in the church, taking their eagerness for spiritual equality with men too far.⁸⁷ Even though their status in Christ is equal to that of men, women's worldly role remains the same. Paul wants women to keep some aspect of normalcy even when they pray in church. In Conzelmann's words, Paul wants the Corinthian women to "maintain the imperceptibility of this unworldliness"⁸⁸—to act out God's will and their newfound freedom in more subtle ways than their outer dress.

As a whole, 1 Corinthians gives a confusing picture of women's status in the church. Jouette Bassler criticizes Paul's odd conglomeration of ideas by saying, "One senses *conflicting*

⁸⁷ Grosheide, 262.

⁸⁸ Conzelmann, 191.

views within Paul shutting down the rational process, and where reason fails, emotion and tradition take over....”⁸⁹ On the one hand, Paul writes that wives and husbands have equal rights within their marriages, and neither man nor woman is independent of the other. Both give themselves up to the other spouse and seek the other spouse’s happiness. On the other hand, Paul clearly intends to maintain the visible difference between men and women through the way in which they dress. He explains the importance of this difference through his understanding of God’s created order, seeing the man as having headship, or authority, over the woman by God’s design. Contrary to Bassler’s interpretation, however, these two different ideas are not irreconcilable. Paul wants men and women to continue living within their traditional roles but to approach them with an attitude of equality. Husbands are still husbands and wives are still wives, but they are to live out these roles with mutuality. Similarly, women can continue to have the freedom of praying in church, but they must not abandon appropriate dress in the process.

1 Timothy 2:8–15

⁸ I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument; ⁹ also that the women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided, ¹⁰ but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God. ¹¹ Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. ¹² I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵ Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.⁹⁰

One of the most controversial passages about women to be found in the New Testament, 1 Tim 2:8–15 presents numerous challenges to interpreters with its many statements restricting women’s freedom. Because this paper assumes the authenticity of the Pastoral Letters, we can

⁸⁹ Jouette M. Bassler, “1 Corinthians,” in *Women’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., edited by Carol A. Newsome and Sharon H. Ringe, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 417.

⁹⁰ 1 Tim 2:8–15.

construct the circumstances of the letter by the places and situations described and addressed within it. Addressed to Timothy, Paul's fellow missionary, the letter was directed to one of Paul's churches, presumably in Ephesus. Paul is writing to give Timothy help and advice in dealing with the significant heretical opposition faced by the church there.⁹¹ Some of the most basic themes of the Pastoral Letters as a whole include faith, salvation, and good works. The relationship between salvation and good works that is portrayed throughout the Pastoral Epistles does not contradict Paul's statements elsewhere in the New Testament about God's grace. While he emphasizes obedience more in these letters than in his other ones, this obedience does not preclude salvation. Humans' responsibility is to respond in obedience to the salvation that comes through Jesus Christ.⁹²

In the passage immediately preceding this one, Paul gives instructions to his readers concerning prayer. They are to make prayers and supplication "for everyone" (1 Tim 2:1) because God "desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2:4). In vv. 5–6, Paul reminds them of the reason for all these prayers: Jesus Christ and his atoning sacrifice. This is the context out of which the passage begins. In v. 8, Paul discusses the proper way for men to pray: "lifting up holy hands without anger or argument." Although this verse may seem to be about proper posture, Paul's emphasis here is on proper attitude. The fact that Paul discusses posture at all may be simply because the phrase "holy hands" was a way for him to discuss proper attitude in a more symbolic way.⁹³ In the Old Testament, having pure and holy hands was important and necessary when approaching God and was even associated with making

⁹¹ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, (WBC 46; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 16–17.

⁹² Mounce, cxxxii.

⁹³ Mounce, 106.

reconciliation with one's neighbors.⁹⁴ Thus, it made sense for Paul to urge his readers to keep their hands holy; it was one more way of reminding them of the urgency of letting go of their anger. He makes a similar point in Eph 4:26, saying, "Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger." Anger, then, is a topic which Paul has addressed before.⁹⁵ Conversely, nowhere in Paul's letters is there a precedent for discussing prayer posture for men.

After addressing men in v. 8, Paul moves on to appropriate behavior for women in vv. 9–10. He insists that they dress "modestly and decently in suitable clothing," not adorning themselves unnecessarily with gaudy jewelry or any other excessive attire (v. 9). Instead, they are to adorn themselves with "good works" because of their "reverence for God" (v. 10). Like v. 8, however, these verses are not solely about outward appearances. The words for "dress oneself" and "clothing" (*kosmein* and *katastolē*, respectively) have a twofold meaning: in addition to referring to what a person looks like, they also indicate a person's "general deportment," how the person conducts him/herself.⁹⁶ In other words, the Ephesian women's way of dressing reflected an unchristian aspect of their character—an inappropriate level of concern with outward beauty. Paul wants them to replace this worldly attitude with one of reverence to God expressed through good works. These good works are not for the purpose of earning the women's salvation, but they are the natural and appropriate response to the salvation that they have received through Christ.

The women's personal character is not the only issue at stake here, though. Their appearances do matter. The words Paul uses to describe the women's appropriate attire, *aidous*

⁹⁴ See Exod 30:19–21; Ps 24:4; Isa 1:15; 59:3.

⁹⁵ See 1 Cor 13:5; 2 Cor 12:20; Eph 4:31; Col 3:8;

⁹⁶ Mounce, 109.

and *sōphrosunēs* (literally, “with modesty” and “with moderation”), have sexual connotations.⁹⁷

The way in which the women were dressing needed to be sexually appropriate rather than indecently suggestive. In Paul’s time, elaborate hairstyle and clothing choices were often strongly associated with sexually immoral women such as prostitutes and adulteresses.⁹⁸

Outward adornments were looked upon as a way in which immoral women tried to manipulate men when their own beauty did not suffice.⁹⁹ In addition to being sexually promiscuous, ornate dress conveyed “ostentatious extravagance,” an attitude of the wealthy often criticized in Paul’s time.¹⁰⁰ If the women in the churches of Ephesus were dressing themselves excessively ornately, they would incur upon themselves a bad reputation. Women’s reputations were deeply linked to the reputations of the men (and, by extension, the church) around them,¹⁰¹ so any rumors of immorality or dishonorable ostentation among Christian women would affect the church of which they were a part. Not only would they tarnish the church’s reputation with non-Christians, but their ornate and suggestive attire could also distract the other worshipers within the church. Therefore, Paul’s instructions regarding women’s attire seem to be for similar reasons as his exhortation to the men in their prayers. In both cases, these Christians are to worship with the proper reverent attitude, not disrupting prayers or worship with either undue anger or promiscuity.

In v. 11, Paul shifts his emphasis away from worship to the subject of church leadership. To go along with a woman’s proper attire, he describes her proper behavior within the church.

⁹⁷ Mounce, 109. See also Liddell and Scott, s.v. “*aidos*” and “*sōphrosunē*.”

⁹⁸ Mounce, 115.

⁹⁹ Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives: Marriage and Women’s Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 104.

¹⁰⁰ Keener, 104–5.

¹⁰¹ MacDonald, 39, 232, 247.

Commentator William Mounce translates the verse as follows: “A woman should learn in quietness, in all submissiveness.”¹⁰² He interprets the term, *hēsukia*, as “quietness” or “quiet demeanor” rather than “silence” for multiple reasons.¹⁰³ Although the noun *hēsukia* and its related cognates, *hēsukiazein* (verb) and *hēsukios* (adjective), can indicate both “silence” and “quietness” in their other appearances throughout the New Testament, instances of women being allowed to speak—or at least to pray—in church make it unlikely that Paul here changes his mind completely.¹⁰⁴ As we read in 1 Cor 11, women in Paul’s churches prayed and prophesied, presumably not in silence. Even more pertinent is Paul’s use of *hēsukios* earlier 1 Tim 2. In v. 2, he writes that everyone, even kings, should “lead a quiet and peaceable life.” The translation of “silent” instead of “quiet” here makes very little sense, given the context. In addition, the syntax of the sentence in which *hēsukia* appears shows that the phrase “in all submissiveness” is syntactically subordinate to “quietness.” That is, “in all submissiveness” is meant to help qualify, or define, “quietness.”¹⁰⁵

This “submission” or “submissiveness” (*hupotagē*) of which Paul writes in v. 11b is reminiscent of Col 3:18 and Eph 5:22, for both of those verses also use the cognate verb *hupotassein* (“to submit”) to refer to the woman’s role. Elsewhere in the New Testament,

¹⁰² Mounce, 117.

¹⁰³ Mounce, 118.

