

**Women's Role  
in Church  
Leadership &  
in Marriage**

# Women's Role in Church Leadership & in Marriage

**Paul Marston**



**LIFESWAY**

Copyright © 2007 Paul Marston

The author asserts the moral right  
to be identified as author of this book.

Published by  
**LIFESWAY**  
143 Longmeanygate,  
Leyland, PR26 6TD, England.  
[www.lifesway.net](http://www.lifesway.net)  
email: [admin@lifesway.net](mailto:admin@lifesway.net)

First edition 2006 entitled *Women in Marriage and in  
Church Leadership*  
Second Impression with present title 2007

All rights reserved

A catalogue record for this book is available  
from the British Library

ISBN-13 978-0-9553742-7-2  
ISBN-10 0-9553742-7-8

Typeset in Times Roman 11pt  
Printed and bound in Great Britain

## Foreword

This book looks at the appropriate principles of interpretation as we approach New Testament teaching on the role of women in church leadership and (because this is connected) in marriage. It explores this teaching, and considers how it may apply today in family and in church life. This new impression with a changed title has very minimal clarifying changes from the first edition under the title *Women in Marriage and in Church Leadership*. The new title is thought to better reflect the main subject of the book which is about in church leadership and women's role in it. This cannot be dealt with separately from the marital role for women as portrayed in the New Testament, but unmarried women today may well be (or want to be) involved in some kind of church leadership, and this is also a book aimed at them.

## The Author

Dr Paul Marston's long interest in such subjects led to the books *The Biblical Family* (1980: Cornerstone, Illinois) and *God and the Family* (1984: Kingsway, Eastbourne) – and a millennium edition of the latter for National Marriage Week website 2000. His thesis for an M.A. in theology (2004) also indirectly concerned issues of marriage, considering the legitimacy of gay-partnerships. He has been a Lay Minister in the (Evangelical) Free Methodist Church UK for over 20 years, and a university lecturer. He has been involved in team-teaching on an ethics course at the Nazarene theological college in Manchester, and the UK Free Methodist church-based bible college. He married Janice in 1970, and has a son Justin and daughter Christel. His academic background includes a B.Sc.Econ, an M.Sc in the history and philosophy of science, an M.Sc in theoretical statistics, and an M.A. in holiness theology.

## Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>The Author</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Contents</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Part 1: The Issues, Scope and Background</b>	<b>9</b>
<i>1.1 The Issues</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>1.2 Author's Views</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>1.3 Scope of the Book</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>1.4 Some History</i>	<i>12</i>
<b>Part 2: On Interpreting Scripture</b>	<b>14</b>
<i>2.1 Understanding Scripture</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>2.2 The Nature of Interpretation</i>	<i>15</i>
Three stages to Biblical interpretation .....	15
<i>2.3 Some Key Principles of Interpreting</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>2.4 Arguments from Slavery</i>	<i>21</i>
The Basic Issue .....	21
The Church and Slaves .....	28
Conclusions.....	31
<b>Part 3: Jewish and Early Church Leadership</b>	<b>33</b>
<i>3.1 Leadership in Israel</i>	<i>33</i>
The Relevance.....	33
Judges.....	33
Prophets .....	34
Lawgiver .....	35
Elders .....	36
Priests and Levites .....	36
<i>3.2 Offices in the Early Church</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>hierēi</i> (priest).....	36
<i>prophētēs</i> (prophet).....	37

<i>episkopos</i> (overseer).....	39	1 Corinthians 14.....	104
presbyteros (elder) .....	40	1 Tim 2:12-15 .....	112
<i>diakonos</i> (= minister).....	50		
<i>apostolos</i> (= envoy, ambassador, messenger).....	54	<b>Part 7: Leadership Today</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>3.3 Decision Making in the Early Church</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>7.1 The Controversy Today</b>	<b>135</b>
Choosing Ministers .....	60	Introduction.....	135
The Jerusalem Council.....	62	Ministers .....	136
Gender Specific Language.....	64	Overseers .....	138
Paul and Decisions.....	65	Oversight in the Free Methodist Church.....	141
<i>The Role of episkopoi/presbuteroi</i> .....	66	So From What Would We Exclude Women? .....	142
<b>Part 4: The Jewish Context, Jesus and Women</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>4.1 Genesis Creation Narratives</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>Index</b>	<b>149</b>
<b>4.2 Hebrew History</b>	<b>72</b>		
<b>4.3 Jesus and Women</b>	<b>73</b>		
<b>Part 5: Men and Women in Marriage</b>	<b>77</b>		
<b>5.1 Paul's Teaching on Marriage and Headship</b>	<b>77</b>		
Headship .....	78		
Subjection .....	83		
Generalisations about Mars and Venus.....	86		
Questions to “egalitarians” and “complementarians” ..	88		
Hierarchical Marriage and Church Leadership.....	90		
<b>Part 6: Men and Women in Church Leadership</b>	<b>92</b>		
<b>6.1 Paul and Women in Practice</b>	<b>92</b>		
Lydia – a female “persuader” .....	92		
Nympha – a female “church-host” .....	93		
Priscilla – a female “teacher” .....	93		
Chloe – a female “informant” .....	94		
Women as Fellow Workers.....	94		
Phoebe – a female “minister” .....	95		
Junia – a female “apostle” .....	97		
Summary .....	97		
<b>6.2 Paul's Teaching on Women in the Church</b>	<b>98</b>		
1 Corinthians 11 .....	98		

# Part 1: The Issues, Scope and Background

## 1.1 The Issues

This book is about three associated issues:

1. The right principles of leadership in a Jesus-centred, New-Testament-based church.
2. The role that women should be able to play in this.
3. The proper male-female roles in marriage

It is written in an absolute conviction that, in social and ethical issues, Christians need not only to take the right attitude and approach, but to know biblically why they are right.

These issues have all been much written about, and there are various terms used for the differing opinions on these issues that exist within circles that may be generally termed “evangelical”. Terms used (with some broad definitions) include:

- **feminist** (advocacy of women’s rights because men and women are seen as “equal”; “radical feminism” rejects any differences in gender roles whatsoever).
- **egalitarian** (seeing men and women as equal in function)
- **complementarian** (seeing men and women as having roles that are complementary)
- **hierarchical** (seeing men as higher in a hierarchy of rule than women)
- **patriarchal** (seeing men as leading or ruling: but in marital context this can be “hard patriarchy” = domination, or “soft patriarchy” = having a casting vote in situations where unanimity cannot be achieved)
- **traditional** (effectively similar to “patriarchal” in meaning)

However, sometimes terms can mislead and can be an over-simplification. Wayne Grudem’s massive book (Grudem (2004)) for example, distinguishes Christians who are “egalitarians” from “complementarians”. On p.54 is a table in which “egalitarians” are proclaimed eg to have “children raised with too little discipline, little respect for authority” and “men become unmasculine, unattractive to women”. However, the equally compendious book Pierce & Groothuis (2004) notes that many egalitarians also believe in complementarity<sup>1</sup>, and most believe that masculine and feminine are distinct. This misrepresentation in Grudem is unhelpful, and the suggestion that having labelled people as “egalitarian” we should exclude them from church leadership – as Grudem suggests (p.52) is not a good way forward for the church of Christ. There are eminently spiritual leaders on both sides of these debates and some of the past giants of faith have been both “egalitarian” and “complementarian”.

A second point is that someone who takes an egalitarian view of church leadership may not always take a strictly egalitarian view of marriage. , and there is a wide ranging spectrum for each of the attitudes above.

Thirdly, in practice – at least in marriage – those with ostensibly different views may not behave much differently. It depends what they mean by the words and where they are on the spectrum.

Fourthly, those who take some kind of “male leadership” view of church leadership may differ radically on what exactly women *should* be allowed to do, and may make some strange decisions. Grudem (2004), offers us a kind of Christian rule book like the Jewish Talmud to cover the options, and concludes eg that women cannot teach a theology course in a Bible College but they can write the textbook adopted by the course tutor; they cannot preach on Sunday morning but they can write the commentary the male preacher relies on to ensure the orthodoxy of his sermon on the passage. If this is really what God intended then he must move in *very* mysterious ways.

<sup>1</sup> Its subtitle is “complementarity without hierarchy”.

## 1.2 Author's Views

If anything, the present author is an “ultra-soft patriarchalist” in regard to marriage and “egalitarian” in regard to present church leadership – but really I seek simply to be faithful to Scripture as reflecting the mind of Christ. I also recognise that in the “middle ground” (excluding both extremes of radical feminism and traditional patriarchalism) slightly divergent views may be held with conviction, integrity, and apparent biblical warrant.

My own Christian background was in the Brethren church, in one of the largest and most open assemblies in the UK with some wonderful people of God as leaders. In general, women were not allowed to speak in the “breaking of bread” meeting, and never became theologians or biblical scholars – though the church generated many male biblical scholars. Often, particularly feisty Christian women were packed off to the mission field where no one enquired much what they did, or they married Anglican vicars. But, sadly, the Brethren went into decline in the late 20thC in terms both of numbers and influence – and their biblical blind-spot on women's ministry may have been something to do with it.

My present views of the place of women in church and family are, then, not a result of my background – nor a result of reacting against it; they are simply a result of seeking to understand Scripture consistently. My evangelical theology is Wesleyan-Arminian by decision, not by birth, and my views on family, divorce, and women in the church had independently come to parallel very closely the positions in the Free Methodist handbook (or *Book of Discipline* as it is quaintly known) before I joined this church in 1980. As it happened, I also published books on the family *The Biblical Family* (USA) and *God and the Family* (UK) shortly after joining, which mirrored the FM position – although were in no way derived from it.

## 1.3 Scope of the Book

The book will look at the general issues of the role of women in the family and in the church, examined from a perspective of biblical understanding. In a short final section this will be applied

to my own church, the Free Methodist Church – though there may be parallels with many other groups so many of the comments are likely to have a general application.

## 1.4 Some History

Some “traditionalist” books today present the gender issue in the church as though it has arisen as a result of some kind of modern radical feminist movement. This is simply not true. Ruth Tucker, in ch 1 of Pierce & Groothuis (2004) shows how some women played important church roles even within the Catholic and Reformed traditions. In our more immediate heritage, the evangelical movement in the UK owes much to Susannah Wesley, whose pragmatic gospel-orientated Anglican Arminianism was essentially that adopted by her son John Wesley. Though his minister father, the Rev Samuel Wesley, put a stop to Susannah's preaching, John Wesley himself was prepared to accept that:

St Paul's ordinary rule was, “I permit not a woman to speak in the congregation.” Yet, in extraordinary cases, he made a few exceptions, at Corinth in particular.” [Letter to Mrs Crosby, 13.6.1771 – *Works* vol xii p.356]

Wesley thought the same was true in his own generation; he appointed Mrs Crosby and then Mary Bosanquet Fletcher, and eventually there were 41 women lay preachers. This was, of course, about *preaching* not about “administering the sacraments”; John Wesley himself never split from the Anglican church in which he always regarded himself as a clergyman, and only ‘ordained clergy’ could conduct communion or marry people. Wesleyan Methodist holiness church movements and sister groups, however, all developed his ideas:

The Free Methodists, Wesleyan Methodists and Church of the Nazarene all promoted equality for women. The Salvation Army admitted women to all ranks of leadership. Newly formed Pentecostal denominations of the early twentieth century continued this holiness practice...[Janette Hassey in Pierce & Groothuis (2004) ch 2. p. 42]

The Methodist holiness leader Phoebe Palmer (1807-1874) wrote *Promise of the Father* in 1859 to defend the call of women to

preach. Salvation army founder Catherine Booth (1829-1890) wrote the pamphlet *Female Ministry* in 1859 to defend Palmer against a “Scriptural” attack on women’s ministry from a local minister. The Free Methodist church founder, B T Roberts (1823–1893) was much affected by Palmer’s ministry, and in 1891 wrote *Ordaining Women*, a classic work (available now through the FM website<sup>2</sup>) which passionately argued that equally mistaken were those who used the bible to defend slavery and those who used it to oppose women’s ministry (and there were leading Reformed theologians at that time who argued both). All this was before there was any significant secular or religious “feminist” movement as we know it.

Women’s ministry is not some “politically-correct” or “radical feminist” twentieth or twenty-first century novelty. Rather, Janette Hassey’s summary shows how the evangelical world largely fell away from the vision of its 18-19thC founders and brightest lights as it began to discourage women preachers. Great early women preachers like Mary Bosanquet Fletcher, Phoebe Palmer, Catherine Booth, Jane Stuart Dunning (and there were hosts of others) were happily married women with supportive husbands. The enormous blessing God brought through them makes it the more amazing that the church is still hampered in places by anti-female ministry sentiments. As once said Phoebe Palmer (arguably the “mother” of holiness movements like the Free Methodist Church, the Nazarenes, and the Pentecostals):

I have not a slight apprehension that God has called me to stand before the people, and proclaim His truth...and so truly has He set His seal upon it...in the conversion of thousands of precious souls...that even Satan does not seem to question that my call is divine.

No one could claim that the ministries of Christians like Palmer (or anyone else, male or female) were without fault, but that God has mightily used such women seems beyond doubt. Yet, so often in my experience, churches know so little of their heritage.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.freemethodistchurch.org/PDF%20Files/Resources/Ordaining Women/Cover.pdf](http://www.freemethodistchurch.org/PDF%20Files/Resources/Ordaining%20Women/Cover.pdf). As Snyder (2006) p.72 points out Roberts had already written *The Right of the Women to Preach the Gospel* in 1872.

## Part 2: On Interpreting Scripture

### 2.1 Understanding Scripture

I am by conviction member of the evangelical “Free Methodist” church, but, like John Wesley, my sole ultimate authority is the Bible: a principle sometimes called “*sola scriptura*” = Scripture alone. This holds to the absolute inspiration of Scripture and its authority in all matters of faith and doctrine.

But does this mean that literally one needs *nothing but* the Bible in some kind of translation? Do we not need to “interpret” Scripture at all? Well, there *are* some who ask something like this:

The aim of good interpretation is simple: to get at the “plain meaning of the text.” ... But... then why interpret? Why not just read? Does not the plain meaning come simply from reading?<sup>3</sup>

This kind of approach may sound “spiritual” but actually is naïve, unbiblical, and impossible to apply consistently (whatever its advocates *say* they do). The following are the basic problems with this supposedly “plain meaning” approach:

1. Greek or Hebrew words cannot be considered simply one-to-one versions of English words. A translation *inevitably* interprets.
2. Language always communicates meaning within linguistic conventions and particular cultural context. A failure to explore these means failing to understand what is really being said.
3. Scripture relates to a dynamic development of revelation culminating in the life and teaching of Jesus the Messiah.

<sup>3</sup> The question as worded in Fee & Stuart (1993) p.14.

Particular passages fit into this framework, as eg Jesus himself showed in saying “but I say unto you...” in the gospels.

4. “Plain meaning” is never applied consistently. Just consider eg: Ex.31:14-15; Deut.22:11; Lev.25:44 Mt.5:27; Lk.22:19 Jn.15:1; Acts 15:29; 1 Cor.7:8; 1 Cor.11:5,14:29,14:34. There is *no* individual or group today applying *all* these in their apparent “plain meaning”.

We have all, of course, seen some wildly improbably “interpretations” forced onto passages by theologians, but to say interpretation can be done badly is not to say that it need not be done at all. Fee and Stuart (1993) rightly say:

The antidote to bad interpretation is not no interpretation, but good interpretation, based on common sense guidelines.(p.17).

Jesus himself showed the need for “interpretation”. On the Emmaus road, to two followers already doubtless familiar with the teachings of the Old Testament (OT):

Lk.24:<sup>27</sup>...beginning from Moses and all the prophets he explained to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself .

This actually gives us some hints for basic principles to use.

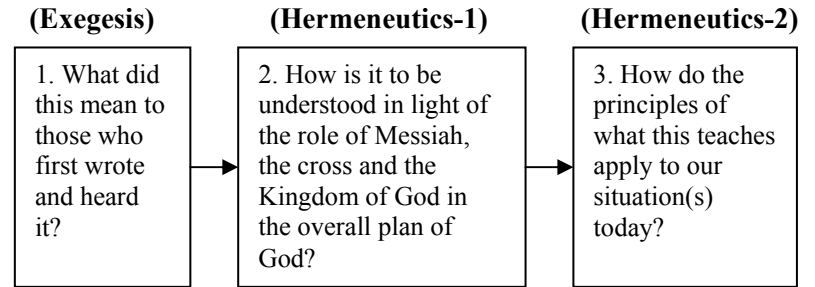
## 2.2 The Nature of Interpretation

What did the passage mean to those to whom it was addressed in the original context? This is the obvious starting point. Ex 21:24 has a principle of *lex talionis*, an “eye for an eye”, which in its original context *limited* the permissible amount of retribution. Jesus, in Mt 5:38, placed this into the context of the Old and New Covenant, and the unfolding Messianic plan that meant new principles operated with his coming. Recognising this, we then need to ask what this means *for us today*: would we *literally* offer the other cheek if assaulted, and is this *only* about cheeks?

### Three stages to Biblical interpretation

Effectively we can identify a threefold process in understanding

any biblical passage<sup>4</sup>: This is what I presented in my initial module in the FM Church Based Bible College programme (available in DVD form), and it is in line with the best evangelical books on the subject eg Fee and Stuart (1993), Klein et al (1993) and Osborne (1997).



The first task is “**exegesis**”: to determine what the actual words meant to those who heard them in their linguistic and cultural context. This may be the *primary* focus for an academic, but the Christian disciple is interested in it only as a step towards a wider understanding and application.

The second task is a “**hermeneutical**” one: to place this meaning within a wider “Christocentric” framework of the cross, resurrection and Kingdom of God – Jesus the Messiah being the central focus of God’s dealing with and plans for humanity. What Jesus himself does in Lk 24:27 relates to this:

Brown (1986) notes:

In Lk.24:27 *diermēneuō*, means to expound or to interpret, Beginning with the Pentateuch and the prophets, Jesus expounded the OT in terms of his own person and mission. (i p.581).

The word Luke uses (*diermēneuō*) relates to this word “hermeneutics”, and Jesus’ approach here was not primarily focused on exegesis (ie what it meant in the original context) but the more holistic issue of hermeneutics (ie what did it point to in terms of his own mission and Messiahship). Jesus himself takes a “Christocentric” approach: he shows them the OT Messianic focus



on “things concerning himself”. The second task, then, is a hermeneutical one: to place this meaning within a wider “Christocentric” or “Messiah-centred” framework of the cross, resurrection and Kingdom of God.

There *is* a progressive revelation in Scripture, but Jesus is not simply one more stage along an ongoing upwards road. God spoke in the OT in diverse ways by various prophets, but *in these last days he has spoken to us through a Son* (Heb.1:1-2). The Word of God *became flesh and dwelt amongst us*, and as the divine only begotten one *in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known*<sup>5</sup> (John.1:14-17). No post-Jesus prophet can move beyond the revelation of the Son who said things like *He that has seen me has seen the Father* (John.14:9). The teaching of Jesus must be the touchstone by which the Jesus-centred church understands proper hermeneutics of the OT, bearing also in mind the explanations of that teaching made by Jesus’ own chosen apostles.

The third task is another “**hermeneutical**” one: to reapply any generalities (particularly here ethical and spiritual generalities) that emerge from this to our own times and cultural situation. This may often involve distinguishing what is “**cultural**” in instructions, from what is “**transcultural**”. For example, when Jesus washed his disciples feet, the cultural element was that in that society this was an element of hospitality offered to guests and performed by slaves. If some modern European offered it to guests today he or she would be thought crazy. But the transcultural elements are that (i) the Christian leader is a servant of all (ii) we should care for each other’s needs (iii) there is nothing to look down on in manual and menial service.

## 2.3 Some Key Principles of Interpreting

### Principle 1: Implicit Meaning

As with all language, there is implicit communication. Suppose, eg, a modern dialogue went like this:

<sup>5</sup> The word used here is actually *exegesato*.

“Is it OK to go out with unbelievers?” asked the teenager. “No,” replied the Pastor, “it’s inadvisable.”

“Unbelievers”, in the context, means non-Christians, and this would need explaining eg in countries where it might mean “non-Muslims”. Furthermore, no one in our Western culture would take this reply “literally” to mean not to “go out” on a school coach trip, to play golf, or a fishing trip with a casual friend. The context implies “go out” = “enter a one-to-one affectionate boy-girl relationship which could turn into courtship”. It would be totally mistaken for someone to “take the reply literally”, or assume that “go” and “out” must be meant in their most general senses, though in some cultures explanatory notes would be needed. Simple translation of words does not always convey meaning, which is why we need exegesis to understand what the words meant *to those who used them in the context in which they were used*.

### Principle 2: Participant Rationality

In Mt 22:23 some Sadducees asked Jesus a test question which, to them, was presumably a rational one to ask. All that we know of Sadducees from other sources (even apart from the explanatory note in the gospel passage itself) indicates that they did not believe in an afterlife. It would have made no sense of *Pharisees* to ask this as a test question because, in this context, they shared the same beliefs as Jesus and Paul. Likewise when the Corinthians (cf 1 Corinthians) asked Paul specific questions about sex and marriage, these must have “made sense” to them in their culture.

### Principle 3: Care with Words

Jesus spoke Aramaic, and the gospels are in Greek. We are not looking at transcripts but conveyance (as evangelicals we assume this to have been Spirit-guided) of *meaning* through translation. Paul wrote in the common *koine* Greek of the first century. This means that:

- (1) Sometimes words he uses are not easily translatable eg the Greek word *gynē* can mean “wife” or “woman” and has no single English word to translate it.
- (2) Words sometimes change meaning over time – we cannot always assume that terms in classical Greek, or Greek in the

3rdC AD were identical in the first century *koine* Greek. Word studies are useful, but must be treated with care.

We should also avoid what Barr called “the root fallacy” – the assumption that if we know the root this tells us the meaning of a word. Often actual users of a word have long forgotten its root meaning. Understanding the root meanings of “chair” and “man” does not much help us to understand the role of Jane Berry when she was elected as “chairman of the police federation”.

#### **Principle 5: Biblical Consistency**

As evangelicals we will assume that there is a consistency between different Scriptural passages because the same God is behind them. A “Jesus-centred” exegesis, of course, recognises the power of “But I say unto you...” The OT sometimes laid down statutes embodying less than the ideal to which Jesus later called his disciples. Within the New Testament (NT), however, we will expect harmony without even this degree of progression – Jesus is God’s final word.

For example, it would be senseless to take Paul to say in the first part of a letter that women should wear their “authority” when they pray or prophesy publicly, but then later tell them to shut up entirely because they had no authority to lead church worship. Unless he changed his mind whilst writing the letter this would make no sense – so any interpretation that assumes this is what he meant must surely be mistaken.

#### **Principle 6: Elements for Exegesis**

There are several main elements needed for good exegesis:

**The “literary context”** is the determination of where a passage fits in the flow of thought of the writer – itself part of an overall structure. This can sometimes be done by what some call an “inductive” study – careful analysis of the themes and structures of argument.