¹⁰⁴ In 1 Thess 4:11, Paul urges the believers in Thessalonica “to aspire to live quietly, to mind [their] own affairs, and to work with [their] hands” as a part of their proper relations with outsiders. The verb *hēsukiazein* is in this case translated as “to live quietly” (NRSV), which is a more appropriate translation than “to be quiet” as is clear from the context. Similarly, in 2 Thess 3:12, Paul exhorts the idle and “busybodies” within his audience “to do their work quietly and to earn their own living” (NRSV). In this case, the phrase translated in the NRSV as “quietly” is *meta hēsukias* (lit. “with quietness”). In both of these cases, the word *hēsukia/hēsukiazein* conveys an attitude or way of living rather than a literal silence. Liddell and Scott (s.v. “*hēsukiazō*”) also include a variety of meanings beyond simply the lack of noise, including “to be at rest.”

¹⁰⁵ Mounce, 117.

hupotassein is used to describe submission in a variety of relationships.¹⁰⁶ Although the specific person to whom one is submitting varies depending on the context, the verb always implies a difference in status or authority between the two parties. Submission is always to an authority of some kind, whether it be a husband, a master, a parent, an elder, or Christ.¹⁰⁷ No specific authority is mentioned in 1 Tim 2, so we do not know exactly to whom Paul intends the women to submit. Mounce suggests that this omission of a direct object indicates that *hupotagē* might best be understood in this case to mean a submissive attitude.¹⁰⁸ Because of Paul's emphasis on the importance of the right attitude in vv. 8–10, this interpretation seems fitting. Paul is not telling the women of Ephesus to silently and passively accept every teaching and command they receive. Rather, he wants them to learn with a “quiet demeanor” and attitude of “submissiveness.” If they should wish to contribute or disagree, they ought to do so in a properly submissive way so as not to be offensive.

In many ways, v. 12 is a restating of v. 11. Both verses are exhortations with two main components. In v. 11, the two components are quietness and submissiveness. In v. 12, they are that women are not “to teach or have authority over a man” and that they should “keep silent.” The same “silence” or “quietness” occurs in both verses, beginning the first and concluding the last, which effectively sets the two sentences together as one idea. As in the previous verse, then, “quietness” is the primary command here, and everything else is explaining the meaning of it. That a woman should not teach or exercise authority over a man is in some way a part of her quietness.

¹⁰⁶ See Luke 2:51; Rom 13:1; 1 Cor 14:34; Eph 5:21–22; Col 3:18; 1 Tim 3:4; Tit 2:5, 2:9, 3:1; 1 Pet 2:13–14, 2:18, 3:1, 5:5.

¹⁰⁷ Mounce, 119.

¹⁰⁸ Mounce, 119–120.

Some scholars have argued that v. 12 is meant specifically to prevent women from teaching heresies. They assert that women are allowed to teach as long as they teach the right things. This perspective is based on the understanding that this passage was written to address one specific situation—one of prevalent heresy. If this were the case, then Paul only wants to stop the women in Ephesus from their habit of speaking false teachings, and for this reason, Paul’s comments ought not to be taken as universally applicable. However, the universalism present earlier in 1 Tim 2 (see vv. 1, 4, and 6) and the phrase “in every place” in v. 8 would indicate that Paul’s instructions are more broad than just to his immediate audience. An even bigger problem with this view is the placement and word choice of *didaskein* (“to teach”) in the sentence. In the original Greek, *didaskein* is the first word of the sentence and therefore emphasized. Not only that, but Paul could have very easily replaced this “to teach” with “to teach false teachings” (*heterodidaskalein*), a word used two other times in the book of 1 Timothy (1:3 and 6:3).¹⁰⁹ If Paul’s intention here is to put a stop to heresy, he is very unclear about it. In addition, it makes little sense for Paul to warn women against heretical teachings without saying the same to men; heresy is harmful whether taught by a man or a woman. The more logical reading is that he does not want women to be teaching men at all in the church. Yet they are still allowed to teach other women and children, as is evidenced elsewhere in the New Testament.¹¹⁰

The Greek word, *authentein* (translated here as “to have authority over”), is uncommon in texts of the New Testament era, both Christian and otherwise. Its meaning in the instances in which it does appear can range between “to exercise authority” and “to domineer.”¹¹¹ Regardless of which definition is more appropriate in this case, either one includes the sense of

¹⁰⁹ Mounce, 124–26.

¹¹⁰ See Acts 18:26; Col 3:16; 2 Tim 1:5; 3:15; Tit 2:3–4.

¹¹¹ Mounce, 126. See also Liddell and Scott, s.v. “*authenteō*,” and Bauer, s.v. “*authenteō*.”

holding authority. The only difference is whether this authority is positive or coercive. Mounce argues that Paul's pairing of *authenthein* with another positive verb, *didaskein* ("to teach"), makes the former definition more likely. In addition, Paul addresses this verse only to women. If he were addressing the problem of domineering, he would want to include men as well. Therefore, Mounce concludes that Paul must not want women to be exercising authority over men.¹¹² One could counter this by pointing out that Paul saw domination only as a problem among women and therefore chose not to address men in this verse. However, it is highly unlikely that men never acted domineeringly—especially considering Paul's reminder to them in v. 8 against being angry. Even if Paul did not perceive domination as a problem for men, this would have only been because the practice was more acceptable for a man than for a woman.¹¹³ Again, the logical conclusion is that for Paul, it was not appropriate for a woman to have authority in the church.

Starting in v. 13, Paul brings in the creation story of Adam and Eve, found in the book of Genesis. He states that "Adam was formed first, then Eve" (v. 13), which is a direct reference to the story of how God created Eve from one of Adam's ribs.¹¹⁴ Because Paul introduces this statement with *gar* ("for"), the subsequent story of Eve's creation after Adam has causal significance for Paul's previous instructions regarding quietness and submission. Paul sees the means of creation as signifying more than just men's and women's origins. According to Mounce, it also indicates God's intention that men should have authority over women. This is not because of a hierarchical principle based on order of creation, but rather, it is due to the *way*

¹¹² Mounce, 128.

¹¹³ Aggressiveness was an appropriate male behavior in first-century C.E. society, while submission and passivity were respectable qualities for females. See Malina, 45.

¹¹⁴ See Gen 2:18, 20b–23.

in which woman was created—from the man’s rib, in order to be his helper.¹¹⁵ Her role in this partnership is that of the subordinate, the helper, while the man is the leader.

Paul continues with this story of Adam and Eve in v. 14, this time talking about their fall into sin: “and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.” Genesis describes the story—Eve talks with the serpent and is tricked into eating the forbidden fruit. Adam, “who was with her” (Gen 3:6), eats some of the fruit as well when she offers it to him.¹¹⁶ Paul interprets this story as showing the deception of Eve as compared to the undeceived Adam. In Genesis, the text clearly indicates that both Adam and Eve sinned by eating the fruit. Paul, however, emphasizes deception more than sin. His statement should not be taken as saying that Adam did not sin; in fact, it implies the opposite. While Eve “became a transgressor” (literally, “has come into transgression”) because she was fooled, Adam sinned knowingly.¹¹⁷ In fact, Paul seems to accentuate Eve’s deception by using two different forms of the verb, *apatan* “to deceive,” in this verse. The regular form of the verb is used for Adam, but for Eve Paul uses *exapatan*, a somewhat intensified version of the same word. The meaning is the same, but the use of the prefix, *ex-*, draws more attention to this second occurrence of the verb.¹¹⁸ However, Mounce points out the fact that this verse does not *only* talk about Eve. If its sole emphasis were the fact that Eve was deceived, it makes no sense for Paul to place the phrase, “Adam was not

¹¹⁵ Mounce, 130.

¹¹⁶ See Gen 3, esp. vv. 1–7.

¹¹⁷ Some interpret Eve’s deception in this verse as the result of her lack of full and direct information (since she had only heard God’s forbidding of the fruit through Adam), arguing that she is not more easily deceived but rather is just more ignorant in this instance. However, this view necessarily implies that Adam failed to do a good job teaching Eve what he had heard from God. In this case, Adam clearly lacks ability as teacher, and Paul should be admonishing men, not women, not to teach. See Thomas R. Schreiner, “An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9–15: A Dialogue with Scholarship,” in *Women in the Church*, ed. A.J. Köstenberger, T.R. Schreiner, and H.S. Baldwin (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 141–42.

¹¹⁸ Mounce, 142. See also Liddell and Scott, s.v. “*apataō*” and “*exapataō*,” and Bauer, s.v. “*apataō*” and “*exapataō*.”

deceived” in the earlier—and therefore syntactically dominant—part of the sentence.¹¹⁹ For Paul, this verse serves rather to emphasize the difference between Adam and Eve (or man and woman): man is not deceived in the same way woman is, and this propensity for deception is a female weakness.