**The “grammatical considerations”**, for most of us who are not really fluent in the Biblical languages, need to be taken on trust from commentaries by those who are. We have, of course, to remember that the Greek and Hebrew tense systems (so they tell

us!) differ from ours. Good critical commentaries will tell us what possible meanings linguistically a particular sentence can have.

**The “historical-cultural context”** concerns the whole background of the writer, target group, occasion and purpose of writing, and the general culture. Without this, often the bare language does not convey the writer’s real meaning. As already noted, there are often assumptions about the meanings of words that are related strongly to cultural context.

#### **Principle 7: Distinguishing “Descriptive” and “Normative”**

A key issue is to distinguish what Scripture merely describes, from what it takes as “normative” ie the way that things *should* be done. Fee and Stuart (1993) p.105) state their view of the issue:

The crucial hermeneutical question here is whether biblical narratives that describe what happened in the early church also function as norms intended to delineate what must happen in the ongoing church...Our assumption... is that unless Scripture explicitly tells us that we must do something, what is only narrated or described does not function in a normative way – unless it can be demonstrated on other grounds that the author intended it to function in this way.

Fee and Stuart (p.101) accept that “much of Acts is intended by Luke to be a model” but still arrive at three basic principles concerning what is meant to be “normative” ie is intended as a model to follow or an indication of what is the right way to behave:

- (1) What is normative in Acts relates to what any given narrative was intended to teach.
- (2) What is incidental to the author’s main intention can never become primary, though can support what is taught elsewhere.
- (3) To have normative value, historical precedent or narrative must be accompanied by indication that is it intended as a model.

They may overstate this, because virtually *all* God’s normative commands in Scripture are to particular situations and peoples, none are directly addressed to us. The task of hermeneutics is to

understand the principles and reapply them. The point, however, is important, and will apply to some issues of female leadership.

Now if eg Paul accepted *de facto* women like Priscilla and Phoebe in leadership, this must indicate that he thought it was OK. On the other hand, if in fact elders were usually married men, then it would be natural for Paul in 1 Tim 3:2 to couch any comments about elders in such terms – even if some (like himself?) were apparently widowers. This means it is not always easy to sort out those aspects that Paul simply assumes because that was how it then was, and those aspects he thought essential to keep to.

## 2.4 Arguments from Slavery

### The Basic Issue

The reader anxious to get onto the womens' issues will have to bear with the present excursus, but it deals with some really vital issues of hermeneutics and apostolic/Scriptural authority.<sup>6</sup> It seems plain to virtually all Christians that some of the laws in the OT (eg on divorce) were pragmatic restrictions on sin-prone people rather than true indications of the heart of God. In this sense there was a “progressive revelation” up to the coming of the Messiah, and we need to take a “Jesus-centred” view of theology. But has God really given us his “final word” on ethics and spiritual issues in Jesus – even if the principles Jesus gave need reapplication in different cultures and contexts? Or has, rather, the progressive revelation of new ethical principles continued beyond Jesus even until now?

Some do, indeed, argue that the “progression” has continued, and often launch such an argument from the issue of slavery. Today we regard slavery *as an institution* as *inherently* wrong and a violation of human rights. Some Christians claim that the Bible, *even in the NT*, regulates slavery but effectively condones it. They then conclude that if we now have a different view of the morality

<sup>6</sup> Though you can skim through to part 3 if the invalidity of the “slavery” analogy is obvious to you already.

of slavery to that of Jesus and Paul, surely the same may be true of the supposed subordination of women?

This kind of argument appears in three ways. Firstly, it comes as part of a detailed argument from non-evangelicals like Giles (2004). Secondly, it comes eg in Webb's hermeneutic (in both Webb (2004) and Pierce & Groothuis (2004)) which, although ostensibly evangelical and accepting that God spoke finally in the NT, sees correction to biblical (*including NT*) ethical ideas and principles from science etc.<sup>7</sup> Thirdly, it comes in less thought-through “asides” eg in Towner (1994) p.74 on 1 Timothy, or in rather throwaway comments made by general Christian writers in defending apparent differences in our present practices from those in the NT.

But we need to look more carefully at this whole approach. Let us first distinguish three very different versions of the thought:

#### Argument (1)

In the biblical days slavery was an accepted institution, and both Jesus and Paul condone it. We should therefore not disallow it today because we must “obey Scripture.”

#### Argument (2)

In the first century slavery was an accepted institution, and both Jesus and Paul condone it. Now, of course, we recognise that it is incompatible with the Christian message, and so Christians rightly oppose it. If we can recognise this for slavery, then surely we can also recognize that we are now more enlightened eg for women's-ministry or gay-relationships or casual-sex?

#### Argument (3)

In the first century slavery was an accepted institution, and there was no realistic prospect of abolishing it. Neither Jesus nor Paul argue for its general abolition because this was not a viable option. Paul's instructions to masters, however, are to “forebear threatening” and to treat a runaway slave as though he were Paul himself. These instructions, if followed, are actually

<sup>7</sup> Jewett (1976) is fairly similar. Both rely for scientific history on the hopelessly factually inaccurate antireligious propaganda book by A D White - cited as 1955 by Jewett and 1960 by Webb but actually dating from 1896.

incompatible with chattel slavery, so Christians will either release slaves or treat them more in a kind of “employer” relationship. In a later society where it became *practicable* to emancipate slaves in society, Christians rightly followed this obvious corollary of the Jesus-Pauline teaching.

Argument (1) makes no allowance for the fundamental hermeneutical principle that in *any* Scriptural teaching there may be both cultural and transcultural elements. Any serious study of the NT reveals that this was always the apostolic intention. It does not, moreover, look carefully at what Paul actually says about masters and slaves.

Argument (2) implies that we today know better on a moral issue than the incarnate Son of God and his appointed apostles. There would be two major problems with this: (i) it would leave us wondering how many other moral or spiritual issues Jesus got wrong (ii) it would leave us without knowing *how* to decide moral issues unless there be some modern guru greater than Jesus (perhaps Kevin Giles or Paul Jewett?) to tell us. It seems surprising that *anyone* calling themselves a Christ-ian could imagine that God incarnate could make such mistakes, what is *really* astonishing is that some evangelicals seem either thoughtlessly or convolutedly to imply it. To say that they are inconsistent is not, of course, to denigrate their personal relationship with Christ, but this does not make it the less inconsistent.

So is Argument (3) plausible, or do we simply *have* to accept one of the others?<sup>8</sup> Jesus himself, of course, uses slave-master relationships as an example to illustrate teaching, but this no more implies any endorsement of the status quo than using farming illustrations implies a rejection of advanced agriculture or a story of a crooked steward (Luke 16) endorses embezzlement. He simply says nothing specific either way about the rights or wrongs of slavery. What is interesting, however, is that even in the OT Jeremiah 34:8-17 God denounces the people because: “You have not obeyed me in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother and

<sup>8</sup> Webb, in Pierce & Groothuis (2004) especially, effectively claims that the choice is just between (1) and (2).

every one to his neighbour.” Jesus, when asked “Who is my neighbour” made it pretty obvious that this term extended even to a natural enemy. Actually, at the very start of his ministry in Luke 4:18-19 Jesus cited a powerful Isaiah reference to setting free of captives and releasing the oppressed. Moreover his whole ideology is that the greatest is one who serves. As the Lord of all he washed his disciples’ feet – this is so radical it is breathtaking – and he makes it clear that this is the central principle in the Kingdom of Heaven. It makes it virtually impossible to see how any true disciple of Jesus could possibly defend the institution of chattel slavery in the way it operated eg in 19<sup>th</sup> century USA – even though there were Reformed theologians who did.

So what about Paul?

Galatians 3:<sup>27</sup> For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

1 Corinthians 7: <sup>21</sup>Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. <sup>22</sup> For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. <sup>23</sup>You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. <sup>24</sup>Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.

Ephesians 6: <sup>5</sup>Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; <sup>6</sup>not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, <sup>7</sup>with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, <sup>8</sup> knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. <sup>9</sup>And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

Colossians 3: <sup>22</sup>Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. <sup>23</sup>And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, <sup>24</sup> knowing that from the

Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

1 Timothy 6: <sup>1</sup>Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed. <sup>2</sup>And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved.

Titus 2: <sup>9</sup>Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, <sup>10</sup>not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

Philemon <sup>10</sup>I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains, <sup>11</sup>who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me. <sup>12</sup>I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart, <sup>13</sup>whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel. <sup>14</sup>But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary. <sup>15</sup>For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, <sup>16</sup>no longer as a slave but more than a slave--a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. <sup>17</sup>If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me. <sup>18</sup>But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account.

Now the Galatians principle is presented as a part of a present order not as a purely future hope, and it comes in a context of implying that making any separation *in the church now* on the basis of rank, race or gender, is contrary to the theology of the body of Christ. But, in itself, it might imply nothing about whether slavery is inherently immoral and should be abolished as an institution.

So what shall we make of Paul's specific instructions to slaves? Firstly, in 1 Cor 7 Paul urges people not to worry that they cannot be good Christians because of the situation in which they find themselves: if God called you to discipleship in some situation, serve him there. We note, of course, that he says "Of course if you

get the opportunity to be free then take it". He was, presumably, thinking about a way other than running away (with its risks of a likely dreadful fate in the Roman Empire). But there is no nonsense about "slaves by nature" here<sup>9</sup>, and freeing slaves (technically "manumission") was not uncommon in the Roman Empire. Rom 13 is not, of course, in its context a declaration that the government is always right, but that civil government as such is a divinely ordained function, and Christians are in general law-abiding citizens rather than closet anarchists. Moreover, Paul encourages slaves with the thought that a freeman is actually a slave to Christ, and a slave is Christ's freeman. Everything, to Paul, turns on the Lordship of Christ, and the Kingdom of God, and all relationships are transformed by kingdom values. Even a slave, then, has a freedom at the most important level. So do his words really "condone slavery as an institution"? No they don't. Paul says nothing to the effect that God has ordained slavery, nor that as an institution it is a "good thing". He is just advising slaves, who had little choice, to see their lot in life more positively. Likewise in Eph 6 and Col 2. Paul *could* have advised slaves either (i) to skulk, skive, and sulk as much as possible (ii) to run away and risk torture and execution (iii) to be upright and honest people, seeing what they had to do anyway in a positive light because doing it "as unto Christ" and knowing that whatever treatment their human masters gave them that Christ would reward their integrity of character. Paul advised (iii), and I have to say that in my present enlightened 21stC state (and teaching on a ethics course) I could not have done any better. It is nonsense to see this as "condoning slavery as an institution", he is simply advising slaves who had no choice. The pastoral epistles show a similar focus – the key Christian issue is what *kinds* of people are we?

But when we turn to Paul's advice to masters, we see what he really thinks of slavery. Eph 6: *you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.* How on earth could slavery survive if masters were to "forbear threatening"? The

<sup>9</sup> As eg Aristotle in *Politics* I.3-7 and in *Nicomachean Ethics* VII

whole institution was based on threats – no one *volunteered* to be a slave. Imagine the slave traders who took slaves to America, or the Southern Plantation slave owners trying to manage slaves but “forbear threatening”. It is absurd. Paul even goes on to remind masters that they have a master in heaven – perhaps hinting at Jesus’ parable in Matt 18 about the unforgiving servant. What Paul does throughout his so-called “household codes” is take all the existing social relationships but totally transform them with radical Kingdom values. “Husbands love your wives as Christ loves the church” is totally radical – it leaves no room for either domination or patronizing and in effect undermines “subordination” in any usual sense. For masters to forbear threatening (and even more receive a slave, as below, as though he were an apostle of Christ) so radicalises the whole idea that it undermines it.

When we turn to the letter to Philemon the unacceptability of slavery becomes even more obvious. Paul writes to Philemon, whom Onesimus presumably robbed, to take him back: *no longer as a slave but more than a slave--a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me.* How, in such a case, could Philemon beat, mistreat, or simply exploit Onesimus? If Paul could ask this in a situation of a wrongdoing slave, how could any “normal” slave be treated less than a brother? How could one be exploited, rather than treated in a way best in his or her interest and by consent rather than compulsion? Church tradition unsurprisingly says that Philemon set free or “manumitted” Onesimus who became a bishop. Knowing that Philemon was a Christian, and that Onesimus would be treated as a “brother” Paul sent him back. But supposing that Onesimus had escaped from the galleys or from work as a slave in a Roman mine – what would Paul have done? This is speculative, but one suspects that he would have applied Deut 23:15, which says explicitly: “You shall not give back to his master the slave who has escaped from his master to you.” As a Christian Jew he could hardly do less than he would have done as a Pharisee.

Any claim that Paul “condoned” slavery as an institution is simply not true. It may well be true to say that he did not imagine it would

be possible to abolish it in Roman society, and he can hardly be blamed for failing to foresee a time when “Christianity” became the dominant political force in society and had the *option* of abolishing slavery. But what he did was to offer advice to Christian slaves on how to maintain integrity and grow in Christ and character, and advice to Christian masters that effectively undermined slavery for Christians in any normal sense of the word.

## The Church and Slaves

There are scant references to slavery in the earliest Christian documents. Ignatius in his early first century letter to Polycarp repeats (more or less) Paul’s instructions to slaves, and urges masters to treat them well. He also adds, however, that slaves should not expect the church to use funds to purchase and free them, and that masters should not allow slaves to become “puffed up”. Tertullian (160-230AD)<sup>10</sup> sometimes uses slaves as examples (often portraying them in poor light) but says nothing about the institution as such. The early *Shepherd of Hermas* speaks of the duty to rescue souls in deprivation (should this include slaves?) and the fourth century *Apostolic Constitutions* enjoined purchasing slaves to “save souls” – presumably to convert them but it does not say if they were then manumitted.

Attributed by some to Gregory of Nyssa (c385AD) is this comment on the boast in Eccles 2:7 of having obtained slaves:

You condemn man who is free and autonomous to servitude, and you contradict God by perverting the natural law. Man, who was created as lord over the earth, you have put under the yoke of servitude as a transgressor and rebel against the divine precept.<sup>11</sup>

John Chrysostom around the same time, was more ambivalent. In some passages he speaks disparagingly about slaves, but in his Homily on Philemon he notes that slaves may be called brothers. His Homily 40 on 1 Corinthians links slavery to the fall but sees the coming of Jesus as putting an end to this. His congregation should not have slaves, or at most have one or two, and adds:

<sup>10</sup> Treatises on *Penance*, and *Marriage and Remarriage*.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.bhsu.edu/artssciences/asfaculty/dsalomon/nyssa/ecc1.html>

...when you have purchased them, and have taught them trades whereby to support themselves, let them go free.

Augustine is also ambivalent. Modern Augustinian websites note his encouragement to masters to show justice and kindness to slaves,<sup>12</sup> and he also rejects the Aristotelian notion that slavery is “natural”. However, his exaggerated view of God’s sovereignty (which also led him to advocate persecution of nonconformists) leads him to say:

The prime cause, then, of slavery is sin, which brings man under the dominion of his fellow,- that which does not happen save by the judgment of God, with whom is no unrighteousness, and who knows how to award fit punishments to every variety of offence

Living in an age when the emperor was “Christian”, Augustine (unlike Paul) could well have argued for general emancipation – but failed to do so.

Sadly his extreme theology had great influence in the later church. Reformation doctrines were radically affected by Augustine, and even up until the 19<sup>th</sup> century Reformed theologians like R L Dabney, J H Thornwell and Charles Hodge argued for the legitimacy of slavery.

It is, fairly consistently, those evangelical Christians who veered most from the Reformed tradition who stood out first against slavery. One of the most “Arminian” of Anglican Puritans, Richard Baxter, in 1665, criticized those who:

...catch up poor Negroes...and...make them slaves and sell them...[This is] one of the worst kinds of thefts in the world...such persons are to be taken as the common enemies of mankind. (Baxter: *Directory*).

During Reformation times, however, it was the Anabaptists who stood out against exaggerated ideas of God’s sovereignty, and the religious persecution by state churches usually associated with such ideas. No surprise, then, that in 1683 the first religious group

<sup>12</sup> <http://www3.villanova.edu/mission/p&j/1992.htm>

in the U.S. to raise objections to slavery were Mennonites, a Christian group that descended from the Anabaptists. Thus:

This growing Mennonite element is credited with American history's first public protest against slavery and was very influential in the later Quaker antislavery position. [Melton (1991) vol i p.53]

In 1688 a pamphlet was printed in Pennsylvania which said:

Now, tho' they are black, we cannot conceive there is more liberty to have them slaves, as it is to have other white ones...And those who steal or rob men, and those who buy or purchase them, are they not all alike?<sup>13</sup>

Initially Quakers had held slaves, the initial impetus for the anti-slavery movement came from continental Mennonites.

In 1736 a Quaker, Benjamin Lay, produced a pamphlet calling slavery:

a hellish practice... the greatest sin in the world. [(Davis (1966) p.291]

John Wesley in 1774 wrote vehemently against slavery. He reported its decline “after Christianity prevailed”, until, from around the 8<sup>th</sup> century, he said it was “nearly extinct till the commencement of the sixteenth century”. Its western revival, he said, started with the Portuguese in 1508 importing Negroes to the New World. His analysis is devastating, complete, and condemns the slave trade, owning, and inheriting slaves. Wesley proclaimed that “liberty is the right of every human creature”, and any involvement in slavery is against the revelation of God. Wesley adds to those who do not renounce it: “It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in that Day than for you”. Wesley was also forthright in denouncing the hypocrisy of Americans who, whilst making bold speeches for independence and freedom, oppressed slaves in their own land. This vehement position was compromised somewhat by mainstream American Methodism<sup>14</sup> by the time of the civil war, but the Free Methodists, who split off in

<sup>13</sup> "Mennonites of Macon County" at: <http://www.macontel.com/special/menn97>

<sup>14</sup> Snyder (2006) p.368, however, notes that figures like William Hosner within the Methodists were campaigned vigorously against slavery.

1860, were as adamant against slavery as our founder John Wesley.

## Conclusions

Free Methodism is in the Wesleyan-Arminian holiness tradition, and this certainly includes the Cappodocians and Anabaptists<sup>15</sup>, as well as Wesley, the Methodists and our immediate founder B T Roberts.<sup>16</sup> Unlike some theological traditions, we have *never* ever accepted the spurious arguments that Scripture *seen through the NT* supports the institution of slavery. Emancipation, no less than social action and the use of women in ministry, has been central in our understanding of Jesus-based Kingdom Values. But in none of these issues does our tradition involve the arrogant view that we are now more moral than Jesus and Paul, or that they somehow supported the institutions of slavery, oppression, or repression of women but now we know better. We may reapply their discernable principles in different cultural contexts and political realities, but this is not at all the same thing. God has, in these last days, spoken finally to us through a Son. This does not mean that we believe the earthly Jesus was omniscient, but it does mean that he did not make mistakes on spiritual or moral issues.

It seems to me that this is lost sight of by those who, like William J Webb, speak of the supposed slavery analogy and (in his case) a “redemptive movement hermeneutic”.<sup>17</sup> Webb’s supposed examples where science has shown biblical error are all simply factually mistaken<sup>18</sup>, and the slavery analogy is misguided. He has produced no example of the approach *moving beyond the New Testament* that carries any conviction. There was, of course, redemptive movement between Old and New Testaments, and OT

---

<sup>15</sup> I actually made this point as a delegate to the FM General Conference in Seattle in 1989, and it was well accepted by the Conference.

<sup>16</sup> Cf Snyder (2006) p.35-36 regarding B T Roberts’ longtime abolitionism in regard to slavery.

<sup>17</sup> In Webb (2004) and in Pierce & Groothuis (2004). I concur with some of the criticisms made of Webb’s hermeneutic in Grudem (2004) Append 5.

<sup>18</sup> I have, of course, taught degree-level history of science for some years; details of Webb’s mistakes are given in my *Gay-Partnerships and the Jesus-Centred Church*. In note 7 above I noted his reliance on a notoriously inaccurate nineteenth century anti-religious source book on such issues.

laws did not contain God’s final mind. But, although Webb himself asserts the final nature of the revelation in Christ<sup>19</sup>, his hermeneutic undermines it. *All* sensible hermeneutic involves understanding the transcultural principles inherent in particular biblical teaching, but this is not the same thing as going beyond the underlying ethics inherent in the minds of Jesus and his chosen apostles. We do not know better than the apostle Paul or the incarnate Son of God. Nothing in the present work will assume otherwise, whether on the issues of slavery, of women in the church, or any other issue.

---

<sup>19</sup> Pierce & Groothuis (2004) p.395. Nothing said in this present work should be taken, however, to indicate any doubt that either eg Wayne Grudem or William Webb are other than committed evangelical Christians.



## Part 3: Jewish and Early Church Leadership

### 3.1 Leadership in Israel

#### The Relevance

Before we can explore how women fit into church leadership, we need to understand the general principles of leadership in the early church. This, in turn relies on various underlying Jewish concepts. We need, therefore, to first consider Jewish terms and roles in leadership, and then the Christian ones that built on them.

#### Judges

In Exodus 18 we find Moses acting as a judge:

<sup>15</sup>And Moses said to his father-in-law, “Because the people come to me to inquire of God. <sup>16</sup>When they have a difficulty, they come to me, and I judge between one and another; and I make known the statutes of God and His laws.”

His father-in-law rightly pointed out that Moses simply could not cope, and suggested:

<sup>21</sup>...you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. <sup>22</sup>And let them judge the people at all times.

Moses acted as the highest court of appeal. This is, of course, the equivalent of our judicial system today, but at that time the civil and the religious were unified. There is no indication in Scripture that this setting up of a system (even though not directly instructed to do so by God) is somehow “un-spiritual” or misguided. A church which sets up (say) a system to relieve the pastor of some

of the pastoral work, is actually not going even beyond Moses – never mind the NT age in which God’s Spirit is poured out on all flesh.

In a later period God raised up judges, and it is noteworthy that Judges 4:4 says:

<sup>4</sup> Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time.

The extraordinary nature of this statement can easily be missed. Deborah was a *married woman* and a mother (5:7). According to the kind of patriarchal model too common amongst Christians she should have been subordinate to her husband, looking after the chores at home. Yet Scripture does not even make much of a fuss about it, just casually noting “Deborah the prophetess was chief judge at this time...” As such her authority far exceeded that of any prophet - she was not an absolute ruler but had extraordinary authority. It was Deborah who declared war on the Canaanite King Jabin and ordered the army chief of staff Barak to mount the campaign. Such was her authority and force that Barak said he would go only if she came with him. This is as though Frances Drake refused to engage the Armada unless Queen Elizabeth went with him... Deborah’s authority far exceeded anything remotely given to any church officers in the NT. Unlike the male judge Samson, who had feet of clay, no criticism is recorded of Deborah.

#### Prophets

In the OT the prophet forth-told the word of God to the people, yet generally had no institutional authority and (as with Jeremiah) different prophets could speak and the king would decide to whom to listen.

From the beginnings of the nation we find Miriam being described as a “prophetess” (Ex 15:20) and leading public worship in a context where men would certainly have heard it.

We noted already under “judges” that Deborah, a married woman and mother, was a prophetess given great authority in the days of the judges. Clearly some “prophets” were greatly regarded, women amongst them.

So let us also look at the reaction of the good young king Josiah when the book of Law was found and he was in turmoil over what to do. He called his cabinet (his leading priest, lawyer and civil servant) and told them to go and get the word of the Lord for him because “great is the wrath of the LORD that is aroused against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book.” This was a national religious crisis and a turning point in the nation’s history – to whom should they turn in this hour of crisis? Both 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles carry this account:

2 Ki 22: <sup>14</sup>So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe.

Another married woman – not quietly saying “yes my Lord” to a husband at home as she did the chores. Her reply, moreover, was a detailed mixture of some mitigation for Josiah but doom for the people. She was not a “sunshine prophet”.

Two other prophets at least were female. In Is 8:3 we find the wife of Isaiah called a “prophetess”, and in Nehemiah 6:14 we find mention of a prophetess Noadiah, though there is no further detail.

What all this means is that female prophets were *not* particularly exceptional in Israel. At least two, Deborah and Huldah, played leading roles. Sometimes it is said that “God uses women in such leadership only if there are no men available” – but Huldah was a contemporary of Jeremiah and Zedekiah.

### Lawgiver

Moses was, of course, a prophet (Acts 3:22), but was also the Lawgiver – and the Torah is often referred to as the “Law of Moses”. He had an apparent autocratic authority from God. When the sons of Korah mounted a rebellion in Numbers 16 God did not suggest a democratic vote – he showed directly what authority Moses had. It is, unfortunately, the case that some modern pastors seem almost to have a “Moses model” in mind. They go up the mountain, get the revelation from God, and when they come down anyone has to either follow or (metaphorically fortunately!) be cast into the pit. But Moses was virtually unique in this respect in the OT, and in a New Covenant when God has “poured out his

spirit on all flesh” it is a totally inappropriate model, as we shall see. NT leadership is not autocratic.

### Elders

In Exodus there is continual reference to the “elders of Israel”. In the context it seems to be a general term “the senior people”. Characteristically the language is male, and the preponderance or perhaps even all those involved probably were male. Later (in Ex 24 and Num 11) seventy of them were selected for a special role. In general, however, the elders seem to lead and speak for the people throughout the OT. How far they were an appointed specific body, and how far an informal group is hard to say, but generally probably the latter.

### Priests and Levites

The priests were specifically appointed to serve in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple, and to perform sacrifice. The Levites were to lead worship and act for social concern on behalf of the people. Both were exclusively male.

## 3.2 Offices in the Early Church

### *hierei* (priest)

In the Old Covenant the priests acted specifically in regard to the sacrifices in the Temple. Generally, like Zechariah in Lk 1, they were married, and looked back to Aaron as their forebear. The “chief priests” were simply the informal leaders amongst them, and the “high priest” had a particular function on the Day of Atonement to mediate for the people.

In the New Covenant Jesus is our sole and only High Priest, the Temple curtain to the inner sanctum being split from top to bottom as he died. The “Temple” of God is now no longer a stone building but the body of God’s people, and there is, of course, in the New Covenant no specific human office of “priest”.

1 Pet 2: <sup>5</sup>you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... <sup>9</sup>But you are a chosen

generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Rev 1: <sup>6</sup>...and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father. (also Rev 5:10)

The priestly role was to act in mediation between God and the people, but in the New Covenant we Christians all exercise the general priestly function to each other because God has poured out his spirit on all of us. This does *not* mean that we each act as our own priests, it means that each of us can mediate Christ and act as a priest to others. Whatever be the function of modern “ministers”, the church had no authority to restrict the priestly function to particular individuals as “priests”. It is therefore misleading to use this term for individuals in a New Covenant context.

### ***prophētēs* (prophet)**

This is used 144 times in the NT, mostly referring to the OT prophets. In the pre-Pentecost period, John the Baptist is called a prophet and so is Jesus. In one of only two feminine forms of the word, Anna is described (Luke 2:35) as a “prophetess”.<sup>20</sup>

Sometimes prophets could foretell the future:

Acts 21: <sup>10</sup>And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea...

As in the OT, however, the role of a prophet is not simply prediction. For example, we also find that the first missionary journey from Antioch arose because the Holy Spirit directed a group of prophets and teachers:

Acts 13: <sup>1</sup>Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

Prophets could also exhort and strengthen:

Acts 15: <sup>32</sup>Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words.

<sup>20</sup> The only other use of the feminine form is in Rev 2:20.

Paul sees prophecy and prophets as gifts of God to the church (1 Cor 12:10,28), the purpose of which in public worship is to produce convincing and convicting (1 Cor 14:24) and all for edification and upbuilding.

Colin Brown (in Brown (1976) v.5 pp.74f) notes that the specific female form of “prophet” is not used of anyone in the church. We do, however, find:

Acts 21: <sup>8</sup>On the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. <sup>9</sup>Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied. <sup>10</sup>And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

It seems a bit tenuous to make much of Brown's distinction of noun and verb forms. Plainly no Jew would have any problem with calling Anna a “prophetess”, and, since the prophesy of the New Covenant specifically said that daughters would prophesy, it would be weird to allow this in the Old Covenant and not in the New. The context of 1 Corinthians 12 makes it clear that women were praying and prophesying in leading public worship, and then we read:

1 Cor 14: <sup>29</sup>Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. ...<sup>32</sup>And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets

Those who prophesied were, presumably, those with the gift of prophecy – ie prophets. Though the term used is masculine, we find that throughout the NT there is no “political correctness” in the language and very frequently male nouns are not really indicative of uniform gender. Plainly Paul expected women and men to have the gift of prophecy. There is no indication that the call to a woman to prophesy was (to use the phrase of John Wesley) some kind of “extraordinary call”.

Sometimes the phrase “apostles and prophets” appears:

Ephesians 2: <sup>20</sup>having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,

Eph 3: <sup>5</sup>which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets:

Eph 4: <sup>11</sup>And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.

Does this indicate some special class apart that may, perhaps, be male only? It seems doubtful that the term is this precise – and there is a danger of the hermeneutical mistake called “technification”. As we shall see, the term “apostle” itself is not used like this either.

Prophets, then, were used in the church by God to foretell the future, to direct by his Spirit, to encourage, convict, edify, encourage and build up. But they plainly did not have automatic authority. Paul says: “Let two or three prophets speak, and *let the others judge.*” This word means to discern or judge, with a sense of cautious hesitation. Prophets can lead but they cannot direct.

### ***episkopos* (overseer)**

Coenen in Brown (1976) 1.p.18 gives various different words in this word-group:

#### ***episkeptomai* (=view, inspect, visit)**

The primary meaning of this is to “visit” – but normally with a regard to some positive helping or caring action: Mt 25:36,43; Lk 1:68, 78; 7:16; Acts 7:23; Acts 15:14; 15:36; Heb 2:6 and Jas 1:27. The only other reference is:

Acts 6:3 Therefore, brethren, **seek out** from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;

The “visiting” here implies selection.

#### ***episkopos* (=overseer, guardian, bishop)**

A noun form is used in Lk 19:44 and 1 Pet 2:12 to mean “visitation” as in the verbal form above. It is also used as a general word for office in Acts 1:20: Judas was an “apostle” and a “minister”, and Peter quotes the Psalms “His office (bishoprick) let another take.” The only other such use of the term for an office is in 1 Tim 3:1 – which we will consider later.

Of a person, the term *episkopos* is used once in 1 Pet 2:25 of Jesus himself as “the *episkopos* and shepherd of your souls”. The other four NT references are to human officers. The *episkopoi* in this context are clearly the same group as the *presbyteroi* (cf below) as may be seen here:

Acts 20: <sup>17</sup>From Miletus Paul sent to Ephesus for the ***presbyterous*** of the church... Acts 20: <sup>28</sup>Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you ***episkopoi***, <sup>29</sup>to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Titus 1: <sup>5</sup>For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint ***presbyterous*** in every city as I commanded you- <sup>6</sup>if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. <sup>7</sup>For an ***episkopon*** must be blameless...

The idea that a “bishop” (*episkopos*) was some kind of ruler or even a leader or *primus-inter-pares* (first amongst equals) amongst the “elders” (*presbyteroi*) is a later invention of the church. In the NT the terms simply indicate different aspects of the same group. The *episkopos* term emphasizes the caring function. It is actually difficult to use any single term for it in English because they all carry too much misleading baggage. The term “bishop” is now totally misleading as it means a senior figure in a hierarchy. The term “overseer” sounds like an authority figure eg over slaves or wage-slaves in a factory - a connotation totally opposite to *episkopos*. The term “pastor” is possible – with connotations of “shepherding”, but this is not really its fundamental meaning. The “visitation” going on eg in visiting needy widows or those in prison is not necessarily being done by “authority” figures – the accent is on the practical caring actions.

### ***presbyteros* (elder)**

Again Coenen in Brown (1976) vol.1 p.192 gives different words:

#### ***presbeia* (=embassy, ambassador)**

#### ***presbeuō* (=be older, be an ambassador, rule)**

The verb is used in the NT only twice in parables (Lk 14:32; 19:14), the noun twice by Paul referring to himself (2 Cor 5:20; Eph 6:20). In all cases it can *only* mean “ambassador”.

**presbytēs (=old man),**

This is used three times. In Lk 1:18 and in Philm 9 (Paul referring to himself!) it means “old man”. The plural *presbytās* is used in Tit 2:2 – followed by the female form *presbitidas* in Tit 2:3.

**prohistemi (= be at the head of, rule, be concerned about)**

**kybernesis (administration)**

*Prohistemi* is only found seven times, always in Pauline letters. The first (cAD50-1) is in:

1 Thess 5: <sup>12</sup>And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labour among you, and are over you in the Lord (*prohistamenous hymōn en Kyriō*) and admonish you.

Brown (1976) says:

They help others to live rightly and therefore deserve especial esteem and love. The reference here seems to be to a group exercising leadership in the church. The present writer [Coenon] believes there were as yet no institutionalised or precisely differentiated offices known to Paul. He was influenced by the pattern of the charismatic community... this is confirmed by the list of gifts in Rom 12:8 where the *prohistamenos* is characterised by *spoudē* (zeal)

This last reference (c55-57AD) reads:

Rom 12: <sup>6</sup>Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; <sup>7</sup>or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; <sup>8</sup>he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads (*prohistamenos*), with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Coenon adds “All of these words are participles which suggest an activity rather than an office”. Most translations (except the NIV) reflect this: NKJV = leads; RSV = gives aid; NIV = govern; NAS

= leads; NEB = a leader. The noun *kybernesis* is used only once, in a similar context as a spiritual gift in 1 Cor 12:28.

In 1 Timothy we find *prohistemi* used thus:

1 Tim 3: <sup>4</sup>one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence <sup>5</sup>(for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)... <sup>12</sup>Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

1 Tim 5: <sup>17</sup>Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

It is interesting that in the household context the man is said to “rule” the children and household (presumably including any slaves), but *not* the wife. Later in the letter a stronger word is used when the young *wife* is called “despot of the household”:

1 Tim 5: <sup>14</sup>Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house (*oikodespotein*) give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully.

Moreover, a woman could, of course, be a “ruler” of her own household as we find in Acts 16:15 and by implication 1 Cor 1:11. Would Paul have believed that a *woman* who ruled her own household well was well fitted to rule in the household of God? We will return to this below, but should just note that:

- (i) Paul frequently uses non “politically correct” male gender language when women are clearly included.
- (ii) No one would deny that in that context the norm would be for males to exercise such leadership in the church, and he thinks in the norm.

The other two uses of *prohistemi* are in Tit 3:8,14, and are used metaphorically “rule over good works” = take trouble over doing them.

The word *prohistemi*=rule is not as strong as eg the word “despot” – and ironically the only despotism mentioned is that of the

young-wife over the household!<sup>21</sup> There is no concept of kingly authority as eg in *dynastēs* (Lk 1:52; Acts 8:27; 1 Tim 6:15). There is no concept of “lordship” as in *kurios* (eg Mt 18:27). Jesus himself presents very strongly the principle of what kind of authority will exist in his church:

Mt 23: <sup>8</sup>But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. <sup>9</sup>Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. <sup>10</sup>And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ.

Although Paul in 1 Cor 4:15 says that he is their “father” in a metaphorical sense of having led them to Christ, the Roman Catholic practice of using “father” as a general title is forbidden by Christ himself. Leadership in the church is a leadership of brothers and sisters by consent, even though Paul uses the household comparison. Some suggest that the term could be rendered “preside” rather than rule – though of course all English terms carry semantic fields and senses different from Greek ones.

### ***presbyteros* (=older, elder, presbyter)**

This word is common in the NT, and as it is a key term in church leadership we need to spend some time to establish its meaning.

Throughout the gospels and the early parts of Acts the term *presbyteroi* is used of Jews (often linked with “chief priests” or “scribes” (*grammateis*) or “first ones” (*archontas*)). This is probably not to be taken to mean specifically members of the “elder council” (*presbyterion*) – which term *is* used only in Lk 22:26 and Acts 22:5.<sup>22</sup> It does mean “older men”, but the connotation is also that they are exercising leadership.

Arguably, then, it can mean either “older man” or an “elder” in some sense implying authority or seniority. Now clearly the members of the *presbyterion* are to be identified as holding authority. But elsewhere the distinction may be less clear. The

<sup>21</sup> Before linguists get too indignant, we should of course note that used in a compound “*oikodespotein*” it could lose this force – but the root *is* despot.

<sup>22</sup> Also in 1 Tim 4:14 as we shall consider.

appropriate English translation has to be inferred from context, thus eg:

Acts 2: <sup>17</sup>...and your young men shall see visions, and your old men (*presbyteroi*) shall dream dreams:

Acts 4: <sup>8</sup>Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders (*presbyteroi*) of Israel...

In some ways it is logical enough to conclude that being linked with “rulers of the people” implies some authority, but in contrast to “young men” the same word simply implies advancing age. The problem is that in English we are effectively being forced to separate out the sense of the original word when any separation to the first century Jews was much more fuzzy.

The first use in a specifically church context is at Pentecost where, as already noted, Peter claims the OT promise of Joel 2:28 that in the New Covenant:

Acts 2:17 I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your *presbyteroi* shall dream dreams:

The age contrast does seem to put the emphasis on the age rather than any particular position – though as already noted it seems unlikely that this distinction was very specific in the minds of the hearers. There is a further point of interest concerning gender here. In the OT both men and women prophesied, and the whole point of the Peter/Joel promise is that in the New Covenant the Spirit is poured out on all the church so this is widespread. But, presumably, in Old Covenant times both men *and* women could “dream dreams” or “see visions”. So is Peter really intending “dreaming dreams” to be restricted to older *men* in the New Covenant? We should note that dreaming dreams is not really a different function from prophecy anyway. Consider the following:

Num 12: <sup>6</sup>Then He said, “Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream.

Deut 13: <sup>1</sup> “If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, <sup>2</sup> and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying,

‘Let us go after other gods’—which you have not known—‘and let us serve them,’<sup>3</sup> you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams...

1 Sam 26: <sup>15</sup>And Saul answered, “I am deeply distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me and does not answer me anymore, neither by prophets nor by dreams...

Jer 23: <sup>28</sup>The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream...<sup>32</sup>Behold, I am against those who prophesy false dreams,” says the LORD.

Dreams were simply part of a prophet’s function, and elder-women (presumably like Deborah and Huldah) were no less likely to dream than elder-men. So is, then, Peter really intending that in the New Covenant (when the Spirit is poured out onto *all* flesh) women will be more restricted than they were in the Old? Surely we must assume that although *presbyteroi* is masculine, as with so much of the apparently gender specific language in the New Testament, it was the intention of neither Joel nor Peter to restrict it to men.

The next church reference is in:

Acts 14: <sup>23</sup>So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

The word used here for “appoint” (*cheirotoneō*) is used only here and in 2 Cor 8:19, and it has a root implying a stretching out of hand (*cheiri*) or voting – ie it is a selection. There are two important questions here. First, how was the selection done? The “they” presumably refers to Paul and Barnabas, but we don’t know how they decided about whom to appoint as elders. Titus was *acclaimed amongst* the churches and *chosen from* the churches. Young’s literal translation notes the reflexive pronoun and hand stretching word in rendering this: “and having appointed to them by vote elders in every assembly.” The word certainly *could* imply a literal vote, though it could have been a consensus. It seems highly unlikely that Paul and Barnabas simply selected people without consultation.

There is, of course, no indication that “ordination” somehow marked off these people as a different class of people ie “ordained clergy” as against “lay people”. This would involve concepts and language of a later age. The appointment was local, and “ordination” did not somehow affect the make up of those elected in some permanent way (like, say, castration would do!)

Probably these elders at this time (c46-48AD) were Jews – and the model is similar to the Jewish one.

In Acts 15, as we will explore below, the key decision about the requirements on Gentiles is made by the “apostles and elders with the whole church” at Jerusalem.

Around 53AD Paul calls together the “elders” of the church at Ephesus and during the address says:

Acts 20: <sup>28</sup>Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you *episkopoi*, to shepherd (*poimainō*) the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

The word “shepherd” primarily means “feed” (cf Jude 12). Though it obviously implies a more general care, its primary focus is therefore care, *not* rulership. Thus Peter also says:

1 Peter 5: <sup>1</sup>The elders (*presbyterous*) who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: <sup>2</sup>Feed (*poimanatē*) the flock (*poimnion*) of God which is among you, serving as overseers (*episopountes*) not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; <sup>3</sup>nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; <sup>4</sup>and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. <sup>5</sup>Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders (*presbyteroi*). Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility...

This brings together a number of things we found elsewhere:

- (i) It links the *presbyteroi* with *episkopoi*.
- (ii) Church leadership is to be by example, inspiration, and consent – not by compulsion and autocratic direction.

- (iii) Christian leadership does not mean “lording it”.
- (iv) The distinction between being older and being “an elder” is fuzzy – Peter goes on in verse 5 to contrast “younger” and “elders”.
- (v) The whole context is one of *mutual* submission.

Point (iv) here is actually quite important. One could render *presbyteroi* in 5:5 as “those who are older” (NIV) because there is a young-old comparison here. On the other hand one could render it as “elders” (NKJV) because (i) it is a term similar to that in 5:1 which all the versions render “elders” (ii) the context of 5:5 is submission, which seems to imply authority. But what this ambiguity does seem to indicate is that we are making too sharp a distinction between “older men” and “elders” when, to the first century church, the two meanings were not well differentiated.

This carries over into Paul’s letters. In one place the use of the Jewish council term clearly seems to imply some kind of authority:

1 Timothy 4: <sup>12</sup>Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity... <sup>14</sup>Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the *presbyterion*..

Yet even here there seems an implied age-contrast – although Timothy is “young” his gift was given not just by prophecy, but with the identification and recognition of the “council of elders”. The effective contrast is even stronger in the next chapter:

1 Tim 5: <sup>1</sup>Do not rebuke a *presbyterō*, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, <sup>2</sup>*presbyteras* as mothers, younger as sisters, with all purity... <sup>17</sup>Let the *presbyteroi* who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. <sup>18</sup>For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages." <sup>19</sup>Do not receive an accusation against a *presbyterou* except from two or three witnesses.

Virtually all translations render the word in verse one as “older man”, and in 17 and 19 as “elder”. But this attempted distinction

(and remember that the word itself is similar in all these) leads to all kinds of inconsistencies.

	NKJV	NIV	NASV	NEB	RSV
<b>1 Peter 5:1</b> ( <i>about shepherding</i> )	elders	elders	elders	elders	elders
<b>1 Peter 5:5</b> ( <i>old-young comparison</i> )	elders	those who are older	elders	your elders	those who are elder
<b>1 Timothy 5:1</b> ( <i>old-young comparison + about rebuke</i> )	older man	older man	older man	elder	older man
<b>1 Tim 5:17</b> (those who “rule well”)	elders	elders	elders	elders	elders
<b>1 Tim 5:19</b> ( <i>about accusations</i> )	an elder	an elder	an elder	an elder	an elder

All the versions regard 1 Timothy 5:1 (which is about rebuking) as referring to older men, but 5:19 (which is about accusations that might lead to rebuke) as about appointed-elders. The NKJV and NASV both assume the old-young comparison in 1 Timothy 5:1 to require “older man”, but in 1 Peter 5:5 an old-young comparison leave the word as “elders” – in dissent from the NIV and RSV (the NEB effectively hedging its bets). This is not to say that, because translators struggle or differ, we can make it mean what we like. It is to say that we are trying in English to make a distinction that was just not that clear in the minds of Peter, Paul and the early church: the distinction between “older men” and “elders” was just not that clear-cut. Even the exact meaning of 1 Tim 5:17 could be read in two ways. It could mean: “Let those of the appointed elders who actually do a good job be counted worthy of double honour”. (Presumably, then, those who don’t properly do the job they were appointed for should just get single honour.) Or it could mean something like: “Those amongst the senior citizens who shepherd and feed the flock should be counted worthy of double honour.” (Presumably then, there would be no necessarily implied *failure* on the part of other senior citizens – they perhaps haven’t been appointed or called specifically to shepherd).

But why does any of this matter? Well for one thing because 1 Timothy 5:2 actually carries the female form of “elders”



*presbyteras*. If 1 Tim 5:1 were rather fuzzy about whether it meant “older men” as distinct from “elders”, then logically 5:2 would have to be fuzzy about female elders. This is certainly *not* to argue that whenever the word appears we should translate it as “elders”. It *is* to argue that the linguistic sense of the term links age-authority, and that a female form of the term is not out of place.

So *could* there have been any female elders?

Two issues are concerned here. First, did the church actually recognise an office of *presbyteras*? We will find later that such an office was indeed actually *abolished* in the Council of Laodicea in 325AD, so it certainly is possible. Secondly, whilst it seems beyond question that the general expectancy was that elders would be men, could the apparently gender-specific term actually have included some women? There would not, of course, have been a term that the apostles could have used which was *not* gender specific. They could have pedantically included both gender in an “either or”, ie “Male-elders or female-elders” – but this was very seldom their practice eg in where rather than say “brothers and sisters” the term “brothers” (*adelphoi*) plainly includes women.

Not mentioned so far is that the parallel reference in Titus is:

Titus 2: <sup>2</sup>that the older men (*presbytas*) be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; <sup>3</sup>the older women (*presbytidas*) likewise, that they be reverent in behaviour, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things (*kalodidaskalos*).

The words forms here are slightly different, and now clearly mean “old man” and “old woman”. Interestingly, the old women should be teachers of good things – though one suspects this is more about teaching by lifestyle rather than by expounding doctrines.

#### **What did elders do?**

(1) Acts 2:28, 1 Pet 5:2: *poimainō* (= shepherd/feed).

(2) 1 Tim 3:5 *epileomai* (= take care of).

In the NT this is used elsewhere only in Lk 10:34-5, where the Good Samaritan asked the innkeeper to ‘take care of’ the injured man.