The discussion of deception in v. 14 is still part of the same sentence that started in v. 13. Thus, the causal *gar* “(for”) applies here just as much as it did in the previous verse. Thus, not only is the order of creation significant in explaining why women ought not to exercise authority over or teach men and should be quiet, but the male and female tendencies toward deception are a second reason for this difference in roles. Paul interprets the idea that a woman can be more easily deceived than a man to mean that she should also not teach a man but should be quiet. Presumably, she would be a less reliable teacher because she has the weakness of being inclined to be deceived.¹²⁰ As stated above, Paul is not saying that men have no weaknesses. He does, however, seem to think that the possibility of being deceived has great significance in one’s ability to teach, and that this is a particular weakness of women.¹²¹ Similarly, Paul sees the way in which woman was created as indicating that her proper role is to submit to male authority.

As if to prevent his audience from extending his teaching too far and seeing women as worthless sinners, Paul goes on in v. 15 to reassure them that women, too, will be saved. He

¹¹⁹ Mounce, 139.

¹²⁰ Since Paul speaks elsewhere in his letters of women teaching younger women and children (Tit 2:3–4; see also 1 Tim 5:9–16; 2 Tim 1:5, 3:15), this passage should not be understood as restricting *all* teaching by women. Rather, it means either that women should not teach men or that women should not teach in a public setting such as a church. Or, it could mean both at the same time. I am of the last opinion: these verses demonstrate that Paul does not want women to be teaching men in church. His instructions in this passage are directly within the context of communal gatherings, not within private homes or marriages, and the large amount of responsibility a wife had within a Greco-Roman household makes it unlikely that she was never allowed to teach her husband anything.

¹²¹ Schreiner, 145–46, asserts that the reason Paul would see deception as more of a problem for women than men is in the nature of the two sexes (as reflected in the order of creation). This difference in nature is not an intellectual one, but one of “different inclinations.” Namely, women’s more relational nature causes them to sometimes prioritize the preservation of relationships over the purity of doctrinal claims. While relationships are important, doctrine is much more important when teaching publicly in the church.

writes, “Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.” Although this verse switches between the singular “she” (referring back to Eve) and the plural “they” (which could mean all women or the Ephesian women or potentially the children the women bear), the most straightforward reading of it interprets both terms as referring to women in general. However, in the context of the rest of the passage, this generalization of all women probably represents just the women in Paul’s audience. Earlier in the passage, Paul speaks of Eve and “the woman” as representing at the very least the women in his audience. We know this because Paul has been writing of Eve’s creation and actions in the Garden of Eden influencing the proper behavior of the women in his audience. In this case, Eve’s childbearing apparently assures her salvation, but the women of Ephesus must continue on in holy lives in order for their salvation to come as well. The two are closely connected.

The most troubling aspect of this verse is the claim that a woman “will be saved through childbearing.” At first, this seems to go against the notion of salvation by God’s grace: the woman is somehow earning her salvation through the good work of giving birth. However, salvation by works goes against not only Paul’s letters as a whole, but even the Pastoral Epistles. Although 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus emphasize good works more than most of Paul’s other letters do, these books still maintain that obedience is the *result*, rather than the cause, of salvation.¹²² Many other passages in the Pauline corpus discuss the necessity of perseverance and action in working out one’s salvation;¹²³ living as a “saved” Christian involves more than

¹²² Mounce, cxxxii–cxxxiv.

¹²³ See Phil 2:12; 1 Tim 4:16. See also Rom 2:6–10, 26–29; 1 Cor 6:9–11; Gal 5:21.

just passively receiving God's grace. In this verse, then, a woman giving birth is following through with the good works expected of her as a Christian.¹²⁴

Mounce and other interpreters understand this verse as suggesting childbearing as one particular and very widespread aspect of women's staying in their "God-given role." Paul wanted to remind the women in his audience to remain in their proper role, one function of which is to mother children. The reason this particular function is mentioned is probably that the false teachers in Ephesus were deemphasizing for Paul's audience the importance of the traditional values of marriage and childbearing.¹²⁵ Although Paul's own preference is for celibacy, he has also argued in 1 Cor 7 that marriage is honorable. His emphasis here on proper gender roles may be a direct response to the false teachers' prohibition of marriage.¹²⁶ Thus, Paul's reference to childbearing was a reminder to the women of what they were already expected to do. He wanted to ensure that the false teachings would not cause the women to abandon the traditionally established role of being wives and mothers.

This is not to say that a woman will not be saved if she never gives birth to a child. This interpretation would be a regression back into salvation by works. The fact that Paul introduces the idea of childbearing in the context of "she" (that is, Eve) in v. 15a makes it possible to see the inclusion of childbearing as a role for womankind as a whole. Eve is the representative of all women. Every single woman is descended from Eve, and womankind collectively has been given the singular ability to give birth to children. The following clause in v. 15b, which

¹²⁴ An alternative interpretation of the verb *sōzein* ("to save") is that it means a physical salvation, or a removal from harm. Two considerable problems arise with this interpretation, however. First, childbirth was far from a safe activity in the ancient world; giving birth meant a high risk of death for the mother. Second, every other instance of *sōzein* in Paul's letters refers to spiritual salvation. When speaking about other kinds of salvation, Paul tends instead to use a different word, *rhuesthai* ("to deliver"). See Mounce, 144–45.

¹²⁵ Schreiner, 150; see 1 Tim 4:1–5.

¹²⁶ 1 Tim 4:3.

qualifies the preceding statement that Eve “will be saved through childbearing,” specifies that women (now plural) are to live with right demeanor and attitudes: “provided they continue in faith and loved and holiness, with modesty” (v. 15a). Thus, although Paul first brings in the idea of salvation in the context of Eve’s (and her descendents’) childbearing, the actual salvation depends instead on their living in an attitude of “faith and love and holiness.”

A different possibility with this verse is the fact that *tēs teknogonias* could be just as easily translated “the childbirth” as “childbearing.” If this were the case, then “the childbirth” (with an emphasis on the article, *tēs* [“the”]) could be a disguised reference to Mary’s giving birth to Jesus—the birth of the Savior of all.¹²⁷ This interpretation would remove any perceived difficulties reconciling the statement with a theology of salvation by grace.¹²⁸ Again, though, other evidence makes this interpretation unlikely. The word itself is very uncommon. Its noun form does not appear anywhere else in the New Testament, although Paul does use the verbal form, *teknogonein* (“to bear children”), in 1 Tim 5:14. The primary meaning of the verb in its context seems to be the *act* of bearing children rather than the children themselves.¹²⁹ Because this is just one instance, its contribution is far from conclusive. However, Mounce points out an important objection to this interpretation. If Paul did intend for this verse to refer to salvation through Jesus Christ, he says it in an “extremely obscure way.”¹³⁰ Considering how often Paul writes explicitly elsewhere about Jesus and his gift of salvation, his choice to make that meaning so unclear here makes little sense. Later readers can look upon this interpretation as an extra

¹²⁷ Walter Lock, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Pastoral Epistles*, (ICC 36; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1924), 33.

¹²⁸ However, it is important to note the fact that it is not Jesus’ *birth* that brought about salvation, but rather his death and resurrection. See Schreiner, 148.

¹²⁹ Likewise, the definitions found in Liddell and Scott, s.v. “*teknogoneō*,” and Bauer, s.v. “*teknogonia*,” emphasize the *bearing* of the children.

¹³⁰ Mounce, 145.

layer of meaning within the text, but chances are that it is not a meaning Paul intended when he wrote it.

The latter half of v. 15 brings readers back to the exhortation to modesty from v. 9, which is another reason why “they” most likely refers to the women in Paul’s audience. Because these two statements regarding modesty seem to bookend the rest of the exhortations about women’s roles, we can infer that Paul’s instructions here arise from a desire to re-establish the Ephesian women’s proper decorum. Not only were these women dressing inappropriately, but their immodesty might have also led them to act improperly within the social hierarchy of the church. Paul’s instructions remind them of their feminine role, that of modesty, quietness, and childbearing.

In light of these different roles prescribed by Paul, it is important to remember that a person’s role does not determine his or her worth as a human being, or even as a Christian. Mounce asserts, “Nowhere in Scripture are role and ultimate worth ever equated. In fact, we constantly find the opposite....What matters is repentance from sins, entrance into the kingdom, and the living out of one’s salvation as a regenerated human being of equal worth with all members of the same body, regardless of role.”¹³¹ The fact that Paul sees men and woman as different—a fact that has become clear in this examination of his writings—does not necessarily bring with it an assumption of one’s superiority over the other. As Schreiner states, “The different inclinations of women (and men!) do not imply that they are inferior or superior to men. It simply demonstrates that men and women are profoundly different. Women have some

¹³¹ Mounce, 148.

strengths that men do not have, and men have some strengths that are generally lacking in women.”¹³²

In sum, Paul teaches his readers in this text that God created men and women differently with different roles in mind for them. For women, this role involves acting and dressing modestly, having a quiet and submissive attitude, and upholding the traditionally feminine role of wife- and motherhood. Men, in contrast, are less easily deceived and better suited to leadership positions. Paul’s special emphasis on proper female behavior was likely influenced by the church’s precarious position in society due to rumors of immorality.