(3) 1 Tim 3:1, Tit 2:2: *didaktion* (= apt to teach).

This form is used also in 2 Tim 2:24 of the “slave of the Lord”. It is a general word for systematic “teaching”.

(4) Tit 2:2: *philoxenon* (= given to hospitality).

(5) 1 Tim 5:17: *prohistemi* (= stand before/preside/rule).

The only function mentioned early in the church’s development is “feeding”. This is mirrored in the much later pastoral letters by taking care of, and the term *episkopos* itself carries this primary connotation in the form of visiting.

Later “apt to teach” is considered a good quality, though it is actually listed as a quality rather than an essential function. At this stage of the church, of course, the teaching function is crucial because there is no New Testament. It carries far more significance than any teaching we may do today because we are merely interpreting the New Testament in our teaching. “Apt to hospitality” is surprisingly placed on the same level.

Presumably leadership is expected, much by example, from the senior citizens. The kind of policy-making decision processes that might have been expected will also be discussed below.

#### **diakonos (= minister)**

This term is just a general term for “servant”, and is used thus in the gospels. In one sense the whole church are “ministers of the New Covenant” (2 Cor 3:6). Of individuals we find it applied to:

- Phoebe (Rom 16:1)
- Apollos and Paul (1 Cor 3:5)
- Paul (2 Cor 11:23; Eph 3:7; Col 1:23-5)
- Tychichus (Eph 6:21; Col 4:7))
- Those who, with the elders, co-sent the letter to Philippians (Phil 1:1)
- Epaphrus (Col 1:7)
- Timothy (1 Thess 3:2; 1 Tim 4:6)
- Of a designated group (1 Tim 3:8, 10, 12)

Our word “deacon” is really just a transliteration from this Greek word *diakonos* meaning “servant”, and the word “minister” means a servant. 1 Tim lists qualifications for Christian “ministers”:

1 Tim 3: <sup>8</sup>Ministers (deacons) in like manner must be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; <sup>9</sup>holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. <sup>10</sup>And let these also first be proved; then let them serve as deacons, if they be blameless. <sup>11</sup>Women in like manner must be grave, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. <sup>12</sup>Let ministers (deacons) be husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well... [mostly from the ASV]

We may first note that a qualification for ministers, like elders, is to be “husband of one wife” as many versions render it. Howard Marshall is certainly correct in suggesting that this should really read “a one-woman man”. [Marshall (1999) p.477] Neither Jews nor Gentiles in Ephesus ever practised bigamy at this time, and it seems unlikely that – when divorce was so common in the Roman culture – Paul would have rejected someone whose past had involved divorce. If it really meant “husband of one wife” then presumably a man with two mistresses and a wife would be OK, but not someone whose previous wife had died. Paul is interested in someone’s present lifestyle, not their past sins. Moreover, if we took it too literally it would rule out Paul himself because (as he implies in 1 Corinthians 7) he is unmarried; he is presumably either a widower or a divorcee – a bachelor Rabbi who had a council vote (Acts 26:10) would have been very unlikely.

The real point is that Paul is dealing in the most general terms. He clearly would not literally want to rule out a celibate unmarried widower, but what about a woman? The common rendering for vs.11 “wives” is a possible translation of *gynaikas*, but seems unlikely. For one thing, why should only deacons and not elders need good wives? For another, many commentators have pointed out that there is no possessive pronoun “*their* wives” - even though (as Fee notes) the NIV helpfully inserts one “without any warrant whatsoever”.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> See the list on Marshall (2004) p. 493; also Fee (1988) p.88.

When Paul means specifically husbands and wives the definite article may be used, eg Col 3:18-19; Eph 5:24-25. Sometimes, where added clarity is needed, he also uses either the word for possession (*heautōn*) as in 1 Cor 7:2, Eph 5:28, or the word for “private” (*idiois*) as in 1 Cor 7:2; 14:25, Eph 5:22 & 24 (also 1 Pet 3:1 & 5). There are, of course, places where (eg 1 Cor 7:10) the implication of husband-wife is so strong that this is not needed, but where instruction is given to wives as distinct from women (eg Eph 5:22, Col 3:18, 1 Pet 3:1) the writer tends to make it clear.

Now in 1 Tim 2:9 the phrase:

*Likewise also women...*

is not taken by anyone to refer only to the wives of the men mentioned in 1 Tim 2:8; rather it refers to women in general including widows. There are similar phrases in 1 Tim 3:8 and 3:11:

*Ministers likewise grave....*

*Women likewise grave....*

The context is of leadership, so presumably it is unlikely that the writer means all women in general.

Could there be any indication that it means specifically “wives”? Let us note the overall structure in 1 Tim 3:2-12:

2 An *episkopon* then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behaviour, hospitable, able to teach; ...

8 Likewise ministers must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money ...

11 Likewise *gynaikas* must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.

12 Let ministers be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

Had verse 12 come before verse 11 then the *gynaikas* could refer back to the “wives” of the *episkopon* and ministers, but it would be odd to speak of *episkopon*, then ministers, and then the wives of *episkopon* –and the ministers’ wives are not referred to until verse 12.

There was, at that time, no feminised word “deaconess” – Phoebe is called a “deacon” using the male form in Romans 16. How it reads is that the writer (as was normal as we have seen) is happily using the male-gender language, probably thinking of the more usual ministers as being male, when he suddenly remembers that there are probably women ministers in Ephesus too. He can’t say “Likewise deaconesses...” because the male gender form of deacon/minister was used for women, so he writes just “Likewise women” implying women ministers.

So what did ministers do? It is commonly assumed that they were a kind of junior post to elders, but the evidence for this is not all that good relating to this first century period. The list given above of those called “ministers” includes some eminent people – and Timothy himself is called a “minister” in this very same letter:

1 Tim 4: <sup>6</sup>If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.

This seems to imply that being a minister does not involve just some kind of “practical” charity work. Giving “instruction” (though the word means put in remembrance of right teachings) and being “nourished in sound doctrines” seem to be a part of it.<sup>24</sup> The immediate context is combating the false teaching of (i) demons (ii) forbidding marriage (iii) forbidding meat (iv) “profane old wives fables”. The latter, of course, are not harmless ideas without foundation (eg put salt on a wart and it will go away) but the kind of fables abounding in aspects of proto-Gnostic heresy, which involved demons and a belief that the physical world had been created by some kind of inferior god. The minister/deacon, then, here has a role in reasserting and expounding good apostolic doctrine. B T Roberts (1891) ch. xvii pointed out that often the “ministers” (including those in Acts 6) did preach, and there is no indication anywhere of one who did not.

<sup>24</sup> Marshall (1999) p.485 argues that ministers had “some share in the teaching and instruction of the congregation” and maybe elders were selected from them.

### **apostolos (= envoy, ambassador, messenger)**

Jesus chose and appointed twelve (Jn 15:16) to go and bear fruit, and said that they were to be his witnesses because they “had been with him from the beginning” (15:26). Jesus promised them that:

John 14: <sup>16</sup>But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

Judas was appointed along with the others (Jn 6:70), but when he fell (Acts 1:25) they decided:

Acts 1:21: <sup>21</sup>Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, <sup>22</sup>beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.

The one selected was to be “numbered among the eleven apostles” (Acts 1:26). In this context it seems that they saw “apostles” as specifically those who had seen Jesus/ earthly ministry, and were mandated to convey his teaching. They played the central part in the start of the church (Acts 2:37). We also note that:

Acts 1: <sup>21</sup>Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, <sup>22</sup>beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection...

Acts 2: <sup>42</sup>And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. <sup>43</sup>Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

Just as Peter used the “key” of the message Jesus had given him to open the door of the Kingdom first to the Jews (Acts 2) and then the Gentiles (Acts 10), so the “Apostles Doctrine” was the truth-base on which the church was built.

There is, of course, no evidence that this specific ministry of the twelve was ever passed on. The whole point was that they had been with Jesus and the Holy Spirit would bring to their

remembrance his teaching and elucidate it for them. Thus Peter<sup>25</sup> in 1 Pet 1 and 2 Pet 1 calls himself an “apostle of Jesus Christ”, though James in his letter does not.

Paul describes his own apostleship like this:

Romans 1: <sup>1</sup>Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God

Romans 11: <sup>13</sup>For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry

1 Corinthians 1: <sup>1</sup>Paul, called an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God...

1 Corinthians 9: <sup>1</sup>Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? <sup>2</sup>If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.... Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? <sup>6</sup>Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working?

1 Corinthians 15: <sup>7</sup>After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. <sup>8</sup>Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. <sup>9</sup>For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

2 Corinthians 12: <sup>11</sup>I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing. <sup>12</sup>Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.

Galatians 1: <sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead) and the brethren...

Ephesians 1: <sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God...

<sup>25</sup> I am assuming, as evangelical Christians normally do, that these letters did carry the authority of Peter, though am aware than others dispute one or both.

Colossians 1: <sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother...

1 Timothy 1: <sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Saviour.

1 Tim 2: <sup>7</sup>for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle--I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying--a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

2 Tim 1: <sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God...

2 Tim. 1: <sup>10</sup>...the gospel,<sup>11</sup> to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.

Titus 1: <sup>1</sup>Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ...

For Paul's own apostleship he claims:

- (1) To be an “apostle of Christ”.
- (2) That he has “seen Jesus Christ our Lord” even though as “one born out of due time”.
- (3) That his appointment was made directly by Jesus, without any human involvement. There is no indication that apostleship of Christ is humanly conveyed.
- (4) To be an “apostle to the Gentiles”.

Paul's particular commission is reflected in Luke's reports of his language in Acts 22:21: “I will send you away (vb: *exapostellō*) to the Gentiles” and Acts 26:17 “I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles to whom I am sending (vb: *apostellō*) you.”

So did Paul see others besides himself and the twelve as in this category? Bruce (1982) has some discussion of whether Gal.1;18 means “The only other apostle I saw (apart from Cephas) was James the Lord's brother...” or “I saw none of the other apostles, but I did see the Lord's brother James...”. Bruce argues that the former is more natural, and:

there is nothing anomalous in the designation, as far as Paul's usage of *apostolos* is concerned. He clearly did not restrict the designation to the twelve...(p.101).

Others (eg Müller in Brown (1976)) are less sure. Paul does use the term more generally, but it has to remain uncertain (1) Whether Paul did mean to include James as an apostle (2) If he did, then whether this meant the kind of apostle who had to have seen the risen Jesus (as James did according to 1 Cor 15:7).

Elsewhere, in Acts 14:14 Paul *and Barnabas* are described as apostles, and in Rom 16:7 the most natural way to take the language is that Andronicus and Junia, who were Christians before Paul and his co-prisoners, were outstanding “apostles”.<sup>26</sup> There therefore seems to be, for Paul, a more general use of the term “apostle”. In a letter from Paul, Timothy and Silvanus (Silas) we later find: “we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.”

Finally, we note two other instances in which Paul uses the term:

Philippians 2: <sup>25</sup>Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your *apostolon* and the one who ministered to my need;

2 Cor 8: <sup>23</sup>If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you. Or if our brethren are inquired about, they are *apostoloi* of the churches, the glory of Christ.

Epaphroditus and the two unnamed brothers in the second reference (cf vv.18,22) are messengers of the churches. This may be analogous to the rabbinic “messengers of the synagogues” of which we read elsewhere, and it tells us only that they were commissioned and not what their consequent duties were.

So there seem to be three different uses of the term ‘apostle’:

- (1) As chosen ambassadors who have been directly appointed by Jesus, and are witnesses to his resurrected body [The Twelve and including in a sense Paul].
- (2) As ambassadors or missionaries of Christ without necessarily having seen his resurrected body [Paul, Timothy, Silvanus].
- (3) As messengers of the churches [Epaphroditus + the two unnamed in 2 Cor 8].

<sup>26</sup> Chrysostom, no feminist, took it thus in *Homilies on the Epistle to the Romans* Homily XXXI in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series I Vol XI,

Unfortunately it is not quite so clear-cut in practice, and we are not sure into which category some fit. It is disputed whether James is called an apostle, and if so in which sense. Timothy, albeit given authority, is *not* called an apostle in the Pastoral epistles, nor does he take the title along with Paul in Col 1:1, but he does seem to be included with both Silas and Paul as apostles in 1 Thess 2:6 even though most think this epistle is written earlier. Perhaps this is to distinguish the special sense in which Paul was an “apostle” from the more general sense of missionary implied in the Thessalonians reference. Andronicus and Junia are probably apostles in sense (2), which is as a kind of “missionary” in today’s terms, but (2) and (3) may overlap: a “missionary” in a sense may be an ambassador *both* for Christ *and* for her home church.

What authority does being an “apostle” confer? The “twelve” plainly do have authority, especially in the earliest stages of the church where there was no other authority. In Acts 6:6 and 8:14-15 it is important that any new work be identified with the Twelve by the laying on of hands. In this sense their appointment by Jesus himself as his envoys is crucial. But, even then, the Jerusalem council in Acts 15-16 *always* links together the terms “apostles and elders” as the leaders in the decision making process. There is no indication even in the early 50’s that the apostles act as unique “supremos” in authority. Moreover, Paul goes up to Jerusalem and sees some of the apostles, but seems adamant that his apostolic commission does not derive from this. Such authority presumably died with the Twelve and Paul (and maybe James who also knew Jesus’ earthly life). Arguably, it is these apostles who are referred to as the church foundations:

Eph 2: <sup>20</sup>...having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,

Yet in Eph 3:5 and 4:11 they are gifts to the church alongside evangelists, pastors, teachers etc. So is this the Twelve (plus Paul and perhaps plus James), or is it the more general group? Or is it the more general office of missionary? Since Paul seems to think it fairly general to have them in churches, one suspects meanings (2) and (3) rather than (1).

The bottom line is that we need to be very careful in ascribing function and authority to “apostles”, because there is no entirely clear pattern of use of this term.

As far as concerns women, clearly the Twelve + Paul (+ James) were all Jewish men, probably all Aramaic Jews at that, rather than Hellenistic ones (including Paul as a “Hebrew of the Hebrews”). Since their authority died with them, it tells us nothing about the appropriateness of Hellenistic Jews, Gentiles or women in leadership.

Amongst missionary apostles of Christ are included Junia, whilst (whether or not the name is used) Phoebe seems to come to Rome from Paul (Rom 16:7), possibly as letter bearer, and in any event there seems no reason at all not to have a woman as a church envoy if they so chose.

Gregory of Antioch (d595AD) in an imaginative speech about the resurrection reputedly had Christ say to Mary: “Announce to my disciples the mysteries you have seen. Be the first apostle to the apostles. So that Peter ... learns that I can choose even women as apostles.”<sup>27</sup> Not too much should be made of this (especially in view of the myths in *The Da Vinci Code!*). If Gregory said this, he was making a pun on the word “apostle” – the women were commissioned by the Jesus in Mt 28:10 to tell the male disciples what to do (see also Mk 16:7), and so were “messengers to the messengers”.

BT Roberts, and many others, have pointed out that the correct translation (not that of eg the NIV) of Ps 68:11 is:

Ps 68:<sup>11</sup>The Lord gives the command; The women who proclaim the good tidings are a great host: (NASU)

This is a notoriously difficult Psalm to exposit in context, but there could well be a prophetic element.

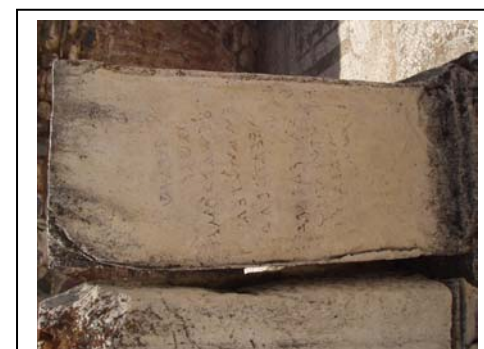
<sup>27</sup> Cited by Susan Haskins in Haskins (1993) p.89.

## 3.3 Decision Making in the Early Church

### Choosing Ministers

In Acts 5 we find the followers of Jesus in increasing conflict with the Jewish authorities. Gamaliel, Paul's teacher, had just spoken out against persecution of the new Jewish sect, but Paul himself had still not as yet been converted. Jesus' followers were still all Jewish, but there were two major groups. Throughout the Empire there were synagogues of “Hellenistic” Jews, who read the Greek LXX version of the OT rather than the Hebrew, and would have Greek inscriptions in their synagogues. Those called “Hebrew”

Jews, in contrast, spoke Aramaic, were centred in *Eretz Israel* (the Holy Land itself), and would expect the Torah to be read in one of the Targum versions – an Aramaic translation. Paul, who describes himself as a “Hebrew of the Hebrews” (Phil 3:5) was probably



Greek Inscription in Sardis Synagogue

educated in *Eretz Israel* and could read Hebrew, but was also as familiar with the Greek LXX Old Testament and with Greek.<sup>28</sup>

In Jerusalem there were perhaps mainly “Hebrew” synagogues, but also some “Hellenistic” ones. The disciples of Jesus were (we presume) “Hebrew” Jews, and in Acts 6 the expanding church found that:

Acts 6 :<sup>1</sup>...there arose a murmuring against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations (*diakonia*)

The response is recorded as follows:

<sup>28</sup> See eg

Acts 6: <sup>2</sup>Then the twelve summoned the multitude (*plēthos*) of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve (*diakoniein*) tables. <sup>3</sup>Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you (*episkepsathe*) seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; <sup>4</sup>but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to (the ministry of) the word." <sup>5</sup>And the saying pleased the whole multitude (*plēthous*). And they chose (*exelexanto*) Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, <sup>6</sup>whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

The apostles here put forward the solution – but it carries consensus “this saying pleased the whole multitude”. Not only is there consensus, but also the choice is left up to the people and not made for them. The second word for “choose” is from *eklegomai* – the same term as Jesus’ choice of the twelve, God’s choice of “the elect” etc. Whether “the multitude” do this by voting or consensus we do not know, but plainly it is their choice and not that of the apostles. The reason for this is so that these ministers will be trusted, but the apostles expect them to choose “men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom”. In some senses it could be said that this is a “practical” ministry, but discernment must surely be central to it.

Do the apostles mean literally “men” – and would they have balked had the multitude come up with a woman? This is hard to say – the gender specific language so often is not actually indicative of real intent, as we have seen. In any event the names are all male, and in that Jewish culture this is not very surprising.

There are a number of things to note about this decision making process.

The first is that this is a problem arising in a multiplying church. Churches in which the Holy Spirit is bursting out in growth are likely to experience problems.

The second is that they do *not* solve the problem by the apostles preaching a sermon to stop grumbling, or by coming down heavily and expelling the chief grumblers – it is by moving to find a

*consensual* solution. This is not a “Moses” type leadership. The Holy Spirit has been poured out *on all flesh* – and they expect the solution to come from the spirit-filled church. Being spirit-filled does not mean that there are no problems – it means that the spirit guides us in their solution.

The third is that this is certainly what we normally mean by “democracy”. Usually in “democracies” we do *not* vote on policies – but we *do* choose our leaders. I have heard it said “there is no democracy in the New Testament, no votes, no committees and no plans or policies”. This is obviously true in the sense that these *words* are not used. The New Testament, however, never uses terms like “trinity”, “freewill”, or “gospel appeal” either; but this does not even mean that such ideas are absent – let alone that such things may not be appropriate in our cultures today. In Acts 6 “the multitude” do “elect” six postholders – whether they do this by vote or consensus is not made clear, but they *do* choose. Of course the apostles would have been horrified had the “candidates” for the posts been electioneering and plotting to get what was a position of service to the church – in the later letter 1 Corinthians Paul is withering about those who set up Christian leaders in the fashion of Sophist orator-lawyers. The church should seek consensus in reaching the mind of the Spirit on such matters. However, it is unlikely that this will *always* happen with *complete* unanimity, and in general it is useful to know when decisions have actually been made.

## The Jerusalem Council

The “Council in Jerusalem” occurs around 49AD. Controversy has arisen in Antioch, the mission-centre for Paul and Barnabas, over whether Gentile converts need to be circumcised. Eventually it is decided to refer the matter to the “apostles and leaders” in Jerusalem – the acknowledged centre of the faith.

We should look carefully at the way the decision is made.

First, Paul and Barnabas are sent (15:1) by “the church” (=ekklesia) – *not* by the elders at Antioch. The church includes both men and women. On the way their accounts cause great rejoicing amongst “the brothers” (*adelphoi*) – a joy which was

presumably shared by women as well as men in spite of the apparently gender specific language. When they arrive they are welcomed “by the church and by the apostles and elders”. The report is made to everyone, but when a dispute arises it is (15:6) the “apostles and elders” who consider the matter. This is, however, still in open meeting, for the speeches of Peter and then Barnabas and Paul are heard by the “whole multitude” (15:12). The critics are silenced not so much by clever theology, but by the testimony of the work of the Holy Spirit. The whole prophecy of the New Covenant was that the Holy Spirit would come upon “all flesh”, and it is the manifestation of the Spirit (as with Peter and Cornelius earlier) that is decisive. James sums up, aligning the theology with the Spirit-experience as is right – and gives his “judgement” (15:19) that minimal ceremonial demands should be made on the Gentiles. Finally we read:

Acts 15: <sup>22</sup>Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. <sup>23</sup>They wrote this letter by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings...

This is no “Moses-style” autocracy. The *whole church* is in consensus, the apostles and elders being named simply as the leadership amongst it. The letter is from “the apostles and elders and the brothers” and to “the Gentile brothers in Antioch”.

It should be noted that two phrases stand out as common to Acts 6 and Acts 15:

Acts 6: <sup>5</sup> this saying pleased the whole multitude.

Acts 15: <sup>22</sup> then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church,

Acts 15: <sup>25</sup> it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord

This is consensual leadership – it differs radically from mosaic leadership because the Holy Spirit has now been poured out on all flesh and the Holy Spirit directs the whole church. The leaders

lead and the suggested solutions in both cases come from the leadership – but they are consulting their people and the suggestions are accepted consensually.

## Gender Specific Language

The term "*adelphoi*" (15:23) means “brothers”, and is male; but does it really mean to be gender specific? Is, for example, the letter from and to *only* the men and not the women? If so, then presumably the ensuing directions to abstain from idols and fornication (15:29) are intended for *only* the men in Antioch - the women can do what they like! But this would be absurd. Plainly women are included – and Luke's non "politically correct" use of gender language signifies nothing. Throughout this whole part of Acts "brothers" often must include women. In the days before it became the norm in English to use the gender-inclusive language “he or she”, the pronoun “he” did not always really imply male gender. Picking out from my bookshelves almost any mid-twentieth century book, we could read something like eg:

Given a textbook, however, the creative scientist can begin his research where it leaves off... (Kuhn (1970) p. 20).

T S Kuhn was perfectly aware that women could be creative scientists, and were he writing today would probably have said “his or her”<sup>29</sup>, but in 1970 the readers of this famous book on the philosophy of science understood that the use of “his” (consistent throughout the work) is not meant as gender-exclusive.

It is also apparent that throughout the whole NT apparently male-gender-specific language cannot be taken literally without absurdity. Consider eg:

Mk 7: <sup>20</sup>And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man."

Rom 12: <sup>1</sup>I beseech you therefore brothers, to present yourselves as living sacrifices, which is your reasonable service.....

1 Cor 11: <sup>28</sup>But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

<sup>29</sup> And I have nothing against this development of gender-inclusiveness.



Gal 2: <sup>16</sup>...knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ...

Gal 3: <sup>26</sup>For you are all **sons** of God through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup>For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup>There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is **neither male nor female**; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Gal 4: <sup>6</sup>And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"

James 2: <sup>24</sup>You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

Of course all these statements apply to both men and women, to try to deny it would lead to an absurd theology.

## Paul and Decisions

Later in Acts 15 we find this sad episode:

Acts 15: <sup>36</sup>Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing." <sup>37</sup>Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. <sup>38</sup>But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. <sup>39</sup>Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; <sup>40</sup>but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God.

We need not be "super spiritual" on such issues. Again we noted above a suggestion that there is no mention of a "plan" in the NT. Yet here Paul *is* putting forward a plan – to visit "every city". Sadly, they cannot agree on whether to take John Mark again. So Barnabas – who had virtually introduced Paul to the church – goes off home to Cyprus, and Paul and Silas *with the blessing of the brothers* go off to fulfil Paul's mission plan.

Paul, however, is willing to *change* his plan as the Spirit guides. Paul travels through Asia Minor, and actually has Timothy circumcised. This is odd because he is carrying with him the decree of the Jerusalem council that says that Gentiles don't have

to be circumcised! But he wants Timothy to be accepted in church leadership, and this is presumably merely a pragmatic help to achieve this.

But God wants the gospel to come to Europe. In Acts 16:6-10 we find the Spirit twice blocking Paul from going where he wants to go. Finally a direct vision from God brings him to understand what he is to do. His first convert in Europe is actually a Gentile business-woman of independent means – at whose house Paul stays (of which more below).

But Paul, although an apostle, is never autocratic. So we find:

1 Cor 16: <sup>12</sup>Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to come to you with the brethren, but he was quite unwilling to come at this time; however, he will come when he has a convenient time.

Again, in this instance Paul and Apollos apparently did not reach agreement on the mind of the spirit – and Paul does not pretend they did. Paul "urges" but he does not command, and he does not renounce Apollos as having missed the Spirit's direction. Church leaders today should not be autocratic and need not be super-spiritual in this regard – if even Paul, Barnabas and Apollos cannot always agree on the right way forward, then why should we assume that we should be able to do so? We should, of course, always *seek* such agreement – but we should carry on anyway. There is, however, no permanent rift – even Paul's rift with Barnabas is later healed (cf Col 4:10 c60AD, and 2 Tim 4:11).

## The Role of *episkopoi/presbuteroi*

The word *episkopos* is used once in 1 Pet 2:25 of Jesus himself as "the *episkopos* and shepherd of your souls". There are four other references in the NT, all to human officers, the first of which makes it clear that this is the same group as the elders:

Acts 20: <sup>17</sup>From Miletus Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders** of the church... <sup>28</sup>Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you ***episkopoi***, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Phil 1: <sup>1</sup>To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the *episkopoi* and deacons:

1 Tim 3: <sup>1</sup>An *episkopos* then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach...

Titus 1: <sup>7</sup>For an *episkopos* must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money...

These words seem in the NT to refer to the same group of people. If we look at the Acts 20 passage, the “*prebyteroi*” of verse 17 are the “*episkopoi*” of verse 28.

More generally in Acts, we find that in the earlier chapters the term “elders” means the Jewish ruling group. This later really just passes over naturally into writing about Jewish Christian elders:

Acts 11: <sup>30</sup>This they also did, and sent it to the **elders** by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

These are the elders of the Judean church. Paul realizes that there needed to be some kind of recognized leadership:

Acts 14: <sup>23</sup>So when they had appointed **elders** in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (see also Tit 1:5)

We note that the word is plural, there never seems to be any idea to appoint a single man to be “in charge”, still less to be the sole “minister” in a church.

In Acts 15 we find the “Council of Jerusalem” in which the “apostles and elders” feature large (Acts 15:2,4,6,22,23). The “apostles and elders” evidently take the lead. We don’t know whether the “apostles” here are the twelve plus Paul, or a wider group so designated, which might include Junia whose name indicates a woman. The “elders” are probably a formally or informally recognised group of people, normally older men.

What is striking in the whole chapter, however, is the consensual style of leadership. To summarize:

1. It is the church at Antioch who send Paul and Barnabas up to “discuss the question with the apostles and leaders” in Jerusalem.
2. When they get to Jerusalem they are welcomed by “*the church* and the apostles and elders to whom they report everything God has done through them”. The report, then, is made to everyone.
3. Then the “apostles and elders meet to consider this question” (v.7). James seems to get the consensus but “it pleased the apostles and elders, *with the whole church*, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas”
4. The letter is sent from the apostles and elders but also “the brothers” – and one may presume that this is really gender inclusive.

New covenant leadership is consensual.

## Part 4: The Jewish Context, Jesus and Women

### 4.1 Genesis Creation Narratives

Genesis has two great human-creation narratives:

God created the man (*'ādām*) in his own image: in the image of God he created him; male (*zākār*) and female (*n<sup>o</sup>qēbā*) he created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them: “Be fruitful and multiply: fill the earth and subdue it: have dominion over the fish of the sea...etc (Gen 1:27-8)

And the Lord God formed the man (*'ādām*) out of the dust of the ground (*'ādāmā*).... And the Lord God said: “It is not good that the man (*'ādām*) should be alone; I will make him an ally suited to him... Then the rib/side (*šēlā*) which the Lord God had taken from the man (*'ādām*) he made into a woman (*'iššā*), and brought her to the man (*'ādām*). And the man (*'ādām*) said: “This time! This is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called a woman (*'iššā*), for from a man (*'iš*) was she taken this one!” Therefore shall a man (*'iš*) leave his father and mother and shall cleave (*dābaq*) to his woman/wife (*'iššā*), and they shall become one flesh.(Gen 2:7-24).

Now the man (*'ādām*) knew (*yādā*) his wife (*'iššā*) Eve and she conceived...(Gen.4:1)

These accounts, of course, were not taken literalistically by leading Jewish and church leaders. For one thing, leading Christian teachers like Origen in the third century noted that the orders given in the two passages (which use identical Hebrew tenses – notwithstanding the NIV!) are entirely different. Neither Origen nor Augustine believed these were chronological accounts

giving us literal time periods.<sup>30</sup> But the creation accounts were *always* taken (both by the church and Jewish figures like Philo) to be divinely inspired and to tell us about what God intended for us. Jesus himself, in Matthew 19, joined the two passages together in his insistence that marriage was intended by God to be permanent, faithful, monogamous and heterosexual.

The word *'ādām* is the hebrew word for “the man”. In Gen 1:26 it appears without a definite article “let us make *'ādām*, but in 1:28 it has the definite article “the man”. In both cases, however, the term *'ādām* here in Gen 1 means generic man, not a male, because it immediately goes on to say: “male and female he created them”.

There was a difficulty in Hebrew because there is no neuter, so any word for mankind had to be either masculine or feminine. Now for man (*'iš*) and woman (*'iššā*) the only difference is the characteristic female ending *-ā*.<sup>31</sup> The word *'ādām*, however, cannot be feminised by adding the suffix in this way, because that would give the word for “ground” out of which (in a kind of pun) the *'ādām* is made in 2:7. Certainly, though, in Gen 1:26-7 there is no indication that there was any distinction between the male and female making up the *'ādām* in terms either of likeness to God or dominion over the earth. The reference is to humankind.

In chapters 2-3, the word use is complex. It must, of course, be noted that right throughout this passage the Hebrew has the definite article “the adam” – 4:25 is the first occurrence without it. Hamilton in VanGemeren (1996) notes “in the Heb. language of the OT proper names rarely, if ever, take the definite article.” (v.1.p.264). The term is used perhaps 7-10 times in the OT as a name, and about 550 times in a more general sense to mean “the man” or “mankind”. It is never plural. In Gen 2-3 “the man” says that woman (*'iššā*) was taken from a man (*'iš*), though strictly speaking she was taken from the *'ādām* to leave an *'iš* behind. But the whole point is that it is simply not intending that kind of precision, and in 4:1 it is the *'ādām* not the *'iš* who is sexually intimate with the *'iššā*. Anyway, it might be noted that, actually,

<sup>30</sup> This is examined in detail in our work *Reason, Science and Faith*.

<sup>31</sup> For some of these details ma indebted to Richard Hess in Pierce & Groothuis (2004) p. 87.

when the command was given by God, the side (*ṣēlā'*) that was later used to make the woman was still present in the *'ādām*. In a sense, then, God *did* give the command to both of them! Moreover, since both were, in a sense, present in the original *'ādām*, neither had precedence. But in another sense, of course, Paul is quite right to say “the man was formed first and then the woman”. Complex, isn't it?

What all this indicates is the great danger in drawing out ideas of hierarchy in this passage where none is stated. God did not say the woman was to serve the man, but to be an “ally”. This term is most often used of God himself.<sup>32</sup> She is to be a “help corresponding to him”, and the taking of the “side” indicates equality and companionship.

Could some kind of “hierarchy” be read into all this?

One argument is from the supposed power in “naming”. But in naming her “wo-man” he simply recognises what she is – adding the feminine to the word for man. It isn't a name like “Sandra”.

Then there is the idea of primogeniture – the supposed supremacy of the firstborn. Yet, strangely, God chose Isaac not Ishmael, Jacob not Esau, Judah not Reuben, David not Eliab, Solomon not Adonijah – and Joseph's enthusiasm for primogeniture was apparently not shared by his father in Gen 48:14-19. In spite of the limited provision of Deut 21:15-17, primogeniture seems more honoured by God in the breach. Strictly speaking, of course, the animals were (presumably?) created before humanity – but this did not imply rulership. This is a very thin basis upon which to read in a hierarchy.

The idea of hierarchy is simply not there. The most we can say is that the moral imperative was given by God to the original man, and we might perhaps presume that the “side” had no recollection of this after being divided off to leave the rest of the *'ādām*, and so got the message second hand.

After the fall, the man was promised “sorrow-toil”, the woman both “sorrow-toil” and also pain in childbirth; this is a prophecy,

<sup>32</sup> Of God: Ex. 18:4; Deut. 33:7, 26, 29; Ps. 20:2; 33:20; 70:5; 89:19; 115:9-11; 121:1, 2; 124:8; 146:5; Hos. 13:9. Of allies: Isa. 30:5; Ezek. 12:14; Dan. 11:34.

not an instruction to women not to use painkillers for birthing. God prophesied that her desire would be for her husband but he would rule over her; this was a prophecy not an instruction. If in the church we experience redemption, we should expect to see at least some of these effects of the curse reversed.

## 4.2 Hebrew History

At no stage of Hebrew history do Jewish women give the impression of being downtrodden serfs. The stories of Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Ruth, Abigail, and Esther show women as resourceful, sometimes judging, faithful, brave, and in no sense inferior.

At least some elements of Rabbinic tradition later departed from this. Though a woman had honour in the family, famously a Jewish daily male prayer thanked God not to have been born a woman. It is hard to know when this actually started, and the second century rabbi Jehuda explains it as being because a man has more commandments to fulfil, rather than about superiority. One second-century Rabbi also says “Talk not much with womankind”<sup>33</sup>, and later, propriety forbids a man to be alone with a woman (other than his wife), to look at or greet one, or even to speak with one on the street.<sup>34</sup> This is extreme, and we need not assume it universal amongst first century rabbis, but the disciples *are* somewhat surprised to find Jesus in conversation with a Samaritan woman – even without knowing her dodgy background (Jn 4:27). Standing outside the rabbinical tradition, the first-century Hellenistic Jewish philosopher Philo also deprecates women: “It is suitable for women to stay indoors and to live in retirement.”<sup>35</sup>

Now it is likely that the ordinary workingman (Jew or Greek) might differ in his practical treatment of his wife from the theoretical viewpoint of some scholars. But both Jesus and Paul

<sup>33</sup> Mishnah Aboth i:5.

<sup>34</sup> Mishnah Kiddushin iv:12. Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 70a, b. Babylonian Talmud Berakoth 43b.

<sup>35</sup> Philo, De Spec Leg, iii: 169.

are Rabbis.<sup>36</sup> Their craftsmen origins would be quite normal in Rabbis, and this should not mislead us. Yet, if they are Rabbis, then how do they fit into the rabbinical tradition?

### 4.3 Jesus and Women

As we turn to look at the attitude of Jesus to women, we find an amazing thing. He stands as a unique figure. Not only does he smash through all the conventions for a Jewish Rabbi of his day, but he also towers above most Christian men who have supposedly followed his example. In contrast with his perfect life, several attitudes often permeate male thinking. One is an attitude of condescension, patronizingly assigning to woman her ‘proper place’ The implication behind this is usually that woman is in some way inferior, though it is usually cloaked in phrases like ‘man has been better fitted by God for certain tasks and woman for others.’ In practice this means that man can think, lead, and understand spiritual things, while woman makes the tea and arranges flowers. Needless to say, there is no biblical basis for this.

Jesus had none of the approaches that we have often seen amongst Christians. He was one who, in the words of Dorothy Sayers:

...never nagged at them, never flattered or coaxed or patronized; who never made sick jokes about them ... who rebuked without querulousness and praised without condescension; who took their questions and arguments seriously; who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no axe to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend; who took them as he found them and was completely unselfconscious. There is no act, no sermon, no parable in the whole Gospel that borrows its pungency from female perversity; nobody could possibly guess from the words and deeds of Jesus that there was anything ‘funny’ about woman’s nature.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> See, e.g., John 3:2 where Jesus is so recognised by a Jewish leader; Acts 22:3.

<sup>37</sup> Dorothy L. Sayers, *Are Women Human?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 47.

Fundamentally Jesus saw people as persons, each a disciple in his/her own right. Two incidents illustrate this. Some people would elevate motherhood as the supreme fulfillment of womanhood. One woman clearly had this idea and shouted, “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked.” But Jesus says, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (Luke 11:27, 28) Womanhood is no more exalted than manhood in procreation; but both are exalted in discipleship and as persons, without reference to gender. Jesus does not typecast woman as mother, nor as domestic servant, as a second incident shows. When Martha asks Jesus to redirect Mary to a proper “womanly” role of serving the food, Jesus replies, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her.” (Lk 10:41, 42) Jesus, in opposition to the other Rabbis, encourages Mary to receive spiritual teaching, to sit at his feet as Paul sat at the feet of Gamaliel with the intention of passing on the teaching.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps her later act (John 12:3.) shows that she understands better than his male disciples. But fundamentally he relates to her as a person; her sex is irrelevant.

This, in fact, marks off Jesus both from male chauvinists and from radical feminists. He sees no need to be either patronisingly patriarchal or touchily aggressive about femininity. He feels no need to make sweeping generalisations bolstered up by proof texts and “psychological insights”. Women and men are simply individuals, and he enters their worlds and lives as such.

This is reflected first in his teaching. The illustrations of his parables often contain a male and a female example. (Lk 13:19-21; 15:3-10; 18:1-14. 29.) Likewise, in his references to the Old Testament he often refers to a woman and to men. (Lk 4:25-27; 11:29-32) He often balances his phrases such as, “father and mother”, ( Matthew 19:29; Mark 7:10, 11; Lk 12:53) “brother and sister”. (Mt 12:50) He refers to “publicans and harlots” (Mt 21:31, KJV.) the lowest profession for each.

<sup>38</sup> Wright (2004) p.130 rightly insists that this was the issue, not, as some have suggested, that a “spiritual” church should be inactive rather than busy!

In his approach to marriage, he uniquely asserts that a man who divorces to remarry thereby commits adultery *against his wife* (Mk 10:11). Yet in the Jewish Law “adultery” was usually an offence committed against a husband by an unfaithful wife and by her lover. In a phrase, Jesus cancels the inequality assumed in the OT and its regulating statutes.

A similar pattern emerges in his healings. He heals a son (Lk 7:12-16) and a daughter (Lk 8:4 1 ff). He heals a woman whose touch made him ceremonially “unclean” (Mt 9:20-22; Lev. 15:25, 27). He even heals a mother-in-law without even a nudge or a wink (Mt 8:14,15). He singles out a crippled woman, calling her a “daughter of Abraham”, to heal on the Sabbath (Lk 13:10-17.) He heals people because they are sick; their sex is irrelevant. He deals with people according to their needs, not their sex. Thus, he accepts the woman with the ointment, seeing a repentant sinner where others see only a sex object (Lk 7:37-50). He forgives the adulteress (where is the adulterer?) (Jn 8:2-11). He praises the faith of the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mt 15:28) and the sacrificial giving of the poor widow (Mk 12:43). He talks with the Samaritan woman at the well - to the amazement both of herself and of his disciples (Jn 4:9, 27). In fact, it is to her that he first states his messiahship as he seeks to convict her of sin and win her to faith.

Women usually seem to get the important news of Jesus first. His coming is first announced to Mary (Lk 1:26-33). The first to broadcast his coming in Jerusalem is Anna (Lk 2:36-38). The first to whom he proclaims messiahship is the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:25, 26). The first to hear of his resurrection are women, and the first to see his resurrected body and touch him is Mary (Mk 16:6; John 20:14-17). It is the women who are to go and tell the men what to do in the most immediate post-resurrection episode – is this a taste of what was to come? After all, the specific prophesy concerning the New Covenant was that “your sons *and daughters* shall prophesy...

Acts 2: <sup>16</sup>But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

<sup>17</sup>And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. Your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams.<sup>18</sup> And on My menservants and on My

maidservant I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy.

The gender here is specifically denied to be an issue as the New Covenant unfolds.

Lastly, we note that Jesus is willing to accept women as disciples in his band and to look to them as the providers for his needs (Lk 8: 1-3).

Jesus does not choose any women amongst the twelve. Neither, of course, does he choose any Gentiles. He does not pick the female Gentile mother who he says has great faith (Mt 15:28) in contrast to the little faith for which he continually berates the Jewish men he does choose. He does not pick the male Gentile Centurion who he says has more faith (Mt 8:10) than all the Jewish men. So does this latter imply that Jesus believes leadership should be restricted in the church *throughout history* to Jewish men? Probably there were some in the early church who so thought – particularly amongst eg those mentioned by Paul in Gal 2:12. There are few today who would argue this, however, and if leadership were restricted to Jewish men then nearly all of our present churches would be leaderless.

Jesus chose twelve Jewish men as those to be his special witnesses. Yet one of the first things the resurrected Jesus does is to tell a group of women to go and tell these very apostles what to do (Mt 28:10). Even earlier, the angel at the tomb does the same thing (Mk 16:7). How bizarre, then, that at least one modern church group has had the strange notion of a “chain of command” – with God speaking through the man/husband to the woman/wife, and the father in the family acting in a kind of “priestly” role. This pattern is broken by both the angels and Jesus himself at the very inception of the church.

Jesus *does* choose twelve Jewish male apostles, and we can speculate on the social reasons for this. But there is no indication that their authority will be passed down, and no indication that in future the teaching in the church should be restricted either just to Jews or just to males. B T Roberts (1891) p.39 made this point in 1891, and it remains as valid a century later.

## Part 5: Men and Women in Marriage

### 5.1 Paul's Teaching on Marriage and Headship

Eph 5: <sup>17</sup>Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup>And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup>speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, <sup>20</sup>giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup>submitting to one another in the fear of God. <sup>22</sup>Wives, [submit] to your own husbands, as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup>For the husband is head (*kephalē*) of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body. <sup>24</sup>Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

<sup>25</sup>Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, <sup>26</sup>that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, <sup>27</sup>that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. <sup>28</sup>So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup>For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. <sup>30</sup>For we are members of His body of His flesh and of His bones. <sup>31</sup>“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” <sup>32</sup>This is a great mystery (Gk: *mysterion*), but I speak concerning Christ and the church. <sup>33</sup>Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

1 Cor 11:<sup>3</sup>But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. <sup>4</sup>Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. <sup>5</sup>But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head,

We need to look here at both the key terms, “head” and “subjection”.

#### Headship

First, the husband's headship. We must be very careful to explore the semantic field of the Greek word “head” (*kephalē*), and not simply assume that it is equivalent to the English word.

Even in English a “head” is not the same as a “ruler”. So can the *kephalē* mean purely a ruler? In 1985 Wayne Grudem looked up 2,336 examples of *kephalē* in ancient literature, and has since found a few more. He offers us (Grudem (2004) p.545f) the 56 best examples where the word supposedly means “ruler”. These are far from convincing. The first few are something like:

Deut 28:<sup>43</sup>The alien who is among you shall rise higher and higher above you, and you shall come down lower and lower. <sup>44</sup>He shall lend to you, but you shall not lend to him; he shall be the head, and you shall be the tail.

Ironically, Grudem repeatedly issues the challenge to egalitarians to find a “single instance where the word means pre-eminence and not rulership”. Well this is one for a start. The context is of the foreigner dwelling in the land, and this issue is not rulership but pre-eminence. The “lender” is usually one who is wealthy, pre-eminent over the borrower. But it is not about rulership at all. Considering Grudem supposes this to be one of the *clearest* examples of pure rulership this does not fill us with confidence in his claims. Grudem's next four concern Jephthah becoming “head” over Gilead – but of course he became not an absolute ruler but a “judge”, which seems rather different. Grudem's next block of references involve something like:

Isa 7:8 For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin..

Well the Oxford Concise English Dictionary does say that the capital city is “usually” the seat of government, but surely here the whole context is seeing Syria as epitomised by Damascus and this in turn by its King as a “figurehead” standing for the nation. Remember, these are the *strongest* examples Grudem can find where he claims that headship supposedly implies rulership.

And so it goes on. Seven of the 56 are the NT ones about which there is the controversy in the first place. A number make the deliberate body-head connection. Fourteen of the 56 are from Chrysostom, writing 4 centuries later and in heavily patriarchal times. Even then, the golden-throated orator is repeatedly emphatic that, although he clearly *does* see the “head” as having authority, the primary emphasis is on the head-body unity.

Now Brown (1976) says that in secular Greek:

...the head of a community is never referred to as a *kephalē*.

Interestingly, with over 2336 to choose from, Grudem is unable to produce much that even seems to refute this statement. The nearest he gets is in a speech by Catiline in Plutarch’s *Cicero* 14:4:

There are two bodies, one lean and wasted but with a head, the other headless but strong and large. What am I doing wrong if I myself become a head for this?

However, this is the period of the Roman Republic. There is no “ruler” over the senate at this time; its “head” simply means its pre-eminent leader(s).

There are other words than *kephalē* for mere rulership. Its three clear fields of meaning are:

1. The head of a man or beast, or head of a column
2. The source or origin eg the source of a river
3. The one with pre-eminence/precedence/leadership.

The third of these does usually carry “authority” or “seniority” implications, though (as in the Deut 28 ref above) may not really have an official rulership connotation.