Ephesians 5:21–33

The household code¹³³ in Ephesians goes into more depth about the husband/wife relationship than any other text in the New Testament. Although based on a very similar code found in Col 3:18–19,¹³⁴ the marriage portion of the Ephesian code (Eph 5:21–33) is much longer and elaborates considerably upon the ideas of the earlier code. Because of both its richness of detail and its direct focus on the marriage relationship, this passage is an invaluable resource in the study of Paul’s¹³⁵ view on marriage. The text reads as follows:

21 Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22 Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ

¹³² Schreiner, 146.

¹³³ Household codes (also called *Haustafeln*) were a common genre in ancient literature. Although they took multiple forms, the basic purpose of a household code was to outline the roles of various members of the household—most often husbands, wives, parents, children, masters, and slaves. The proper hierarchy within the household was believed to be reflected in efficient functioning of the state. The three household codes present in the New Testament are Eph 5:29–6:9; Col 3:18–4:1; and 1 Pet 2:13–3:12. See John T. Fitzgerald, “Haustafeln,” *ABD* 3:80–81; David L. Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter* (Chico, Cal.: Scholars Press, 1981), 35–36.

¹³⁴ Col 3:18–19 “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as in fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly.”

¹³⁵ For the purposes of this paper, I am referring to the author of Ephesians as Paul even though he was more likely a follower of Paul. This choice was both for the sake of simplicity and because even if it was not written by Paul himself, Ephesians is an extension of Pauline thought.

is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body. ³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” ³² This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. ³³ Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

To place this in context, the letter to the Ephesians was written to a much more general audience than any of Paul’s other letters were. The letter does not mention any specific problems or situations that Paul was addressing; rather, it appears to be more of a treatise written in the form of a letter.¹³⁶ The audience is primarily Gentile,¹³⁷ and Paul’s goal is to give these Gentile Christians general instructions about how to properly live as Christians. He reminds them of the beliefs to which they should hold as well as the behaviors those beliefs should produce.¹³⁸ One unique characteristic of Ephesians is its use of the term *ekklēsia* (“church”) to mean the universal church. All of Paul’s other letters are directed to individual churches, but Ephesians has a more cosmic and universal focus.¹³⁹

The way in which this household code is introduced into the letter is noteworthy: the “be subject to” (*hupotassomenoi*, lit. “being subject to” or “submitting”) in v. 21 is actually a participle (a verbal adjective), the last in a string of several participles, all of which are dependent on the imperative verb, “be filled” (*plērousthe*) in v. 18b.¹⁴⁰ This syntactical

¹³⁶ Victor Paul Furnish, “Ephesians, Epistle to the,” *ABD* 2:535–542, 536.

¹³⁷ See Eph 2:11–13; 4:17.

¹³⁸ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC 42; Dallas: Words Books, 1990), lxxv.

¹³⁹ Lincoln, lxiv.

¹⁴⁰ A literal translation of Eph 5:18–24 reads “And do not become drunk with wine, in which is reckless living, but be filled with the spirit, speaking to one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and

dependence means that Paul's idea of submission—which he uses to introduce the whole household code—is one aspect of being “filled with the Spirit” (v. 18b). In other words, Paul's readers are to see the roles set out for them in the household code as a practical way of living in the Spirit.¹⁴¹ The latter half of v. 21, “out of reverence for Christ,” gives them further reason to see their everyday roles as part of having faith in God. This “reverence” (*phobos*) is literally “fear,” which gives this phrase the same meaning as “fear of God,” the biblical idea of one's appropriate reverence and obedience to God, the Creator.¹⁴²

Although Paul uses the verb *hupotassein* (“to submit”) multiple times in his letters, Eph 5:21 is the only instance in which it is used in reference to a whole group of believers. Elsewhere, the verb always connotes a subordinate group submitting to an authority figure.¹⁴³ The instructions in the Ephesians household code to wives, children, and slaves fit within the traditional idea of submission, but Paul's instructions to the dominant group in each pairing (husbands, fathers, and masters) would not ordinarily be seen as submission. Rather, their instructions—loving (5:25), instructing (6:4), and not threatening (6:9)—demonstrate their power over the other party. Paul's inclusion of all believers in this exhortation to submission in v. 21 suggests that he saw some element of submission even in the roles of these dominant groups.

In vv. 22–23, Paul instructs wives to “be subject to” their husbands because “the husband is the head of the wife.” As discussed earlier in conjunction with 1 Cor 11:3, the word, *kephalē*

making melody with your hearts to the Lord, giving thanks at all times to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in fear of Christ, the wives to their husbands as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, himself the savior of the body; but as the church submits to Christ, thus also [should] the wives to their husbands in everything.” Translation by author.

¹⁴¹ The other ways mentioned as participles in Eph 5:19–20 are more explicitly religious (singing, making melody, and giving thanks) than the idea of submitting to the everyday role relationships set by society.

¹⁴² Lincoln, 366.

¹⁴³ See Rom 13:1, 5; 1 Cor 14:34; Col 3:18; 1 Tim 2:11, 3:4; Tit 2:5, 2:9, 3:1.

(head), denotes a position of some authority.¹⁴⁴ This definition is supported by the fact that here in Ephesians, Paul parallels the husband's headship over the wife to Christ's headship over the church (5:23). Not only that, but he also states explicitly in v. 24 that "the church is subject to Christ," so Christ's headship produces submission on the part of the church. The wife is urged, also, to submit to her husband "as" (*hōs*) the church submits to Christ.

Interestingly, neither of the two times within vv. 22–24 in which wives are told to submit to their husbands is the verb addressed directly to them. In v. 22, the "be subject to" is actually an implied verb, carrying over from *hupotassomenoi* in the previous verse. The Greek in v. 22 does not include any verb at all. In v. 24, the same thing happens. The second half of the sentence contains no verb and refers back to *hupotassetai* ("is subject to"), whose subject is the church, not wives. One might be tempted to interpret this lack of directness as indicating a decrease in the intensity of the wives' submission. Commentator Andrew Lincoln asserts, however, that the meaning of these verses, with their emphasis on wifely submission, is clear enough even with the verbs omitted.¹⁴⁵ Greek texts commonly make use of implied verbs, so the meaning of the passage does not change because of this occurrence. Adding credence to Lincoln's interpretation is the placement of the phrase, "in everything" (*en panti*) in the midst of the phrase in v. 24: wives are to be subject to their husbands "in everything." The submission of *hupotassein* is in full effect. Wives' submission to their husbands should be just as extensive as the church's unlimited obedience to Christ.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ See also F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 384.

¹⁴⁵ Lincoln, 367.

¹⁴⁶ Lincoln, 372, explains that the church's submission to Christ is portrayed in the book of Ephesians as "looking ahead for his beneficial rule, living by his norms, experiencing his presence and love, receiving from him gifts that will enable growth to maturity, and responding to him in gratitude and awe." See Eph 3:17, 3:19, 4:7, 4:11–12, 4:15–16, 4:20–21, 5:2, 5:17, 5:19, 5:21.

While Paul's exhortation to wives to submit would have been typical in a first-century C.E. household code, his instructions to husbands would have come as a surprise.¹⁴⁷ The logical role for the husbands in this relationship would have been "to rule their wives."¹⁴⁸ Instead, Paul tells them to "love [their] wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (v. 25). Although the command for husbands to love their wives is borrowed directly from Col 3:19, Paul expands considerably on this idea here in Ephesians. Not only must the husband love his wife, but he is expected to act like Christ toward her—Christ, who "gave himself up" for the church. Christ sacrificed his own life on behalf of the church, which implies that the husband's role is one of self-sacrifice, even to the point of death.¹⁴⁹ While the wife's role entails complete submission, the husband's is at least as demanding: he is to prioritize his wife's life above his own. Perhaps this is what Paul means in v. 21 about mutual submission; the wife gives herself *to* her husband in obedience, but the husband gives himself up *for* his wife. This self-giving love stands in stark contrast to the dominating role given to husbands in most Greco-Roman household codes.

Paul's focus shifts in vv. 25b–27 from the marriage relationship to a discussion of Christ and the church. Here, Paul explains the result and goal of Christ's sacrifice for the church: the purification of the church, his bride. He uses imagery strongly reminiscent of Jewish wedding traditions, particularly that of the bridal bath.¹⁵⁰ In doing so, he demonstrates how Christ sanctifies the church, making her "holy and without blemish" (v. 27). Rosemary Ruether asserts that Paul's analogy falls apart at this point, because a husband is not capable of the same

¹⁴⁷ Household codes in writings by Areius Didymus, Josephus, Philo, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and Calicratidas, among others, described husbands' role as governing or ruling their wives, who were expected to be submissive and obedient because they, as women, had lower reasoning capacity than men. See Balch, 42–57.

¹⁴⁸ Lincoln, 373.

¹⁴⁹ See Eph 5:1–2 for supporting evidence that Christ's giving himself up was through his sacrificial death.

¹⁵⁰ Lincoln, 375–77.

redemptive love and sacrifice that Christ gave for the church.¹⁵¹ However, the main point of these verses seems to be to glorify the church, not to give further detail on the husband's role in marriage. One might wonder whether the husband's role is to purify and cleanse his wife, but the specificity of Paul's description indicates otherwise. He uses language—such as “holy,” “by the word,” and “in splendor”—that is more sacramental than it is practical. A human husband cannot very well remove all blemishes from his bride. This imagery fits much better with the idea of Christ, who is not merely human, and the church, which is his body on earth, than it does with an earthly marriage.

With v. 28, Paul resumes his discussion of earthly husbands, saying, “In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.” This verse begins a theme present in the remainder of the passage: the husband's love for his wife should be like his love for himself. While vv. 25b–27 detail Christ's love of the church and his particular form of self-sacrifice, vv. 28–33a explain what this love is to mean for husbands. Paul states it in several different ways, but each time the general meaning is the same. The husband loves his wife like his own body (v. 28a), loves his wife as part of his love for himself (v. 28b), and loves his wife “as himself” (v. 33a). This love includes more than just feelings, as is demonstrated by v. 29: “For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church....” The husband is to act out his love for his wife by taking care of her just as much as he cares for his own body. For Christ, this meant cleansing the church of all its blemishes; for the husband, it means doing all that he can for his wife's well-being (just as he would for his own). Paul justifies his command to husbands by referencing the story of Adam and Eve. Eph 5:31 is almost a direct quotation of Gen 2:24. By quoting this

¹⁵¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 141.

verse from Genesis, Paul explains that a marriage brings husband and wife together into “one flesh” (v. 31). As one flesh, the couple now literally *is* one body. The husband cares for the wife as he does for his own body because his wife is now *part* of his body.

After another, this time brief, digression about the Christ/church relationship in v. 32, Paul concludes his discussion on husbands and wives with a summary statement in v. 33: “Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.” Although this verse is not a direct quotation, the first half of it is strongly reminiscent of Lev 19:18.¹⁵² Paul, a Greek-speaking Pharisee, would have been familiar with this text because of its location in the Septuagint. Because of this notable similarity, Paul probably intends husbands to see their love for their wives as one expression of their love for their neighbors. In addition, love is an important theme throughout Ephesians as the expected behavior of all believers.¹⁵³ Thus, husbands’ motivation to love their wives as themselves is twofold. It arises both from their general love for neighbor and from their natural love for themselves—which is extended to their wives, with whom they are bonded as “one flesh.”

Although translated in the NRSV as meaning “respect,” the word in Greek is a form of the verb, *phobeisthai*, which literally means “to fear.” Bauer’s *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* also includes the meaning, “(have) reverence, respect,” but this meaning is primarily in the context of revering God.¹⁵⁴ The only other biblical instance of *phobeisthai* indicating reverence to a human being is Lev 19:3 in the Septuagint, which instructs people to “revere” their fathers and mothers.¹⁵⁵ Because this verb’s

¹⁵² Lincoln, 384. See also Lev 19:18 “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but *you shall love your neighbor as yourself*: I am the LORD.” [emphasis added]

¹⁵³ Lincoln, 387. See also Eph 1:4; 3:17; 4:2, 15, 16; 5:2.

¹⁵⁴ See Lk 1:50; 18:2, 4; Acts 10:35; 1 Pet 2:17; Rev 14:7; 19:5.

¹⁵⁵ Bauer, s.v. “*phobeō*.”

meaning is so steeped in the idea of fear and reverence, the translation of “respect” does not fully capture what the verb would have connoted to its original audience. Lincoln agrees, asserting that in this context, it “certainly includes having respect, but is stronger than this, though not the fear of a slave.”¹⁵⁶ As one would expect, due to wives’ earlier instruction to submit, their “respect” for their husbands is more reverent than ordinary respect between two people of equal status. For Paul, it would have meant a sense of respectful deference as to someone of higher rank. The husband is, after all, “the head of the wife” (v. 23). Whether or not Paul sees the husband’s role (headship) as superior to the wife’s (submission to her husband’s headship), he does see the husband as the leader in the relationship.

A fuller picture of the cultural context of this letter will aid in understanding Paul’s reasons for describing the marriage roles the way he does. First of all, the letter comes from a distinctly male perspective. If Paul’s only motivation in writing this section were to compare the marriage relationship to the relationship between Christ and the church, it would not have mattered which partner represented Christ in the analogy.¹⁵⁷ As long as he had one spouse to represent the head and one to represent the body, the analogy would have worked. His perspective taught him, however, that the husband was clearly the head, or Christ, in the analogy. The fact that Paul is male is not the only reason for this perspective, though. In Paul’s time, part of society’s expectation for men was that they would be in control and not make themselves effeminate by subjugating themselves to those who should be their subordinates.¹⁵⁸ Even more importantly, a man’s successful leadership within the structure of the household was seen as indicative of his ability to ensure proper functioning of larger institutions (in this case, the

¹⁵⁶ Lincoln, 384–85.

¹⁵⁷ Lincoln, 392.

¹⁵⁸ Craig A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 141.

church).¹⁵⁹ Women, on the other hand, were already expected by society to be the subordinates.¹⁶⁰ Therefore, it only makes sense that the roles that Paul finds logical involve women's subordination to their husbands. This fact, combined with Paul's reading of the story of Adam and Eve (which, though not present in this particular passage, is of importance in our other texts), is more than enough to convince him that sexually differentiated roles are divinely ordained. What is more, socially acceptable rankings within the household would have benefited the church's image to outsiders.¹⁶¹ Paul would not have helped the church by overturning the norms of society; he would have brought upon it increased criticism and persecution.

In spite of the fact that the household code of Eph 5:21–33 maintains the social norms of the surrounding society, Paul's emphasis in this passage is on the husband's role, not the wife's. While the Colossians household code, in its original Greek, uses 9 words to describe the wife's role and 10 for the husband's, Ephesians spends a substantial 143 words on the husband's role and only 47 on the wife's.¹⁶² Even more striking is the repeated emphasis on the husband's self-giving love. As stated previously, a more typical instruction to husbands in Paul's time would be to "rule," not "love," their wives. In this passage, however, Paul states repeatedly that the husband should love his wife as himself, caring for her selflessly as Christ loved and died for the church. Even though the husband is still the one primarily in control in the marriage, he is not ruling with his own interests in mind. He bases his actions instead on the well-being of his body, which includes his wife's interests just as much as his own (if not more, if we take Christ's sacrificial death as an example).

¹⁵⁹ Osiek et al., 133–34.

¹⁶⁰ David L. Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter* (Chico, Cal.: Scholars Press, 1981), 1–2.

¹⁶¹ Osiek et al., 126.

¹⁶² Lincoln, 355.

Additionally, we need not assume that wives were completely passive just because they were submissive to their husbands. Early Christian women were able to make significant contributions to the church's ministry even within the limits of social expectations for womanly behavior. Their heavy involvement in the household churches of Paul's time is just one example.¹⁶³ In addition, the wife's position within the Roman household entailed simultaneously managing a variety of responsibilities—food, supplies, clothing, slaves, agriculture, and raising children. Wives did most of this work without the direct supervision of their husbands, who were sometimes gone for long periods of time and, when home, considered it improper to even know the details of how household affairs were being run. In this way, the wife had considerable freedom within the house, which was her sphere.¹⁶⁴

It must be admitted that despite Paul's dramatic redefinition of the husband's role, his depiction of marriage in Eph 5 is unequal by modern standards that associate positions of authority with higher status. As stated by Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, "[T]his Christological modification of the husband's patriarchal position and duties does not have the power, theologically, to transform the patriarchal pattern of the household code, even though this might have been the intention of the author. Instead, Ephesians christologically cements the inferior position of the wife in the marriage relationship."¹⁶⁵ The husband still holds the ultimate authority within the marriage, and it is the wife's role to respect that authority. However, the holding of authority does not necessarily connote superiority, as Schüssler-Fiorenza implies. In Paul's description, these two roles are mutually beneficial. A relationship consisting of two people would not function properly if both partners were authorities. Even if the wife holds a

¹⁶³ Osiek et al., 245.

¹⁶⁴ Osiek et al., 144–151.

¹⁶⁵ Schüssler-Fiorenza, 270.

subordinate position to her husband, her role is just as important and does not imply weakness. Comparing Paul's marriage roles to the division of labor in the armed forces, Stephen Clark asserts, "On the contrary, a strong subordinate strengthens the unit the head leads and makes the head more effective."¹⁶⁶ The husband and wife, who are now "one flesh," work together in their different roles for the betterment of this one flesh of which they are each a part.