One problem is that “traditionalists” may tend to unwarrantedly “read in” a “rulership” which it is inappropriate. Thus one might read a kind of “boss-ship” into:

Col 2: <sup>10</sup>and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

But in Colossians “headship” is a far more complex issue. As regards the principalities etc we first read:

Col 1: <sup>16</sup>For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.

He is their *source*, and this is the central meaning in Col 2:10. However, these principalities and powers have a rightful claim on us through our sin, but this was cancelled when the “indictment against us” was nailed to the cross and so:

Col 2: <sup>15</sup>Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

There is also a headship of Christ in regard to the church in Colossians:

Col 1: <sup>18</sup>He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

Col 2: <sup>19</sup>and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.

Neither of these verses relate to rulership. The first deals with pre-eminence, the second with sustenance. Of course Christ *does* have the right to tell the church what to do, but the real point of being the body of Christ is surely the “organic unity” and the source of our sustenance? It is, of course, a metaphor, like the vine and the branches, and all metaphors are a partial picture. But “rulership” is not the primary image in a vine and branches, nor in the word *kephalē*.

A number of commentators actually think that the “source” sense is the major emphasis intended by Paul in the “head” passage of 1 Corinthians – including Colin Brown himself and also Prof F F Bruce in his commentary on Corinthians:



Here head is probably not to be understood as “chief” or “ruler” but as “source” or “origin”. [Brown (1976) ii p.160]

As we will see, this is very likely – and it underlies the Adam and Eve reference there, but Paul is also in the passage drawing a pun on the physical head-body analogy, so this also is likely to be in his mind. Of the 75 NT uses of *kephalē* it is mostly as a head of a body, so if this is a primary metaphorical meaning in the Ephesians passage, what would this imply?

Unlike a mere ruler, a head is an integral unit with the body over which it may have pre-eminence; it properly identifies with that body so that if one part suffers, all suffer together.

Scripture speaks of three headships, implying three “organic-like” unions and three source-generations:

- Father → Son
- Christ → Church
- Husband → Wife

The Father is the pre-eminent head of the divine union of the Trinity and the Son is the begotten of the Father.

Christ is the pre-eminent head of the “one body” union of the church of which he, as head, is source and sustainer.

The emphasis Paul puts on the marital headship in Ephesians is firstly that of the oneness of an organism. The husband and wife are “one flesh”, so that in acting well to his wife a husband is acting as though to his own body. In connection with this, Paul says, he will “nourish” her. The primary emphases, again, are on organic unity and sustenance.

Headship speaks particularly of organic unity, care and sustenance. It also speaks, though incidentally, of a pre-eminence over an equality of kind. Thus, in the Trinity Christ could rightly claim equality with the Father (John 5:18; Phil. 2:6.) In the church, Christ is the firstborn of many brothers (Rom. 8:29) and is not ashamed to call them such. (Heb. 9: 11) In marriage, the husband and wife are “allies” or “helpers”, for she is a “help corresponding to him”(Gen. 2:18) Headship need imply no superiority, and (unlike rulership) it does imply union.

Now in general when I am functioning well as a whole person I am not aware that my head is separate from me. When I say “I decided to go shopping” – I just mean “me”. As a modern person I know that it *is* in my brain that the decision was made, but there was no clear notion of this in the ancient world. In Hebrew thinking *the heart* was considered to be the organ of reasoning, not the brain, and the heart also the real seat of the person (cf Mk 2:6, 7:6 etc).<sup>39</sup> The physical head was what was recognised as *representative* of the person – to honour the head was to honour the person. But, just as when “I” decided to go shopping, it is only when I am being somewhat dysfunctional that I may say “My head told me to go shopping but my body wanted to stay in bed”. When I am functioning harmoniously, in the wholeness of “Shalom” as it were, it is just “me”. It would be ludicrous to say “my head decided and my body just had to do it” in such instances. It would be rather odd to say: “my head humbly rules and my body makes joyful intelligent submission”. It’s just “me”.

The same is true in my marriage. Having been deliriously happily married to a Christian wife for over 35 years, and seen two children grow up loving the Lord and married to Christians, I can think of few if any occasions when my wife and I did not simply make major decisions as a “one flesh” unity in our mutual cleaving. She is an “ally corresponding to me”, and I do not see this as *in any way* departing from what the apostle meant. What happens if a couple in such one-flesh union simply cannot agree will be considered in the next section.

Now we should note here that it is only in common secular usage (and amongst some Christians who have not read their Bibles very carefully) that man is called the “head of the house”. The Bible itself never uses the word “head” in this way, but speaks only of the man as the head of the wife. The implied picture of sharing one body applies only to the husband-wife relationship, not to the looser ties of household.

Elsewhere, the husband is said to “preside over” (*prohistemi*) (1 Tim. 3:4.) his household, but the word used there does not mean to

<sup>39</sup> I am unimpressed by Grudem’s few Greek examples of a brain “ruling”. Paul was a Hellenistic Jew, not a Greek.

“rule” or “govern” in the normal sense. In fact, a stronger word is used of the wife in the same letter of Paul, when she is called the “despot of the household”! (1 Tim 5:14). Paul does not use this term of the husband, so if we really ask whom he thought was “ruler of the household” it is the woman.

To love one’s wife *as Christ loved the church*... Paul is, of course, using the common vehicle of a “household code”<sup>40</sup>, but what he actually says is mind-bogglingly radical. First century secular figures usually expected no such a thing. *How* does Christ love the church? Not only by sacrificing himself and seeking first their welfare, but in saying:

Jn 15: <sup>15</sup>No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you **friends**, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.

My wife is, and has always been, my best friend. Jesus also wants to see us (men and women) come to full sonship:

Rom 8: <sup>29</sup>For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Any husband seeking to be Christ-like wants to see his wife fully develop as a person, not as some kind of restricted doll like the tragic heroine in Ibsen’s *Dolls House*. The kind of picture given, eg, even in Jane Austen’s novels – where good women do little more than learn to sew and play the piano – is far removed from this Christ-example pattern. As we shall see, it is also far from the picture of women in the New Testament church.

## Subjection

If we turn now to the wife’s side of the arrangement, the word for “subjection” (*hypotassō*) means to “set in order under”.<sup>41</sup> Again

<sup>40</sup> See eg Witherington(1998) pp.185ff – though his general treatment is poor here. Also Howard Marshall in Pierce & Groothuis (2004) ch 11.

<sup>41</sup> From hupo (= under) tasso set in order). Tasso originated as a military term in the Greek citizen armies; see Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 1:476; Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*,

the reference is not to unthinking obedience to an absolute ruler, but to voluntarily recognizing legal authority. It goes beyond mere obedience. Paul in the same passage (Eph 6:1) and elsewhere (Col 3:20) tells children to obey their parents – but the New Testament nowhere ever tells wives to “obey” their husbands. The nearest it comes is when it gives as an example of Old Testament subjection (presumably in terms of her own culture) Sarah’s obedience to Abraham, calling him “lord” (1 Pet 3:6). But this is an indirect reference, and in any case Sarah clearly had ideas and initiative of her own and is far from the classic picture of a downtrodden wife capable only of unthinking (or “joyfully intelligent”) obedience.

Not only is the language used not that of dictatorship-servility, but the headship-subjection idea itself becomes explicit only in the New Testament. There could, perhaps, be an implied headship in God’s pre-fall treatment of Adam and Eve. But there is no record of Eve being told to “be subject” to Adam. He presumably passed on to her God’s rules, but any idea that he had some peculiar authority over her has to be read into the text gratuitously. Rather, any such “rulership” is prophesied (like pain, suffering and irksome toil) as a malevolent affect of the fall (Gen 3.16).

Actually, between the fall and the coming of Jesus, wives are nowhere told to obey or even be subject to their husbands. Perhaps this shows that the meaning of headship-subjection is not conveyed by simple terms like “obey”, and that it became humanly comprehensible only after Jesus himself gave us an example of headship and subjection in his own life and work. It is in failing to look at Jesus’ example that the unspiritual have mistaken headship-subjection for dictatorship-servility. Whatever it means, it is not the kind of patriarchal system we have often witnessed in history (though mercifully not in Wesleyan holiness movements, which are my own chosen tradition).

Subjection, of course, is only to recognised and rightly exercised authority. In Acts 5:29 Peter and John recognise the authority of the Sanhedrin, but when that is being exercised wrongly they see a higher duty.

8:27; Liddell, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, has *tasso* on 2:1759 and *hypotasso* on 2:1897.

The view we have of the wife's "subjection" must again be seen in light of the unity implied in "headship", which unity (as Paul reminds us) is at the heart of "leaving and cleaving" in God's design for marriage.' We have already noted that the word translated "be subject" (*hypotassō*) means to "set in order under", speaking of legal authority rather than absolute lordship. Thus, Christians are to "be subject" to secular authorities and to those appointed to preside over the church. At one level, subjection has to do with the Christian's commitment to an orderly society. Authority is to be obeyed not because it is always right (as an authoritarian might believe), but because isolated acts of anarchy (except in the very direst situations) do not lead to either a better community or a better character in the Christian. Those who hold recognized positions of authority are responsible to God to fulfil their divinely given functions, and those under them to obey except in genuine matters of conscience.

"Subjection" speaks of orderliness. But there is a deeper level at which subjection is a basic feature of Christian character. Christians are to "be subject" to one another. Actually, most translations do not make it clear that Eph 5:22 does not even repeat the verb – the wife's subjection to husband is actually just an example of the subjection in verse 21. This certainly does not mean that wives are to be uncreative, devoid of ideas of their own, or servile. What it means is that in an atmosphere of sharing, they are to be prepared to forego their own inclination if required. Only against a background of this kind of general Christian mentality are wives told to "be subject" to their husbands.

As already noted, my wife and I have always tended to discuss issues until we reach agreement. Any sensible man recognises that on some issues his wife probably has better judgement than he (and *vice versa*). On many issues one partner may feel much more strongly than the other. But if, after every effort, there remains a genuine difference of opinion on some matter that concerns the marriage unit, then how should the decision be taken? One cannot have a majority vote with only two people. Should they let the issue drag on as a bone of contention? Should they shout at each other until the weaker gives in? Should they toss a coin? How about arm-wrestling? Should they take turns at deciding on

alternate days? Or should every couple have a pre-nuptial agreement on who is to have the casting vote? If it came to it, then our understanding is that the wife is to "be subject". Whether this is to be called "hierarchicalism", "ultra-soft-patriarchy", or whatever, is up to others, but it does seem to be an implication of biblical headship-subjection. This was our view when we started our own marriage in 1970. It was our view when I wrote *The Biblical Family* (1982) and *God and the Family* (1984) – in a Western Christian culture that was then generally patriarchal. It remains our view today. In writing this, though, we sat down together and thought about all the times that the subjection issue had actually occurred; but we couldn't remember any. We have always been more conscious of being a one-flesh cleaving organic body made up of allies than some kind of hierarchical structure. A view that "subjection" is transcultural does not, either, imply any "typecasting" of roles. When we married my salary was twice that of my wife but for the last ten years she has earned more than I have – and it has made no difference to us at all. She chose to have a seven-year break from paid employment when we had our two children – a decision which neither of us has ever regretted. But, in a Christian family where the woman earned more, we would see no problem at all in the man having a break from employment whilst the woman "went to work" in the manner of a Proverbs 31 wife. Lydia is not less feminine for being a businesswoman, Aquila and Priscilla do not lose gender identity because they work at the same tentmaking trade.

### Generalisations about Mars and Venus

Is "subjection" sexist? We should note first that the Bible nowhere says that God gave headship to the man because he was better fitted for it. There is absolutely nothing in Scripture to suggest that the woman is inferior mentally, spiritually, or psychologically. In many marriages we know very well that she is not. Could anyone seriously suggest that Deborah was inferior to Lappidoth? That Huldah was inferior to Shallum? That Abigail was inferior to Nabal? The last is particularly absurd. Abigail was superior to Nabal in wisdom, initiative, beauty, charm, dignity, temperance, and faith, and no lesser person than King David recognised it as he

listened to her words. The idea that all women are by nature inferior is a foolish pagan idea (held, for example, by some of the Greeks) and sometimes read in the past into the Scriptures by men too influenced by pagan thinking and male chauvinism.<sup>42</sup>

It may be argued that the very act of placing “in subjection” implies inferiority. Ironically, in the New Covenant:

1 Cor 1: <sup>27</sup>God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty

Obviously this is not an encouragement to churches to appoint manifestly unfit leaders, but it should make us very wary of worldly generalisations about subjection implying inferiority. In any case, no one suggests that in saying people should “be subject” to governing authorities Paul implies that Christians are “inferior” to pagan Roman rulers.

The New Testament seems to make only one significant generalization about any inherent differences between the sexes. Peter says, “Likewise you husbands, live considerately with your wives, bestowing honour on the woman as the weaker sex, since you are joint heirs of the grace of life.” The phrase used here is (literally) “the weaker vessel”. The word “vessel” is used here deliberately because it can only mean weaker in body in such a context. As a generality this is true. It is illustrated if we compare standards in unisex sports such as tennis or track, where men and women develop through rigorous training to maximum capacity. But it is only as an observed generality that Peter mentions it in passing. He does not say that *every* husband is physically stronger than his wife. He does not say it is a basic part of God’s design. He certainly does not say that because men are physically stronger they should rule. In actual fact, his point is almost the opposite. He says that in things that matter, women are coequal heirs with men, and so no one should be misled into giving them less honour just because on average they have less muscle power

Experimental psychologists are finding inherent differences in the brain functions of men and women. There are, eg, reactions that

<sup>42</sup> Jewett (1976) explores the scholastics in this respect.

are “more typical” of one or the other gender. But all of us know that there is such a vast range of variation within the genders that any such generalisation has to be taken with a lot of caveats. The “men are from Mars, women are from Venus” type generalisations need to be viewed with great caution.<sup>43</sup> In Christian terms, New Testament family and church structures are not based on them.

## Questions to “egalitarians” and “complementarians”

The word “head” may carry some overtones of pre-eminence or authority, but it does not generally mean a ruler. However, the word “subjection” must mean that under certain circumstances, a deferment of one to another takes place. This is, of course, in a general context of mutual subjection in different contexts of authority in a church, but Paul does without doubt say that wives should be subject to husbands.

The word “egalitarian” could mean that husband and wife, male and female, are equal in importance and talents – in that sense I am an egalitarian. But, more generally, it means those who believe that there is no hierarchy at all in marriage. Egalitarians in this sense have to argue one of three things:

Either (1) “Subjection” doesn’t really mean subjection.

Or (2) Paul intended this to apply only within that particular culture and time, there is no “transcultural” element.

Or (3) Paul intended it to be universal, but we can now go “beyond” this with a “redemptive movement hermeneutic”.

The first of these is frankly not credible. The second would need to be demonstrated. Of course we all agree that we cannot be simplistic about particular teachings, we do need to discern the transcultural principles behind any instruction, and reapply them in our own culture. We do not now require women to wear a *stola* whilst leading worship. But in such cases (a) they generally refer to issues of dress and food which both Jesus and Paul proclaim are

<sup>43</sup> Just for the record, I will ask for directions in a car, I can multitask, and I am much less interested in football than my wife is! Perhaps I’m “from Neptune”!

significant only in what they symbolise, and this varies with culture (b) there are often hints of conditionals in the text itself (as 1 Cor 11:6). This is simply not there in these texts about marriage, which are based on the creation ordinances themselves and given as pure generalities. This leaves only (3). As I understand it, neither Webb nor anyone else has made out a case that this avoids implying we are now more enlightened than Christ and Paul. None of the examples he gives in which the principle is supposed to be “obvious” in going beyond the New Testament are any such thing, and my own belief is that he is mistaken. I do not in the least doubt the evangelical faith, experience and spirituality of those who accept this idea, but I do believe it is incompatible with an evangelical view of the nature of the incarnation.

On the other hand I feel uneasy with the actual formulation given to “complementarianism” eg by Grudem. This has partly to be because of the ridiculous accusations he makes against egalitarians (“wimpish men”; “ambivalence towards sex”<sup>44</sup>; “suspicion of authority”; “anti-competition”; “dependence on welfare”; etc) in the table Grudem offers “free for teaching purposes”.<sup>45</sup> But also, phrases like “intelligent joyful submission to her husband” *might* be useful to describe this rare occasion where consensus is not reached, but as characterisations of the whole relationship sound just a bit oily. I asked my wife if she thought it characterised our marriage and she laughed. I guess that if we really couldn’t agree on something, she would intelligently and joyously submit, but in a marriage in which the husband and wife are a one-flesh unit, cleaving together, such disagreement doesn’t come up much. The hierarchicalist phrase “equal value but different roles” is also theoretically acceptable, but again open to a dominance-subservience kind of practice. Of course “homemaking” is an important role, and it is important for children to have someone there for them in early years. But it could easily turn into a kind of

<sup>44</sup> Apparently hierarchicalists have, in contrast, a “positive delight in sex as a gift from God”, which could possibly be a good recruiting point.

<sup>45</sup> Grudem (2004) pp.54-5. This table is one of the most absurd pieces of slanderous nonsense I have seen in any 21st century literature. May God help us if it really is being used for “teaching purposes”, and may Wayne Grudem think again.

restricted female image which would sit ill with Deborah, Lydia, the wife of Proverbs 31, Phoebe, Pricilla, Junia, Chloe, etc, not to mention Susannah Wesley, Mary Bosanquet Fletcher, Phoebe Palmer, Catherine Booth, and hosts of others.

Various authors in Pierce & Groothuis (2004) seem to accept that in practice many of the best “egalitarian” and “hierarchical” marriages actually feel much the same. My own is explicitly hierarchical, but certainly feels more like it is egalitarian on an everyday basis than some of the descriptions of hierarchicalists.

## Hierarchical Marriage and Church Leadership

If we decide that women are “subject” to husbands, would this rule out any female leadership in the church?

Women are *hypotassō* (set in order under) their husbands in the organic “one flesh” unity of a marriage. In Eph 5:22 the instruction to wives does not actually repeat the verb *hypotassō*; their subjection to their husbands is a part of the instructions to the church in general to be *hypotassō* to one another. What does the latter mean? It cannot mean simple obedience to each other – how could everyone obey everyone else? What it must mean is that members should be subject to any constituted authorities in the church - but these could be in different areas. For example, in Acts 6 those appointed to oversee charitable distribution would have authority – having delegated it one assumes that even the apostles would have “been subject” to the instructions of the seven in this area. In modern terms, the pastor in our church would have to “be subject” to the “King’s Kids” leader in respect to his children just as any other church member would. So when Paul tells slaves to “obey their masters” (a much stronger word than *hypotassō*) would this mean that a slave could never be a teacher or church elder in authority in a church where the master worshipped? This would go against everything Paul stood for in Gal 3:28:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus in a covenant in which God pours out his prophetic spirit on all of them.

For a Christian master – treating the slave with respect and brotherly love as Paul indicates<sup>46</sup> – there is no contradiction in being *hypotassō* in the context of a church to a spiritually mature slave who has to obey him in “secular” context. If Phoebe were married (and there is no reason necessarily to suppose that she wasn’t), presumably her husband will have had no problem in being *hypotassō* to her in her role as a minister in the church, although he is head of the one-flesh marriage union, and she is *hypotassō* to him in the marital context.<sup>47</sup> For some years I was in this kind of situation in my own church context. I was head of the one-flesh organic unity of my marriage within which my wife was *hypotassō* to me (though as with all healthy organisms we seldom noticed it). However, for some years my wife was on the church board (the ruling body in our local church) and I was not. Within the church I was *hypotassō* to the board of which she was a part. This is all part of Eph.5:21 which gives the context and the implicit verb to 5:22. In proper context we were each “subject to” the other.

It is, then, perfectly possible to believe in some kind of “hierarchy” in marriage, but to be egalitarian in regard to church leadership. Whether it is *biblical* to believe in this latter is, of course, another matter, and we will continue to explore this.

<sup>46</sup> Sadly, the later church missed the whole point of Paul’s words on slavery, and slaves were not generally made church elders.

<sup>47</sup> Both Deborah and Huldah, remember, were married women. In modern states, monarchs, senators, and prime ministers can all be married women - Benazir Bhutto even managed it in muslim Pakistan.

## Part 6: Men and Women in Church Leadership

### 6.1 Paul and Women in Practice

As a general background to Paul’s teaching, it is useful to see how he actually regarded and treated women in the church.

#### Lydia – a female “persuader”

One of my favourite passages in Acts is in Acts 16 where Paul arrives in Philippi, the first recorded coming of the gospel to Europe:

Acts 16: <sup>13</sup>And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. <sup>14</sup>Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshipped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. <sup>15</sup>And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” So she persuaded us.

Paul is a Jewish rabbi, but he goes to where prayer is being offered up publicly – by women. Lydia is a Gentile businesswoman from the rich city of Thyatira (which I have visited in Turkey). She is a “God-fearer” – not even a Jewess but a Gentile who worships the Jewish God. A feisty and clever woman, she puts the Rabbi Paul right on the spot: “If you have judged me to be faithful to (or a believer in) the Lord...come to my house.” How will he see her? As a Gentile woman, or simply as a faithful believer? If he goes home with her one imagines the headlines in the Jerusalem Chronicle (or whatever) – his reputation is in tatters. But what can he do? She’s got him! “So she persuaded us...” says Luke wryly. Yet so many commentators would have us believe that Paul

regarded women as temptresses like Eve, leading men astray if given any sway, and to be given no influence in the church; not much sign of that here as Paul is *persuaded* to break all rabbinic tradition by a Gentile woman. In verse 40, moreover, having been arrested, beaten, been cause of an earthquake, seen the jailer converted, and got an apology from the town officials (quite a night really!) Paul goes straight back to Lydia's place yet again before leaving the area. The suggestion one sometimes hears that Paul was a misogynist is about as credible as a suggestion that Margaret Thatcher was a communist.

So let's look at the whole picture of women in the churches with which Paul was associated.

### **Nympha – a female “church-host”**

In many instances Paul's churches meet in houses wholly or partly owned by women. The Roman one is in the house of “Prisca and Aquila” (Priscilla is named first and by an affectionate diminutive); the Corinthian one is also in their house.

The great majority of modern scholars accept that there is also a house church in the house of a woman in Colossians:

Col 4: <sup>15</sup>Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house. (NASU/NAS)

This is also the rendering of the RSV, NEB, JB and even the NIV, and O'Brien (1982) p. 246 explains why the feminine Nympha is more likely to be correct.

The one mentioned in the letter to Philemon is in the house of “Philemon, the beloved Apphia and Archippus”. In every case the church meet in a house with a woman in part or (in Colossians) in sole ownership. Paul, as noted, *totally breaking any rabbinic custom or expectancy*, set up his own base in the household of the Gentile businesswoman Lydia in Philippi (Acts 16:15).

### **Priscilla – a female “teacher”**

Paul stays in Corinth in the house of a woman, Priscilla and her husband Aquila (Acts 18:2), both of whom he takes with him later when he sails for Syria (Acts 18:8). Having been with Paul, we then read that they meet up with:

Acts 18: <sup>24</sup>a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures.