Overall, Eph 5 indicates that Paul sees the husband's and wife's roles in marriage as different. However, these roles are both part of the mutual submission expected of all believers in v. 21. The wife's submission takes the form of acknowledgement of her husband's authority and the husband's submission is in considering his wife's needs to be just as important as his own. In this latter idea, Paul departs significantly from the customary role expectations of his day. As in his other letters, he justifies his teachings by means of the creation story. This time, though, the creation story promotes mutuality rather than difference. The husband and wife are "one flesh," and the husband must therefore love his wife, literally, "as himself."

Synthesis

Having surveyed several of the most important passages about women in the Pauline corpus, we can draw some conclusions about what Paul's perspective on the role of the woman in marriage. Paul's general statements can be divided into three categories: those about the equality of men and women, those about men and men's role, and those about women and women's role. Because Eph 5:21–33 provides the most detail about the marriage relationship, it will be our primary text in determining the Pauline view of marriage. 1 Cor 7 and Gal 3:28 give supporting information on the hints of equality found in Eph 5, while 1 Cor 11:2–16 and 1 Tim

¹⁶⁶ Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1980), 60.

2:8–15 provide helpful background information on the male/female distinction also present in Ephesians.

In spite of frequently describing men's and women's distinct roles, Paul writes at other times of equality between man and woman. In Gal 3:28, he declares that in Christ, "there is no longer male and female." Although the specific connotations of this verse are ambiguous, Paul's most probable meaning here was to remind his readers that earthly differences are irrelevant to baptism and inclusion in the community of faith; Christ accepts people from all walks of life. This spiritual equality of male and female assures women of their equal worth before God, even if they have a subordinate earthly role.¹⁶⁷ Paul makes a very similar point in 1 Cor 11:11–12, saying that "in the Lord" neither man nor woman is independent of the other, but both come from God. While the two have different roles, neither can function without the help of the other. A related concept appears in Eph 5:21, where Paul urges all believers to "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." This idea of subordinating one's own interests for the sake of other believers reflects the theme frequently present in Paul's letters that Christians' duty is to serve others before themselves, including both other believers and Christ himself.¹⁶⁸ This exhortation applies equally to both men and women.

Paul also writes of equality within the marriage relationship itself. The mutual submission of all believers in Eph 5:21 indicates that even with their different roles, the Christian husband is to put his own interests behind those of his wife, and the wife is to do likewise for her husband. 1 Cor 7:3–4 makes clear that the husband and wife do not have authority over their own bodies; that authority belongs to the other spouse. The husband surrenders his own body to

¹⁶⁷ This is not to say that woman's earthly role was viewed as any less valuable or important than man's. As discussed earlier, women's contribution to the household was an invaluable asset to men in the first century C.E.

¹⁶⁸ See Rom 14:19; 1 Cor 10:24; 12:25; 2 Cor 5:15; Gal 5:13; 6:10; Eph 4:1–3.

his wife just as she surrenders her body to him. Unlike men's and women's public worldly roles, which for Paul partially depend on the cultural expectation that women be subordinate, the roles for husband and wife within marriage are physically equal. In Eph 5:28–31, Paul explains why this is the case. By getting married, the husband and wife become “one flesh,” a concept which Paul borrows from Gen 2:24. No longer separate, the two are now one and the same body; it only makes sense that they no longer have exclusive authority over their own bodies. Paul also states in 1 Cor 7:33–34 that both husband and wife are concerned about “how to please” the other spouse. A marriage involves both the surrender of one's own interests and authority over oneself and the active pursuit of what is pleasing to one's spouse.

Almost all of Paul's statements about men reflect the idea of man holding a position of authority over woman. He describes the man as the head of the woman both in 1 Cor 11:3 and Eph 5:23. We can infer that this headship comes with some authority, since the woman is expected to submit to the man (to be discussed in more detail below). Similarly, in 1 Tim 2:13 Paul reasons that a woman should not teach or hold authority over a man. He defends his assertions about male headship by referring to the story of creation in Gen 2. He maintains that man and woman were created differently and that this creation reflects their different God-given roles. In 1 Cor 11:7–9, Paul explains that woman was created after man, from man, and “for the sake of man.” This is his basis for asserting in this passage that man is the “image and reflection of God” and woman “the reflection of man” (1 Cor 11:7).

While Paul does see a difference between man and woman, with man's headship as part of this distinction, these passages do not portray this headship as an oppressive form of leadership. On the contrary, Eph 5:25–33 and Col 3:19 emphasize a self-giving love on the part of the husband. The husband's headship, here made explicit in Eph 5:23, is to be acted out by

the husband's love for his wife. Husbands are called to the high standard of Christ himself; Paul exhorts them to love their wives "just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph 5:25). The husband is to love his wife as he loves himself and his very own body (Eph 5:28, 33). This love motivates him as he "nourishes and tenderly cares for [her], just as Christ does for the church" (Eph 5:29). While he is in a role of authority, he is to use his authority for the betterment of his wife, not in order to harm or oppress her.

The wife, for her part, should be submissive. In Col 3:18, Eph 5:22, and Eph 5:24, the wife is exhorted to submit to her husband. Although not written specifically regarding marriage, 1 Tim 2:11 gives a similar instruction: women are to learn with an attitude of quietness and submission. While these instances do not provide specific descriptions of what submission ought to entail, their pairing with the aforementioned descriptions of man's headship indicate that submission means obeying male authority and not challenging a man's leadership.¹⁶⁹ Eph 5:33 gives further credence to this interpretation with its instruction for wives to "respect" (lit. "fear" or "revere") their husbands. Paul's emphasis on women displaying quietness without usurping male authority in 1 Tim 2:11–12 is a further example.¹⁷⁰ For Paul, the man is the head, the leader, and the woman ought to allow him to act out his leadership without hindering him.

Paul justifies this subordinate role for women through his interpretations of Genesis. Woman is the "reflection of man" rather than the "image of God" (1 Cor 11:7). This difference, for Paul, is the result of the different means by which man and woman were created. Because

¹⁶⁹ The fact that 1 Tim 2 was written about men and women in public worship does not make its statements irrelevant to men's and women's roles in marriage. As is evidenced by Paul's repeated use of Genesis in his arguments, the husband's role is deeply connected to his being a man and the wife's role to her being a woman. Thus, the types of behaviors Paul encourages and discourages for men and women in general are further indicators of what his idea of husbands' and wives' roles ought to be.

¹⁷⁰ 1 Tim 2 does not necessarily imply that the women in Paul's audience *were* usurping male authority in the church, but the fact that Paul exhorts them to learn in silence (twice), to be submissive, and not to hold authority over a man makes it clear that he did not want women to be in roles that made men's authority less obvious.

woman was created from man (1 Cor 11:7) and for man's sake (1 Cor 11:8), she "ought to have a symbol of authority on her head" (1 Cor 11:9). In other words, God created woman for the purpose of helping man (Gen 2:18), and she should not overstep her bounds as helper by venturing into the man's role of leader of their partnership. An additional reason that Paul gives for woman's subordinate role is that in Genesis, "the woman was deceived" (1 Tim 2:14). Paul claims that the female propensity to be deceived, as evidenced by Eve in the Garden of Eden, makes it inappropriate for women to be teaching men. The man, who was not deceived, should fill the role of teacher and authority figure in the partnership (1 Tim 2:11-14).

In summary, these texts describe a marriage relationship grounded in three basic ideas: both spouses' equal status within the Christian community, the distinct role of the husband, and that of the wife. Paul is simultaneously upholding some form of equality between the spouses and a separation of roles. The specific descriptions of each role give an indication of how this equality comes into play. Based on his understanding of the creation story, Paul sees the husband's role as one of leadership. Yet, as exemplified by Christ's love for the church, this leadership should be guided by self-sacrificing love. The same principles motivate Paul to describe the wife's role as submitting to her husband's leadership. Nonetheless, within these roles is also the mutual submission idea from Eph 5:21; both spouses' behavior is guided by an attitude of service and love for the other with less focus on their own concerns. In effect, the wife's surrender of her own desires in submitting to her husband's decision-making has nearly the same result as the husband putting aside his own desires in order to best serve his wife. Both cases include a surrender of one's interests as well as an effort to further the well-being of the other spouse. In this way, both spouses receive what they need, but instead of receiving it by their own doing, they each receive it from the other.

The husband's and wife's roles are not identical, however. The specific item being surrendered in each case is different for the husband and the wife. The husband, to whom God has given the authority (headship) in the relationship, does not give up his right to make decisions. Instead, he surrenders his own desires and interests, committing himself to loving his wife so much that her needs take precedence over his own. Because his love is modeled after Christ's love for the church, in extreme cases it could require giving up his own life and livelihood for the sake of his wife. The authority that comes with his headship thus comes at the price of significant responsibility. The wife, on the other hand, in submitting to her husband, is surrendering her right to overrule her husband's decisions. In return she receives all that he can give her: his best efforts to ensure her well-being.