Acts 18: <sup>26</sup>So he (Apollos) began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

Apollos is a well-educated Hellenistic Jew, quite probably to be regarded as a rabbi. He is already a leader in the church and later a key co-leader with Paul, placed by some in the Corinthian church above Paul himself (1 Cor 3:4). He is a man whom Paul himself can urge but not command (1 Cor 16:12). Even having been with Paul for some months, and so closely associated with him, Priscilla sees nothing untoward in (with her husband) putting this high flying Jewish church leader right on his theology. I can see no difference between teaching and “explaining the way of God more accurately”. Does Paul approve? Later he writes from Corinth:

Rom 16: <sup>3</sup>Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, <sup>4</sup>who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

Priscilla's name is actually given in an affectionate diminutive *and* (in a culture in which order may have been significant) *placed first* – some see this as indicating who may have been the driving force in this husband-wife team. It seems wildly implausible to ascribe to such a man as Paul the idea that a woman could never teach a man, or (even more silly) that listening to a woman like Chloe, Prisca or Lydia was likely to lead a man astray.

### **Chloe – a female “informant”**

Paul apparently relies for information on members of the household of a woman (Chloe) in Corinth (1 Cor 1:11). This would be very strange had he thought eg that Adam listening to Eve was a general pattern for disaster.

### **Women as Fellow Workers**

Paul regards women as “fellow workers” (Phil. 4:2, 3). His longest letter contains greetings to seven women by name: Prisca, Mary, Junias (probably female); Tryphaena; Tryphosa; Julia; Olympas.

## Phoebe – a female “minister”

The key letter to Rome is apparently carried by a Corinthian woman (Rom 16:1) and to Rome he writes:

Rom 16: <sup>1</sup>I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a minister (*diakonon*) of the church in Cenchrea, <sup>2</sup> that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a patron (*prostatis*) of many and of myself also.

Dunn (1988) notes that the NIV “servant” is “inadequate” to convey the fact that this is “more a recognized ministry”. She is, he says, actually the “first recorded deacon in the history of Christianity”. One of the problems with this, however, is that we might tend on this basis to assume (from the much later Pastoral Epistle references) that the “deacon” is a kind of junior post. Actually we find Paul saying around this earlier period:

2 Cor 11: <sup>23</sup>Are they *ministers* of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.

Eph 3: <sup>6</sup>...the gospel, <sup>7</sup>of which I became a *minister* according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

Col 1: <sup>23</sup>the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a *minister*. <sup>24</sup>I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, <sup>25</sup>of which I became a *minister* according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God,

Eph 6: <sup>21</sup>But that you also may know my affairs and how I am doing, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful *minister* in the Lord, will make all things known to you.

Col 1: <sup>7</sup>as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful *minister* of Christ on your behalf,

Col 4: <sup>7</sup>Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful *minister*, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me.

Keener notes on Rom 16:1 that “Paul does not even employ any special feminine form of *diakonos* here.”<sup>48</sup> There is no indication in Pauline letters written during this period (whatever the situation by the time of the pastoral epistles) that a “minister” (*diakonos*) was some kind of junior post, nor any indication that Phoebe (of whom the form of *diakonos* is not even feminised) was a minister in any sense different from Paul, Epaphras or Tychichus. What then *does* it mean? It plainly does *not* mean some kind of spiritual “supremo” in an individual church (as it may do today) – but then the NT church had no such role or person. The “minister” is a “minister of the gospel”, and seems to be a global church role. It would seem very odd, however, to suggest that for Paul, Epaphras and Tychichus it means a leader/teacher role, but for Phoebe (who seems to have carried Paul’s letter) it means that she serves the church by making cakes and doing flower arrangements. Far more likely that, as carrier of the letter, she will have helped explain it to its recipients.

Dunn also notes of the other term used of Phoebe:

The unwillingness of commentators to give *προστατις* its most natural and obvious sense of “patron” is most striking. (p.888)

He notes, however, that Kittel’s massive work gives “protectress, patroness”. The masculine equivalent word, Dunn says, means a leader, ruler, patron, or protector, “not least for the role of some wealth or influential person a patron (and so protector) of Hellenistic religious societies. In spite of the NIV’s valiant attempt to emasculate what Paul actually says, for Paul to speak in this way of a woman (whose name suggests that she was a *Gentile* woman) is extraordinary. To say they should receive her “as befits the holy ones” seems to make it a sign of spirituality to receive a woman minister – perhaps Paul suspects that some might refuse (why else would he say it?). How ironical, then, that there are so many in churches today who think it a sign of spirituality to *not* receive a woman minister.

<sup>48</sup> In Beck & Blomberg (2001) p. 39



## Junia – a female “apostle”

Rom 16. <sup>7</sup>Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

There is no other place in ancient literature where the name Junia is a man (eg short for Junianus), and the overwhelming likelihood is that Junia is female. Dunn writes:

The full phrase almost certainly means “prominent among the apostles” rather than “outstanding among the eyes of the apostles”. [Dunn (1988) p.894]

Sanday and Headlam accepted this even in Victorian days, pointing out that it was so taken by “all patristic commentators”. Cranfield (1975) also insists Junia was female, and says it is “virtually certain” that it means “outstanding in the group who may be designated apostles.” Most commentators think that Andronicus and Junia were married (though they just possibly might have been brother and sister). Cranfield adds:

‘the apostles’ must be given a wider sense as denoting those itinerant missionaries who were recognized by the churches as constituting a distinct group among the work of spreading the gospel (cf eg Acts 14:4; 14:1; 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11; 1 Th 2:7; also Didache II:3-6). That Paul should not only include a woman... among the apostles but actually describe her, together with Andronicus, as outstanding among them, is highly significant evidence (along with the importance he accords in this chapter to Phoebe, Prisca, Mary, Trypaena, Tryphosa, Persis, the mother of Rufus, Julia and the sister of Nereus) of the falsity of the widespread and stubbornly persistent notion that Paul had a low view of women...[Cranfield (1975) p.788]

Junia, then, is not an “apostle” in the same sense as Paul and Peter, but then we don’t have any of those today anyway. We might call her and her hubby “missionaries” – but it seems inconceivable that such a person would have no role in evangelism and teaching.

## Summary

The picture sometimes given by critics of Paul as a misogynist is about as likely as picturing Ghengis Khan as a pacifist. More

important, however, a very clear picture emerges of Paul’s actual practice, and of the wide range of leading, teaching, and ministerial roles taken by women directly connected with Paul and involved in his churches. Whatever we make of his teaching, it surely cannot be in total contradiction to his practice.

## 6.2 Paul’s Teaching on Women in the Church

We will now turn to the various passages concerning actual teaching on women in the church:

### 1 Corinthians 11

1 Cor.11: <sup>2</sup> Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you. <sup>3</sup> But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. <sup>4</sup> Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. <sup>5</sup> But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. <sup>6</sup> For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered. <sup>7</sup> For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. <sup>8</sup> For man is not from woman, but woman from man. <sup>9</sup> Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. <sup>10</sup> For this reason the woman ought to have a [symbol of] authority (*exousian*) on her head, because of the angels. <sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. <sup>12</sup> For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God. <sup>13</sup> Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? <sup>14</sup> Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? <sup>15</sup> But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her[a] for a covering. <sup>16</sup> But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.

There are several key issues here:

1. What does “head” mean in this passage?
2. What is the “(symbol of) authority”?
3. What is the “praying and prophesying” here?

### Headship

We noted earlier (pp.72-3) how eg Bruce and Brown see “headship” in this passage as having a primary meaning of “source-generation”. This is true for all the three headships God→Christ, Christ→Church and husband→wife. It does seem that Paul (as he often does) is actually making a play on words. “Woman came from man” as her source (in Gen 2), but of course men are born from women so women in this sense become the source of men. Thus, whilst Paul repeats the emphasis of head-body (and so organic unity) used in Ephesians, he also plays on the “source” meaning of the word. It is virtually untranslatable into English.

But this passage is not *about* headship as such; it is mentioned almost in passing. Paul’s main point is about *headcoverings*, so what was this all about?

### The Symbolism of Headcoverings

The evangelical scholar Bruce Winter’s exhaustive research on the background of this issue appeared in Winter (2003). Greek and Roman customs differed. In Greek custom, the wife would not eat with the husband at a dinner party unless only amongst relatives, whereas the Roman wife was much freer. Corinth was, at this time, a Roman province, established in Roman culture.

The tombstone relief given below dates from the early first



century in Rome, showing the tomb of a beloved Roman wife:

Winter says:

She is modestly attired with the traditional marriage veil over her head, wearing an ankle length dress and kissing his hand... The epitaph on the tombstone reads:

My wife who died before me; my only wife, chaste in body, a loving woman who possessed my heart; she lived faithful to a faithful husband; equally in her devotion; she never let avarice keep her from her duty... [Winter (2003) p.18-19]

Winter notes the words of Plutarch, rationalizing a husband’s adulterous behaviour as normal and expected, whilst expecting the wife to remain faithful. But Winter also notes that:

Both in ostensibly factual texts and in imaginative writing, a new kind of woman appears precisely at the time of Cicero and Caesar: a woman in high position, who nevertheless claims for herself the indulgence in sexuality of a woman of pleasure. [Winter (2003) p.20-1]

Winter traces this conflict both in the Imperial edicts of Augustus Caesar (and the reaction thereto), and in Corinthian society. He suggests that the phenomena in 1 Corinthians 11 relates to this rise of the “new woman”: “liberated and licentious”. He also cites evidence that there were two main kinds of female statue in this period:

#### A. The married woman :

She was portrayed clothed in a long dress with a large mantle drawn around her, which she used to cover the back of her head to form the marriage veil. [Winter (2003) p.78]

#### B. The unmarried virgin

...slightly more guarded body language... The second feature was the absence of any veil... [Winter (2003) p.70]

Dancing girls wore no veil at all and revealing clothes, whilst high-class courtesans (*heterae*) wore transparent alluring veils.

What all this means is that there was a dress code, not just amongst Jewesses, but amongst the Roman Gentiles.

When Paul refers to “nature” he does not mean biology. To be a “Jew by nature” (Gal.2:15) or “uncircumcised by nature”

(Rom.2:27) is an issue of culture – *everyone* is born *biologically* uncircumcised and a Jewish convert is also a “Jew by nature”. Likewise doing right “by nature” (Rom.2:14) is not about biology but a wider nexus of genetics, culture, and freewill decision which makes up what a person becomes.<sup>49</sup> In Rom 11:21 the grafting in reverse is quite possible in biology, but “against nature” in the sense of all rational sense and culture.

In 1 Cor.11 Paul deals with a complex situation, where the city treasurer, slaves, husbands and wives, Jews and Gentiles, perhaps with some ex-courtesans (*heterai*), are meeting together in a totally unprecedented love-feast communion meal and (apparently somewhat chaotic) worship gathering. With Paul’s counter-cultural views on the importance of allowing women to minister in church (by praying and prophesying), he says something about them wearing the sign of their own authority to do so. A person’s *exousian* is always their own authority, not an authority over them. Some awful modern paraphrases appear not to know this, but Paul speaks of a symbol of their own authority to pray and prophecy, indicating that this is not a rebellious form of “women’s lib” but an entirely acceptable and proper function. Paul is well aware (cf 11:6) that it is a culturally based affair,<sup>50</sup> and we can infer that since it involves symbolism (which is important but secondary) different cultural situations may indicate different practices. But in 1 Cor.11:14-15 Paul says:

Does not nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair it is a disgrace, but for a woman it is her glory, for her long hair is given to her for a covering.

Paul obviously knows that most men *can* physically grow long hair: and in Samson’s case he was not thereby disgraced before his famous haircut. True that male-pattern-baldness often occurs in respected elders, but this in itself would not make long hair “a disgrace”. By “nature”, then, Paul does surely not mean mere biology, but that complex of the physical and culture generally prevailing in his first century milieu: “the way things are”.

<sup>49</sup> Including, if you like, the Wesleyan idea of prevenient grace.

<sup>50</sup> Winter does cite several Roman examples where hair was cut in judgment on sexual infidelity.

### **Because of the Angels**

We need first to ask what does “because of the angels” (v.10) mean? There are two or three basic possibilities:

#### **(i) It refers to human “messengers” not “angelic beings”**

The *koine* Greek word for “angels” (αγγελλοι) can simply mean “messenger”. The 4thC Syrian Ephrem and 6thC Latin writer known as Ambrosiaster argued from reference to the “angels of the churches” in Revelation (2.1, 8 etc) that these were visiting bishops. Winter argues for human “messengers”, but just meaning that anyone present who may take away a bad report if women behave and dress like the licentious or courtesans.<sup>51</sup> This would be in line with Paul’s later concern that outsiders seeing a chaos of tongues-speaking may think they are mad (1 Cor 14:23). It is not “unspiritual” to be concerned with what those in our society think of us. There is a principle of not letting our good be evil spoken of (Rom, 14:16). The problem with this interpretation is that “angels” does not seem to mean this elsewhere in the NT.

#### **(ii) It means “angels” in the sense of spiritual beings.**

This has in its favour that the other three mentions of angels in the letter (4:9, 6:3, 13:1) all refer to spiritual beings. In his very thorough commentary, Thiselton lists the variations on this from the neo-misogynist Church father Tertullian who thought them like the supposed “fallen” angels of Gen 6:1-2 who lusted for women, to the early 5thC Augustine and Theodoret who thought them the “holy” or perhaps even guardian angels (Mt 18:10).<sup>52</sup> The Qumran or Essene community near the Dead Sea also apparently thought angels present at communal worship. Thiselton concludes against fallen angels with good basis<sup>53</sup>, and our best guess is that it was something to do with general orderliness in spiritual realms. In any event, it need not make the particular symbol any the less culturally based.

<sup>51</sup> See Winter (2003) p. 89 or (2001) pp.206-11.

<sup>52</sup> See Thiselton (2000) p.840.

<sup>53</sup> All kinds of theological air-castles are needed to see this as being about avoiding the amorous intentions of fallen spiritual beings.

Presumably whether it is contemporary messengers or spiritual angels they would both understand that symbols were important but culturally relative.

### **Praying and Prophecy**

The context in 1 Corinthians 11 is very clearly that of participating in public worship, and in effect leading it. This is not a “women’s meeting”, but (as 1 Cor 11:17-18 shows) it concerns “when you come together as a church”, and verse 20 shows that “holy communion” was part of this gathering. It could be argued, albeit implausibly, that the “prayer” was private prayer, but whoever could imagine private prophecy? There is absolutely no doubt whatever that women were leading public worship in prayer and prophecy, and that Paul regarded them wearing a marriage veil as an authority to do so. It is now taken by most commentators that the “authority” (*exousian*) is not the husband’s authority over the wife, but the woman’s authority to publicly lead prayer and prophecy. Thiselton concludes:

If a woman exercises the control that exemplifies respectability in roman society, and retains the semiotic code of gender differentiation in public, “with the veil on her head she can go anywhere in security and profound respect.” This extends to the act of using prophetic speech in public worship...[Thiselton (2000) p.839]

### **Cultural and Transcultural**

We must be wary of casual hermeneutics that simply assume that the veils issue “doesn’t apply today”. To pronounce that a particular element of apostolic teaching is purely cultural rather than transcultural we must have a good hermeneutical basis. In this instance it is because, in general, the whole New Covenant teaches us that symbols are important *only* as pointers to inner spiritual realities. The principle is applied eg to rituals and to food (Mk 7:14-19; Rom 14:14), and applying it to dress is an obvious corollary. Even within the passage Paul has a certain “if... then...” kind of argument. But whatever a *stola* meant within the Roman Empire it has no meaning at all today. The transcultural principle is that, in leading public worship, women should not dress in such a way that the “wrong signals” are sent out. What dress sends what

signals is a local issue. In some Islamic countries a woman might best wear a headscarf. In the West, a short skirt and low cut dress is not very helpful in leading worship. This does not mean that everyone has to dress to please the most pharisaic member of the congregation – but that suitable note be taken of what is usual in that society.<sup>54</sup> We should not get hung up about it, (and eg there seems no particular objection to hair being dyed bright green or tattoos or nose rings being worn if that is normal for that age and culture), but what “signals” dress sends out *is* a relevant question.

## **1 Corinthians 14**

This reads:

1 Cor 14: <sup>26</sup>How is it then brothers? Whenever you come together each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation. Let all things be done for edification...<sup>34</sup>Let your women/wives keep silent in the church/gatherings (*ekklesiais*), for it has not been permitted them to speak (*lalein*) but to be in subjection just as the law says. <sup>35</sup>And if anything they desire to know, let them ask their men/husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak (*lalein*) in church/gathering

### **“Church”**

The word used here means a gathering, essentially any public gathering of Christians.

### **“Speak”**

The Greek word *laleō* is a very general word for speak. It is the word used for speaking in tongues (*glossalia*) in 1 Cor 14:2 (x3), 4, 6, 10, 13, 18, 19, 21, 23, 27, 39. It is also used for prophecy in 1 Cor 14:3, 29. By far the most common use of “speak”, then, in the context of a church service is in connection with speaking in tongues, followed by speaking prophecy. Actually, in 1 Cor 14.6 Paul applies the verb to

- ❖ a revelation
- ❖ a word of knowledge

---

<sup>54</sup> In my own experience it has actually more often been men (wearing short shorts!) who may dress unadvisedly in our culture to lead public worship.

- ❖ a prophecy
- ❖ a teaching (*didache*).

He is basically including all the functions in 14:26 – and even the “song” has to be included, for in Eph.5:19 he refers to

...speaking (*lalountes*) to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.

“Speaking” includes singing as well.

### **What does 1 Cor 14:34 not mean?**

The word “speaking” is used in 1 Cor.14:34 and 35 to forbid women to “speak” in “church”. So what does it mean? Actually, we will first look at what it cannot mean!

If this passage stood on its own, it could indicate that women were not to prophesy or to speak in tongues in any Christian gathering, nor to pray, to sing, or indeed to make any noise whatever in the gatherings (*ekklesia*) of God. This would apply to a meeting of the “whole church” or to the meeting of a house church, even when in the house of a woman (eg Nympha or Lydia), with a woman minister (Phoebe) or apostle (Junia) present, or where the woman of the house (Priscilla) had taken an active role along with her husband in instructing a learned Jew in Christian doctrine. But would this really make any sense? There are a number of reasons why not.

### **(1) It Would Be Out Of Step Even With The Old Covenant**

Exodus 15:20 calls Miriam a “prophet”, and it seems unlikely that the men would have been unable to hear their singing. Judges 4:4 reports that:

“At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel... She sent and summoned Barak... “The Lord commands you...”

In ch5 it is “Deborah and Barak” who sing the prophetic victory song.

Yet Paul in 1 Cor.14:34 says that women should be silent “*as even the Law says*”. “The Law” must mean presumably mean either the Jewish Torah or the OT, neither of which forbade women to

prophesy in gatherings, nor even to act as judges. Exodus is part of “the Law” and Judges of the OT. There is absolutely nothing in either the Torah or the OT that forbids women to speak or prophesy in mixed gender gatherings.

### **(2) It Would Be Out Of Step With Contemporary Pre-Christian Jewish Practice.**

In Lk 2:36 we find:

Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity;

It is perfectly normal to call a Jewess a prophetess, even before the coming of the New Covenant.

### **(3) It Would Be Against the Prophecy of the New Covenant**

As noted, the prophecy of the New Covenant in Joel 2:28-9 says:

And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons *and your daughters* shall prophesy... Even on male slaves *and female slaves* in those days I will pour out my spirit...”

This is quoted in Acts 2:17-18:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons *and your daughters* shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams.

And on my menservants *and on my maidservants* I will pour out my Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy...

Let us look at the context. Acts 1:13 lists the leading (male) disciples, and then says:

“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”

“The women” probably includes Mary Magdalene of Bethany (who had “chosen the better part” as part of his band of disciples), Joanna (who was a patroness), perhaps Suzanna, and Mary the wife of his uncle Cleopas – the women present at his burial. Thus

when “Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (about 120)” it would be bizarre not to take this to include the women, in spite of Peter beginning (and it was *before* Pentecost!) “Men, brothers...” In Acts 2:1 it says:

“When the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place....”

Again, the “all” must surely include the women here? The women also, then, experience the falling/filling of the Spirit and the *glossalia* that ensued.

The context of Peter’s words in Acts 2:17-18, then, is in the public outpouring of the spirit in *glossalia* after Pentecost. Clearly there are women present, and he specifically applies the OT text to state that even the female slaves will prophesy in the New Covenant spirit outpouring. He is explaining what they are hearing – the public manifestation of the spirit – not referring to potential “women’s meetings” at some future date.

#### **(4) It Would be Against Early Church Practice**

The NT church took seriously this Joel prophecy about daughters prophesying in the New Covenant. Philip the evangelist had four virgin daughters who prophesy (Acts 21:9) – without presumably feeling any need (in the words of 1 Cor 14:35) to ask their husbands anything at home. Luke must surely have known this because he and Paul were staying there and he heard them. Paul in 1 Cor 11:2 specifically implies that he is endorsing and insisting on practice that is general in the churches, not innovating some new and more restrictive code.

#### **(5) It Would Contradict Paul’s Own Words In 1 Cor 11.**

1 Cor 11:2 refers to the general church traditions. The whole passage is referring to the practices “of the gatherings (*ekklesia*) of God (11:16). His comments concern when they “come together” as an “*ekklesia*” (11:17, 11:18, 11:33). His concern is that when women pray or prophesy in such contexts they should wear the sign of their authority (*exousian*) on their heads. Paul presents this as a “tradition”, and deliberately makes it based on an “if... then...” cultural basis. All this is in line with his consistent teaching (eg Rom 14) that symbols are nothing in themselves, but

are important insofar as they indicate some underlying attitude or spiritual reality.

Now, although we can make a clear case today that in our culture a head covering is not an *exousian*, Paul plainly assumes that women *will* pray and prophesy in a “church” gathering. Gatherings were, of course, in houses, and Paul refers (as above) to “churches” which met in various houses. There was no difference between an “official” church meeting and a house meeting.

How, then, have those who take 1 Cor 14 to insist women should never speak, pray publicly, or prophesy in mixed-gender Christian gatherings got around all this?

- (1) By suggesting that 1 Cor.11 refers only to “private” meetings, whilst 14 to the “official” church meeting.
- (2) By suggesting that 1 Cor.11 refers to praying etc in “women’s meetings”.
- (3) By suggesting that the prayer and prophecy is “private” ie silent.
- (4) By suggesting that in 1 Cor 11 Paul regulates a practice that he intends to ban altogether three chapters later.

The first of these makes no sense in the context. The “church” meeting in a household is as much the church, and as much a mixed gathering, as any other. There are no “official” buildings. In general the “breaking of bread” or “communion” can occur both in small house groups (Acts 2:46) or in larger city-wide meetings (1 Cor 11:20). There is no indication (whatever modern practice) that some specially designated minister or elder has to be present. Actually, insofar as there are large “official” formal meetings, 1 Cor 11 describes such meetings. 1 Cor 11:33 instructs them to wait for one another, and the meeting is contrasted with what they do “privately” (11:22). It is in *this* context that women are authorised to pray and prophesy: a large, public, formal, meeting, that included the breaking of bread or communion.