These two roles require different sacrifices on the part of each spouse, for which each spouse receives different benefits in return. Even so, neither role is any less necessary than the other. Even more importantly, if both spouses are performing their roles diligently—motivated by their love for God—then they both benefit from the love and support of each other. In this ideal marriage, no one's needs get left behind because each spouse is primarily concerned with the needs of the other.

Now that we have come to understand what Paul was describing in a Christian marriage, four significant problems arise that must be addressed when applying this model in modern society. First, how culturally dependent are Paul's prescriptions? Second, how can or should they be applied in today's society? Third, is this picture of marriage roles realistic for believers today? Finally, do these roles contradict the notion of gender equality?

Application

Because Paul's instructions were written in a culture significantly different from our own, not all of them are equally applicable today. Some practices that were perfectly normal in Paul's time and culture, such as women wearing head coverings in public, seem strange and unnatural to many people today. Other principles, however, are more compatible with modern culture. For instance, the general model that Paul gives for the marriage relationship, founded on the husband's self-sacrificing love and the wife's submission, is still valid today.

When Paul tells the women in Corinth that they must wear head coverings when praying to God, his arguments strongly suggest that such an instruction was natural and to be expected. He asks the Corinthians to judge the matter for themselves (1 Cor 11:13), which implies that he is confident that their common sense would agree with him. Furthermore, he likens head coverings to long hair on women, saying that "it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or shaved" (1 Cor 11:6). It thus appears that in Paul's culture, custom dictated that women always wear their hair long, while men always had short hair. To wear one's hair differently than was expected due to one's gender would incur shame and disgrace. Paul discouraged women from wearing their heads uncovered because he believed it to be equally shameful as leaving their hair short, and he did not want the women in his churches to act shamefully.

In contrast, people today are free to wear their hair whatever length they choose without being shamed at all. Although women typically have longer hair than men do, significant numbers of each sex wear their hair at the length traditionally ascribed to the other sex. In most modern cultures, hair length has nothing to do with respectability. If Paul asked today's readers to judge for themselves, very few would agree with him that "nature teaches [them] that if a man

wears long hair, it is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory” (1 Cor 11:14–15).

Within this same passage, however, Paul makes claims that do not depend on cultural setting. These claims have to do with the created difference between men and women. Unlike his instructions about head coverings, which are based on the customs of the surrounding culture, many of Paul’s statements in 1 Cor 11 are either general in focus or based on principles from Genesis (or both). Some examples are the following: “the husband is the head of his wife” (v. 3), man is “the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man” (v.7), “man was not made from woman, but woman from man” (v. 8), and “in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman” (v. 9). None of these statements requires support from societal norms; rather, with their use of “man” and “woman” in the singular, they are written in a way that suggests they are universally applicable.

The appropriate application of Paul’s instructions for women in 1 Tim 2:8–15 is less clear. Because he is addressing a specific situation in Ephesus, it could be that he is only restricting public teaching by these Ephesian women, not women everywhere. On the other hand, he does say “no woman” should teach and then further justifies his statements using the Genesis story (vv. 12–14). In this case, therefore, the correctness of Paul’s interpretation is especially significant. Elsewhere in his letters, Paul himself admits that some of the things he writes are his opinion, not revelation directly from God.¹⁷¹ If Paul has incorrectly interpreted Genesis, it calls into question the applicability of his restriction of women’s teaching. While a full discussion of women’s teaching in the church is beyond the scope of this paper,¹⁷² what

¹⁷¹ See 1 Cor 7:10, 40.

¹⁷² Admittedly, if Paul restricts women from teaching in the church, their equality in Christ may not extend at all past their equal salvation with men. One could argue that men and women would not truly be spiritual equals if they were limited by sex to certain roles within the church—roles that tend to have differing “spiritual” statuses

matters in this discussion is Paul's line of thought regarding men's and women's different roles, and his statements in 1 Tim 2 have enough parallels to the texts in 1 Cor 11 and Eph 5 that they are still relevant to this study of marriage.

The husband's and wife's roles that Paul describes in Eph 5:21–33 have a greater purpose than just fitting in with the surrounding culture. First of all, Ephesians does not appear to be written to a specific church to address particular problems with household relations. In addition, the instructions that Paul gives to husbands and wives are much more theoretical than they are practical, in the sense that the most specific (or direct) of his instructions are those to the wife to submit and to the husbands to love. Finally, Paul's apparent motivation for describing these roles as he does is much bigger than what people would find normal, as was the case in 1 Cor 11. Namely, he associates the husband's role with Christ's sacrificial death on the cross and the wife's with the church's role of submitting to Christ. Whereas he compares his instructions about head coverings to his audience's culturally-dependent notions of appropriate hairstyles, this description of marriage is compared to the timeless story of Christ's love, the same gospel to which Paul was so committed.¹⁷³

As stated above, Ephesians does not instruct husbands or wives in detail about *how* to love or submit to their spouses. Traditionally, the idea of wives' submission to their husbands' headship has been interpreted further to mean that the proper wife should be in charge of the

ascribed to them. However, one might also question how rooted these ascribed spiritual statuses are in an actual hierarchy of levels of spirituality. Perhaps church authority figures and teachers are no more spiritually advanced than anyone else in the church but simply perform different duties from other Christians. Yet, even if this is not the case and Paul does deem women inferior in the ability to advance spiritually and be church leaders, a lower role in the public domain of the church does not necessitate a lower role in the private household.

¹⁷³ See, for instance, Rom 1:16; 15:16–20; 1 Cor 1:17; 9:13, 16, 23; Gal 1:6–9; Eph 3:7; 6:19; Phil 1:12; Col 1:23; 1 Thess 2:4; 2 Tim 1:8–11; 2:8–9.

home whereas the husband should be the provider of the family.¹⁷⁴ However, Paul does not make any claims of that sort in Eph 5. His instructions deal more with attitudes than they do with specific behaviors. Even in the other passages we have examined, he does not designate any specific actions that belong to either the husband or the wife. In 1 Cor 7, both spouses have equal responsibilities. In both 1 Cor 11 and 1 Tim 2, Paul's instructions to women about proper appearances and submission concern public meetings of the church, not marriage relationships. Thus, while a gender-based division of labor within marriage is an understandable extension of Paul's thought—particularly due to the prevalence of such roles in his own culture—it is not what he is discussing in any of the passages mentioned above.

Rather, his main point appears to be about attitudes, about *how* each spouse goes about doing whatever it is he or she does. For the wife, the appropriate attitude is one of deference to her husband. She should respect his leadership and authority over her, putting her trust in him as the head in their relationship. This means that she lets her husband make the final decision in important matters, even if she disagrees with him. She does not intentionally act in a manner contrary to his wishes. Instead, she gives him the freedom to be the leader in the marriage, without sabotaging it by failing to respect his decisions.

The husband should act with an attitude of loving responsibility. He is the head; as such, he holds the extra responsibility of being the one to make the difficult decisions in the marriage. When he makes these decisions, he is to love his wife as himself (Eph 5:33) and tenderly care for her (Eph 5:29). Thus, he has the duty to not make decisions selfishly but to carefully take his wife's well-being into account. Since his role is compared to Christ's, his job is to act as much like Christ as he can, even when that means giving of himself for his wife's sake.

¹⁷⁴ See, for example, John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2002), 42–43.

Pastor-turned-marriage-counselor Emerson Eggerichs gives some helpful insights into how this relationship ought to work in modern times. He explains that of the two spouses, it is the husband's job to "chair the relationship" in that he takes the responsibility to protect his wife and even die for her. The wife, on the other hand, is "first in importance": she is held in the highest esteem and treasured by her husband. It is this love and esteem for her that motivates him to willingly give of himself on her behalf, and, in turn, her knowledge of his commitment inspires her to respect and submit to him.¹⁷⁵ The wife's submission is not only ideal, but also necessary for the husband to be able to perform his own duties in the relationship. Since he has the extra responsibility to make the right decisions for the couple as a whole, he needs the freedom (authority) to make those decisions unhindered.¹⁷⁶ The wife can allow her husband this freedom in good conscience because she knows that he will do his best to make the godly choice, the choice that is most beneficial to them both as a couple.¹⁷⁷

In practice, this means that when the husband and wife face a decision that affects them both (and the rest of the family, if there are children), the wife cannot force her opinion onto her husband. If, for example, she wants to change careers or have the family attend a different church, she should discuss it with her husband before initiating any changes. It is then his role and responsibility to prayerfully weigh the options, consulting his wife for input, and to choose what he thinks is best for the whole family. The husband needs not make every single decision in the household; his role means taking primary responsibility for the decisions made. As such, he has the right to have the final word on significant decisions. These decisions have the most far-reaching effects and require the most responsibility, so these are the ones that the husband

¹⁷⁵ Emerson Eggerichs, *Love and Respect* (Nashville: Integrity Press, 2004), 175.

¹⁷⁶ Eggerichs, 221.

¹⁷⁷ Eggerichs, 218.

decides. Some decisions and responsibilities are delegated to the wife. Wives in the first-century Roman Empire had many duties to perform which involved decisions that their husbands did not touch. Similarly, Christ's sacrifice for the church does not leave the church completely passive. The church has the responsibility to act rightly in the world in response to Christ's love. As for self-sacrificial love, it is rare in our culture for a situation to arise that requires dying on someone else's behalf. Yet, if it would come to that, the husband's role calls him to be willing to make the sacrifice. He should do everything he can to save and protect his wife if her life is threatened, such as by a gunman or a house-fire. His love should motivate him to act for her safety before his own.

While nothing guarantees that the husband will make the right decision—he is only human, after all—the wife cannot make her submission conditional upon her husband's decisions. Submission only when one's own desires are being upheld is not submission at all. Yet, this does not mean the husband has the right to abuse or selfishly manipulate his wife.¹⁷⁸ His responsibility is to consistently take both his wife's and his own best interests into account when making judgments. One cannot realistically expect him to make the right choice every time; however, if his efforts are sincere, then his wife should not fare any worse than he does.¹⁷⁹ In addition, Paul's mention of being "filled with the spirit" in Eph 5:18, directly preceding his discussion of husbands' and wives' roles, suggests that believers need not rely solely on their

¹⁷⁸ The role of the husband described by Paul is incompatible with that of an abusive husband for multiple reasons. In 1 Cor 7:11–16, Paul deems divorce acceptable in cases in which the spouses are of different religions and the unbelieving spouse seeks it. His letters give no indication that he would forbid divorce in cases of abuse or infidelity. The emphasis with which he describes the self-sacrificing aspects of each spouse's role in Eph 5 contradicts the blatant selfishness of abusive situations. Finally, Roman law in Paul's day forbade men from beating their wives [see Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Good News for Women: A Biblical Picture of Gender Equality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 179].

¹⁷⁹ This system does imply that the husband is naturally better suited or inclined to decision-making than the wife. This is doubtlessly clear in some cases, but in other marriages, the wife may be better at making decisions. In these cases, the husband should realize her superior ability and ask her for assistance in coming to a decision. The wife should not, however, press her opinion upon her husband. Her role of submission still holds, just as his role of seeking her best interest (in this case, her opinion) still holds.

own abilities in living out these roles. It is the spirit of God that enables them to perform the roles that God has designated for them.¹⁸⁰ As she submits to her husband's authority, then, the wife is also submitting as to the Lord (Eph 5:21), trusting God to work through her husband to make the best decisions. Her respect for him does not originate in his successful performance of his role; it is the appropriate response to the headship he was given by God.¹⁸¹

Moreover, the fact that both the husband's and the wife's roles in Eph 5 are difficult to carry out is no reason for them to be inapplicable today. Countless other exhortations of unrealistic actions can be found throughout the Bible, including many times in the Pauline corpus. For instance, Paul exhorts the Philippians, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others" (Phil 2:3–4). Like his exhortations to husbands and wives in Eph 5, these instructions provide a standard to which they can aspire. They will probably not free themselves fully of all selfishness, but they will progress much further striving toward a lofty goal than they would if Paul had not given them such a standard. Likewise, no human husband or wife will follow his or her role completely every single day, but these Pauline roles provide a model relationship toward which couples can strive.

Because the roles designated to husband and wife are indeed different, one might naturally question whether they are compatible with gender equality. Can men and women be equal if they are delegated different roles based on their sex? Rebecca Merrill Groothuis asserts that it is *possible* to be different in function but equal in being, but that the "gender hierarchy" of biblically defined gender roles does not fit this description. Groothuis views the role of wifely submission as "subordination" that is unjustly projected onto women based on men's false

¹⁸⁰ Keener, 158–59.

¹⁸¹ Witherington, 61.

pretenses of women's inferiority.¹⁸² Contrary to this view, however, our examination of Pauline texts has produced a different picture of wifely submission. The wife submits to her husband's leadership, but her husband gives up at least as much in his own sacrificial leading of the relationship. Although the husband has a higher "rank" in terms of making decisions, he also has a higher level of responsibility. In practice, neither spouse's role is any more "subordinate" than the other. The husband's sacrifice for his wife has the same subordinating effect on him that her submission to him has on her. Both spouses give themselves up for the other, thereby placing themselves below the other in "rank." Neither the husband's nor the wife's role could function without the other; together, self-sacrificing headship and submission form a mutually beneficial cycle. While the husband and wife may act in different ways,¹⁸³ their roles are equally necessary and equal in worth.

The husband's and wife's roles in a Pauline marriage are not equivalent, but they are equal in the sense that the demands required of each spouse involve the same amount of sacrifice. The wife gives up her right to make decisions against her husband's wishes. The husband gives up his right to make decisions that go against his wife's best interest. Both spouses' roles thus involve the sacrifice of giving up one's own interests in return for the caring and well-intentioned efforts of the other spouse. One might argue that the husband's sacrifice—because it requires him to be willing to sacrifice even his very life—is greater than the wife's

¹⁸² Groothuis, 42–43.

¹⁸³ Research in the social sciences has uncovered notable differences between men and women that support the type of generalization promoted in Paul's letters: that men tend to function better in leadership roles and women function better in supporting or nurturing roles. While one cannot generalize an entire sex into stereotypes, both Carol Gilligan and Simon Baron-Cohen have argued that—on average—men and women have different ways of thinking about the world. Men's minds tend to be more rule- and system-based and suited to less personal large-group interaction. Women's minds, on the other hand, are more attuned to the complex web of social factors, making them better suited to making personal connections with other people. Although these psychological differences do not apply to every man or every woman, they do add some scientific credence to a system of roles that does differentiate between the two sexes. See Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982); Simon Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference: The Truth About the Male and Female Brain* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).

sacrifice of submitting to his authority. Indeed, the act of giving up one's life is the greatest sacrifice one can make for another person. However, most husbands are never put in a situation that requires such a sacrifice; even if a husband were, this act of sacrifice can only occur once. The wife, on the other hand, is being asked to daily give up her right to make the final decision on issues. This sacrifice of authority, while in itself smaller than giving up her life, is just as great when performed daily throughout her lifetime. Although the husband must be willing to give up his life for his wife at any moment, the wife is, in effect, giving up her own rights to her life at every moment.

The husband's role, making the decisions, is higher-ranking in terms of influence. It is, however, not superior to the wife's. The wife's willingness to trust her husband requires just as much effort as the husband's willingness to take responsibility for the major decisions in their relationship. Although it is tempting to assume that the husband's greater authority gives him a higher status, this need not be the case. The two roles can only function properly when reciprocated, and neither role is more important than the other. The husband and wife are equal in status because their relationship is based strongly on reciprocity. Furthermore, several of the texts we have examined have affirmed the equality of both men and women before God. Differences in outward appearance or role do not change men's and women's equal status in Christ (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 11:11). In addition, the husband and wife surrender their authority over their bodies equally to one another (1 Cor 7:3–4). The specific sacrifices being made in each spouse's role are extensions of this already existent mutuality in the marital relationship.

Conclusion

In the course of this examination, we have uncovered a viable model for modern marriages from significant texts within Paul's letters. Although written in a culture very

different from our own, Paul's differentiated roles for husbands and wives are still applicable and useful today. The husband, as the head in the relationship, takes on the responsibility of leadership in important decisions. He strives to make fair judgments with his wife's best interest at heart. The wife need not undermine her husband's authority in these decisions because she trusts that he is making them fairly and to the best of his ability, with God's help. She can freely submit to him in the understanding that he will not take advantage of her trust in him. As one flesh, both husband and wife promote the good of each other, both in turn receiving the benefits.

The wife's submission and the husband's self-giving headship are not the only option for a model of marital roles. Both spouses could submit to each other with no one having final say in decisions, or both spouses could vie for that authority when disagreements arise. The problem with both of these models, though, is that they leave husbands and wives to determine for themselves a solution every time a problem arises, trying to decide who should make the decision when each spouse would decide differently. The process of determining this solution could become another disagreement in itself. With Paul's model for marriage, both spouses understand what their roles should be and need not have the struggle to establish them. One might think that this would harm the wife, since she surrenders her right to decide to her husband. However, the fact that the husband knows he has the full responsibility of the decision should motivate him to be even more careful not to make the wrong decision. Both spouses know that—when performed properly—these roles are beneficial to both parties involved. Both the husband's and wife's interests are taken into account. Granted, human fallibility dictates that neither husband nor wife will always fulfill his or her role perfectly. Yet, human fallibility also dictates a similar lack of perfection in any model one might choose.

These texts from Paul's letters thus provide a model for marital roles that is both biblically based and valuable in today's society. Other approaches to the degree of cultural dependency in biblical texts would result in different interpretations, and this study merits further research. However, this paper has shown that gender-differentiated marriage roles can be advantageous for both men and women.

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