The second suggestion is again out of all context. There is no indication that women are having separate meetings in the early church, and we know of no “women’s meetings” other than on the

river bank at Philippi where the Jewish rabbi Paul could hear the Gentile woman Lydia pray if he went. In any case, the passage in 1 Cor 11 refers to men and women and comes immediately before reference to the general church gathering as we have seen.

The third suggestion is absurd – whoever heard of silent prophecy? This is the exegesis of total desperation.

The fourth suggestion again would be crazy – like saying; “Always cross your fingers when telling a lie” and then later “Don’t tell lies”. If women were not actually allowed to pray or prophesy in any church, then instructing them in the same letter to wear veils as signs of their authority to do so would be incredibly bizarre.

### **What does 1 Cor 14:34 mean?**

Let us look again at the whole literary and cultural context of Paul’s letter. What we are seeing is:

- (1) One side of a correspondence (5:9; 7:1).
- (2) A response to reports (1:11).
- (3) A set of instructions very specific to and in response to their known situation.

The church at Corinth apparently has some large meeting place at which the whole church customarily assembles. When they do so it is fairly chaotic. For one thing, there is no established etiquette for such a meeting. Corinth is a seaport, a provincial town better known for trade and prostitutes rather than (like Athens) philosophy. Paul even has to explain to them that the regular use of a prostitute (6:15) is unacceptable in a life of holiness. In this Greek culture men may not banquet with their wives (who have a separate “hen party”). Jews never eat with Greeks. Masters never eat with slaves. Male and female, Jew and Greek, master and slave eat separately – and people at banquets often get drunk. In Corinth members of all these groups are meeting together as Christians for a meal (probably with some *ex hetaerae* (courtesans) thrown in), and a few Roman women who are tempted by the “latest libertarian fashions”. What is, then, going on?

Well some are apparently overeating and others get drunk (11:21) – all perfectly normal in Greek and Roman banquets. People are

speaking in tongues and prophesying as the fancy catches them, probably as others eat or talk. In this context Paul starts to give some advice. In 1 Cor 11 he starts to regulate the goings-on in public gatherings. Women who pray or prophesy need to wear the sign of their authority to do so. To Paul, proper structure and authority is essential.

In Corinth, it is important for the due authority and structures to be recognised in what is apparently a fairly anarchic context of meeting. Women are to pray and prophesy, not as some kind of Bacchic orgy (and in the worship of Bacchus women are central), but wearing the signs that they do indeed have the proper authority to do so.

There is one further point of background. Chloe’s people have reported to Paul that there are factions in the church identifying with different figures. 1 Cor 1:10 speaks of the “divisions among you” as does 1 Cor 11:18. Winter (2001) describes how in Roman cities, and especially in Corinth, rival “sophists” or teachers/rhetoricians/lawyers would set up with their disciples. Between them there was a great deal of rivalry, even hostility, and it was essential to look good and speak well (much as for modern politicians where the media image is everything). The Corinthian church people were tending to set up Paul, Peter and Apollos as though rival sophists or teachers. Paul is horrified. It is not that he is against *all* Greek philosophy (he quoted Cleanthes and Epimenides approvingly in Acts 17 in a sermon which led to at least four conversions), but he is distinctly unimpressed with the sophists of the kind that dominate Corinth. He declaims: “Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” [The word “Greeks” in this chapter is a metonym for non-Jews, but sophism did originate from Greece.]. Paul admits (2:1-4 and see 2 Cor.10:10) that he is not a great sophist orator – but the basis of Christian faith is “the Spirit and power”, not rhetoric. He insists (2:7) that the gospel is true wisdom, but such wisdom is revealed by the spirit, not through oration. Such factionalism is behaving like “men” (ie the Corinthian culture around them) and Paul twice calls it “fleshly” (*sarkikoi*: 3:3 & 4). There is, Paul insists, just one Temple of God: you (plural) are the Temple of God (3:16). [The

idea found in some hymns that we are building individual mansions in heaven is entirely foreign to Paul!]. Peter, Paul and Apollos are simply fellow workman on the one building, not rivals. The Kingdom of God is about power, not rhetoric.

As it stands, however, not only are they gathering around sophist-type speakers, but these divisions are also apparent in the actual church meetings

So what, in this context are we to understand as we return to the words:

As in all gatherings of the saints, women in your gatherings let be silent, for it is not permitted for them to speak but to be in subjection (*hypotassō*) just as the law says. And if anything they desire to know, let them ask their own men (husbands) at home. For it is a shameful thing for the women in church to speak.

Now a women who publicly leads a service in prayer, or gives a “prophecy” (a Scriptural term much wider than predicting the future), does not “want to know” anything. The instruction to ask their husbands at home would be totally irrelevant to any such situation. The only thing that really makes any sense is to imagine that they are chattering amongst themselves during the service, discussing what was being said and (possibly) criticising any sermon being given. Obviously we cannot know the exact context. Perhaps this is reflected in some of the chatter evidently going on in the general chaos of their meetings. Perhaps a group of women have become accustomed to sit together and discuss the relative merits of the different “speakers” as though they were sophist orators.<sup>55</sup> The most obvious way to see Paul’s words “If there is anything they want to know let them ask their husbands at home” is as a serious put-down to a group of “new liberated” women in the church who are behaving badly.<sup>56</sup> They are dressing provocatively in a way identifying with a licentious lifestyle, they are opinionated, and they are fostering this “sophistic” approach in which rival preachers are judged and set in competition. There is

<sup>55</sup> In modern orthodox Jewish synagogues the women sit separately, and there is often a culture of tolerating some chatting whilst the Torah reading is “going on”.

<sup>56</sup> Perhaps this is a little like the episode when Jesus asked the woman at the well to fetch her husband.

no comparison between this and the orderly praying and prophesying Paul wants in 1 Cor 11, or the teaching role assumed by his beloved and spiritual friend Priscilla (whom he affectionately calls “Prisca”).

Whatever the circumstance, it makes no sense to imagine that Paul is totally reversing his earlier instruction that women can pray and prophesy in the gatherings. 1 Cor 11-14 is a unified passage dealing with church service order (the digressions in 12 on gifts and 13 on the paramount importance of love relate also to this).

The bottom line is that – unless we want women to be literally absolutely silent in contradiction to 1 Cor 11 – *everyone* has to “interpret” the Greek word “speak” in some restricted sense. To take it to mean “chatter amongst themselves” makes most sense in the context – it is part of the prevailing chaos, anarchy, and party spirit in Corinthian meetings. This is essentially the understanding taken eg by Catherine Booth, the co-founder of the Salvation Army in 1859, and the recent scholarship eg of Winter on the cultural background serves only to reinforce this.

## 1 Tim 2:12-15

### Introduction

This passage says:

<sup>8</sup>I desire therefore that the men (*andras*) pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; <sup>9</sup>in like manner also, that the women (*gynaikas*) adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, <sup>10</sup>but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. <sup>11</sup>Let a woman (*gynē*) learn in quietness (*hesykia*) with all submission. <sup>12</sup>And I do not permit a woman to teach (*didaskhein*) nor to seize authority (*authenthein*) over a man, but to be in quietness (*hesykia*). <sup>13</sup>For Adam was formed first, then Eve. <sup>14</sup>And Adam was not deceived, but the woman (*gynē*) being deceived, fell into transgression. <sup>15</sup>Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing (*technogonias*) if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.



1 Tim 2:12 is a “problem verse”. Now, by calling a verse a “problem verse”, sometimes commentators mean that a verse says something they don’t like, and it is a problem for them to find a way around it. This is not what is meant here. The basic problems – *whatever one’s theology* – are as follows:

1. The “Pastoral Epistles” are ostensibly written by Paul to Timothy in Ephesus, and to Titus in Crete, but we do not know the occasion of writing. Many scholars doubt that Paul actually wrote them, though for those of us with a high view of biblical inspiration a pseudonym (whilst not uncommon at the time) would in this instance require an unacceptable degree of deception. I share the most common view of evangelical scholars who hold that Paul’s authority is behind the letters, even if an editor or amanuensis put the materials together.<sup>57</sup> The best evidence seems to be that they were written late in Paul’s life – but we are not sure of this.
2. The letters speak against a major heresy. The leaders in this heresy are named as Hymenaeus, Alexander and Philetus (1 Tim 1:20; 2 Tim 2:17) - all of these being male names. 2 Tim 3:6 refers to “silly women who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to really know the truth.” There is no evidence *in the letters themselves* that women are:
  - a. teaching
  - b. holding authority of any kind (let alone seizing it)
  - c. refusing to “learn in submission”

The problem is that some of them are “always learning”, submissively listening all too eagerly but *to the wrong men*.

3. Whatever view one arrives at of this passage, one has to make one out of these three possible assumptions:

EITHER: The letter was written without Paul’s authority.

OR: Paul changed his mind.

<sup>57</sup> Throughout this section “Paul” will therefore be referred to as the author.

OR: What it intends is in line with his earlier teaching and practice.

The first two seem inconsistent with an evangelical view of inspiration – the second more especially as it would imply that Paul had abandoned the whole basic prophecy about the nature of the New Covenant. The third leaves some difficulties whatever view of women’s ministry we try to adopt.

Having said, however, that this is a “problem passage”, this is no reason to ignore it or dismiss it with vague talk of “cultural change”. We need to attempt a sound exegesis of it in the original context, and on the basis of this build a sensible “hermeneutic” in both senses of this word.

This means beginning with a close examination of the actual words and grammar used, a consideration of literary context, and an interpretation in the light of cultural context.

### The Words Used

#### ***Gynē* (woman/wife)**

This term means either woman or wife. 1 Tim 2:8-9 clearly refers to women and men *in general* (presumably the unmarried are also supposed to pray), and when the word *is* used *specifically* for wife or husband Paul often adds a possessive phrase eg “they should ask their own men/husbands at home” (1 Cor 14:35). Having said this, because the term in Greek is not differentiated, Paul may often use it without consciously deciding whether he means “women” or “wives” – even though he well knows there are in the church independent and apparently unmarried business women and householders like Lydia, and many widows in Ephesus and Crete (some of whom he accepts will stay as widows).

#### ***Didaskō* (teach)**

This word occurs 95 times in the NT, including 15 in Paul’s letters, but its exact meaning can be determined only by the context. In Col 3:16 “teaching” seems to be a role for *all* “the elect” (presumably men and women) through whom God makes known his riches, and who were earlier called “saints”. Rom 12:7 refers to a task within the church of the *didaskos* who expounds the principles of the faith. In Gal 1:12, 2 Thess 2:15 and really 1

Cor 4:17, it means to hand on a tradition. It is Timothy's right and duty to teach (1 Tim 4:11; 6:2) and to pass this on to "faithful men" (2 Tim 2:2). It is hard to know whether Paul here means "men" to be gender restrictive, because as already noted he often uses the term "all men" (Rom 5:12,18; 12:17, 18; 1 Cor 7:7; 9:19; 9:22; 10:33; 15:19; 2 Cor 3:2; Col 1:28) where it plainly includes women. If Paul's language was not "politically correct" this need not worry us, but we should also note:

Gal 3 <sup>26</sup>For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

<sup>27</sup>For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup>There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

In the New Covenant Paul sees women as having the Jewish rights of "sons" in the family of God.

What should we understand by the word "teach" (*didache*)? Plainly it does not mean to pray or prophesy, but it is hard to see in what respect it differs from the activity of Priscilla in "explaining" (*exethentō*) to Apollos the way of God more accurately (Acts 18:26). The only suggestion that seems to make sense of all this may be that at this stage in the church's development there was, as yet, no canon of the New Testament. At this stage the particular essence of good *didache* was to ensure faithful reproduction of the apostles' doctrine. We do not today (unless we believe in the Pope) have any "authoritative" source of Christian teaching, other than the New Testament. Even if someone deduced that women were never to undertake *didache* in this first century sense, there seems no reason for them not to *exethentō* or explain the way of God more accurately to us. Actually, the word *didaskō* (teach) is applied anyway to women in Titus 2:3, so we need to look at its context to decide what exactly was disallowed.

### ***Hesychia* (quietness)**

The word *hesychia* in classical Greek and the LXX means quietness in contrast to war [Brown (1986) iii.p.111] and in its only other NT use (2 Thess 4:11) a "life of tranquillity" rather than agitated theological busybodies pursuing the latest "signs". The

emphasis is on tranquillity not physical silence. This might be contrasted eg with "busybodiness" (cf 1 Tim 5:13).

### ***Hypotagē* (submission)**

This is not the usual term for the "subjection" of wife to husband (*hypotassō*). *Hypotagē* is used only in 2 Cor.9:13, Gal.2:5 and 1 Tim.2:11, 3:4.<sup>58</sup> In Corinthians it is the "submission of your confession to the good-news of Christ" whilst in Galatians it concerns Paul's right refusal to "submit" to false legalistic doctrines "so that the truth of the good-news" might remain with them. This is about "submission" to the true gospel, rather than false teaching. It seems unlikely that this is about wifely subjection to husband, for Paul would then have used the regular word. 1 Tim 1:3-4 has already spoken of alternative teachings about Jewish-Gnostic type genealogies and myths, and 1 Tim 5:13 seems to refer to young widow involvement in the kinds of idle "busyboding" that had been a problem in 2 Thess.3:11 – though in the latter case it was men.

### ***Authenteō* (seize authority)**

This term is variously translated:

- to teach, nor to usurp authority over (KJV)
- to teach or to have authority (NKJV)
- to teach or exercise authority (NASU)
- to teach, nor to have dominion over a man (ASV)
- to teach or to have authority (NIV)
- to teach or to have authority (RSV)
- to teach men or lord it over them (TLB)

Over half of these take no notice of the very unusual word used, but what does it really mean? We need to look at it carefully because it is at the very heart of any case against "women in ministry" that has any plausibility.

<sup>58</sup> Interestingly only *children* (not wives) in 1 Tim 3:4 are to be *hypotagē* to fathers, whereas mothers are "despots of the household" (1 Tim.5:14).

The usual word for “authority” in the NT (107 times) and in Paul’s writings (31 times) is *exousian* or cognates. This never (especially in Paul’s writings) seems to mean naked power, but constituted authority – even when we are to “wrestle” against spiritual forces who misuse their authority that ultimately came from the Son of God (Eph 1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12; Col 1:13; 1:16’ 2:10; 2:15). This is the word Paul uses in 1 Cor 11:10 to speak of the woman’s “authority” to publicly pray or prophesy, embodied, as we have seen, in her head-covering. Paul also uses it in a context of an authority of himself as an apostle, over those in the church, to receive material benefit from them (1 Cor 9:12, 18; 2 Thess 3:9). Had he in 1 Tim 2:12 meant to say that women should not have any constituted authority over men there is absolutely no reason not to use this common term *exousian*. Instead, the word actually used is a rare word *authentēin* (from the equally rare verb *authentēō*). Does this make any difference?

Grudem (2004) p.321 argues that we need not be uncertain about word meanings just because they occur only once in the NT – showing that there are 1934 such words throughout it and 65 of them in 1 Timothy. He is, of course, right that, *in itself*, a word being rarely used need not imply uncertain meaning. But he does not address two key issues. The first concerns what alternative words there are. Obviously if a NT writer wanted to refer eg to “ivory” (Rev 18:12), then this word would be used – even though it is not used elsewhere. But there was no other obvious word he could have used for “ivory”. In contrast, however, the word for authority *exousian* is commonly used and Paul elsewhere uses the verbal form three times, yet the writer did not use this obvious word here. 1 Tim 2:12 deliberately avoids this obvious and common word for authority to use the rare word *authentēin*.

The second issue is that some of the unique words Grudem identifies in 1 Tim (eg “love of money”) have several other occurrences of the verbal form, whilst others (eg “show hospitality”) conjoin common enough terms (“strangers” and “receive”). Insofar as *authentēin* is accepted in this light by lexicographers, it seems to conjoin the word for his or her (*auto*) with an obsolete word for worker (*entēs*) - meaning something done by one’s own hand. Thayer eg gives:

- (a) one who with his own hand kills either others or himself
- (b) one who does a thing himself the author 1 Tim 2:12

Since, however, the word clearly had developed, we must avoid the “root fallacy” here. Its meaning may have developed beyond the roots, even if the roots form a useful starting point.

This leaves us only with comparing uses elsewhere. Neither the NT nor the Greek Septuagint (LXX) translation of the “Old Testament” (which was in first century use) contain the word. However, Paul, we know, was saturated in the Jewish “Wisdom literature”, which was included in the LXX. In the LXX of Wisdom 12:6, *authentās* means parents “who slew with their own hands souls destitute of help” – ie infanticides. There is only one other LXX reference to *authentās* (3 Macc 2:28-9) and in this the word’s meaning is obscure but it does *not* mean authority.

Now Grudem notes that there are 82 instances of the verb outside the Bible, and a number of words from the same word group. What he does not say is that few of them mean “authority” and few are contemporary. The secular usages of the noun largely reflect the meaning in the Wisdom literature. Linda Belleville notes the roots the term involves, and then examines the usage:

An *authentēs* is someone who originates and carries out an action. During the sixth to second centuries B.C., the Greek tragedies used it exclusively of murdering oneself (suicide) or another person(s). The rhetoricians and orators during this period did the same. The word is rare in the historians and epic writers of the time, but in all instances it too is used of a “murderer” or “slayer”. During the Hellenistic period the primary meaning of *authentēs* was still “murderer” but the semantic range widened to include “perpetrator”, “sponsor”, “author” and “mastermind” of a crime or act of violence. This is the case regardless of geographical location, ethnicity or religious orientation. For instance the Jewish historian Josephus speaks of the *author* (*authentēn*) of a poisonous draught (*Jewish Wars* 1.582; 2:240). Diodorus of Sicily uses it of (1) the sponsors (*authetas*) of some daring plans (*Biblia historica* 35:25:1) (2) the perpetrators (*authentais*) of a sacrilege (*Bibliotheca historica* 16:61) and (3) the mastermind (*authentas*)

of a crime (*Bibliotheca historica* 17.5.4.5). By the first century A.D. lexicographers define *authentēs* as the perpetrator of a murder committed by others (not the actual murderer himself or herself).<sup>59</sup>

Belleville notes that it can mean “master but in the sense of masterminding some massacre or temple theft. She notes:

Verb forms contemporary with or prior to Paul... are rare to non-existent in Greek literary and non-literary materials. (p.213)

She then goes on to list them:

1. Aeschylus (6thC BC) *authentēkota* = act of violence
2. Aristonicus (1stC BC) *ho authenten* = author (of a message)
3. Tryphon (c 27/6 B.C.) “I had my way with him [*authentēkotos pros auton*] and he agreed to provide Catalytis the boatman with the full fare...” Belville rightly objects, in the context, to rendering this “I exercised authority over him”. It means to “prevail with” or effectively to “bully into”.
4. Philodemus (1stC B.C.) *authentousin anaxin* = powerful lords.
5. Dorotheus (late 1stC early 2ndC) *authentas* = dominant in astrological use – as Ptolemy also uses it around this time.

Belleville finally comments:

Those who have studied Hellenistic letters argue that *authentēō* originated in the popular Greek vocabulary as a synonym for “to dominate someone”... Biblical lexicographers J.P.Louw and Eugene Nida put *authentēō* into the semantic domain “to control, restrain, domineer” and define the verb as “to control in a domineering manner”; “I do not allow women... to dominate men” (1 Tim 2:12). Other meanings do not appear until well into the third and fourth centuries AD. (p.216)

Grudem, ironically, tells us that there is *no* uncertainty regarding the meaning of the word *authentēin* in spite of its rarity, and then

<sup>59</sup> Pierce & Groothuis (2004) p.212 – which see for references.

tells us that there “may have been nuances of *exousia* [the usual word for authority] that Paul wanted to avoid, or nuances of *authentēō* that he wanted to include, but it is difficult for us to say what those might be” [Grudem (2004) p.322]. Apparently, as Grudem sees it, all the clear implications of murder, violence, masterminding crime, infanticide (in an LXX book with which Paul was familiar), and preparing poisonous draughts (in a work written by a Jew not long after Paul) tell us nothing about the “nuances” behind *authentēin*, which is, Grudem claims, a virtual synonym for the common word *exousian*. This seems a really bizarre position to take.

The situation here is far from one where “egalitarians” (as earlier defined) are trying to wriggle out of the obvious meaning of *authentēin*. Belleville (p.216) is absolutely right to conclude:

So there is no first-century warrant for translating *authentēin* as “to exercise authority” and for understanding Paul in 1 Timothy 2:12 to be speaking of the carrying out of one’s official duties. Rather the sense is the *Koine* “to dominate, to get one’s way.”

Belleville deliberately comes up only to the first century, and the word did continue to change meaning. Those of us who assume, however, that the letter we call 1 Timothy was indeed written in the first century, will not look to any later change in its meaning. Moreover, Kroeger notes that even in the late second century we find a grammarian saying:

The word should never be used for the despot as certain court speakers do, but for the one who kills with his own hand.<sup>60</sup>

The “egalitarian” Catherine Kroeger has herself made two unusual claims for the word *authentēin*, which we may just note in passing. In 1979 she accepted that the ancient meaning was “murder”.

The Attic orator Antiphon used the term *authentēs* to mean “murderer” in four different instances in legal briefs of murder cases and once to mean suicide, as did Dio Cassius. Thucydides, Herodotus, and Aeschylus also use the word to denote one who

<sup>60</sup> Cited in Kroeger & Kroeger (1992) p.227 n6.

slays with his own hand, and so does Euripides.<sup>61</sup>

She claimed, however, that: “In Euripides the word begins to take on a sexual tinge”. In Euripides’ play *Andromache*, Hector’s widow Andromache has been taken as slave-concubine by Neoptolemus whose jealous wife says

“You wretch, who dare to sleep with the son of the man who killed your husband and bear children to the *authentēs*.”

This, Kroeger then claimed, implied a sexual connotation.<sup>62</sup> Her claim, though, was implausible. The term here could mean either a murderer or a person who has usurped authority – there is no obvious sexual tinge anymore than saying “she married her husband’s murderer” implies that “murderer” has a sexual tinge. Kroeger’s other examples are equally unconvincing. In 1992 Catherine Kroeger and her husband Richard argued for a different meaning, ie that Paul used *authentēō* to mean “proclaim oneself author of a man” in response to “a Gnostic notion of Eve as creator of Adam.”<sup>63</sup> The word *authentēs* could, just possibly, mean to “originate”.<sup>64</sup> The problem is that the phrase would then read: “I permit not a woman to teach nor to originate a man”: the word “proclaim” is neither there nor implied. The Kroegers’ latest claim, therefore, seems incredible. There is a possibility (as we shall see) that female primacy was a background issue, but it is not implied in *authentēin* itself.

### **The Grammar of “teach and seize authority”**

Andreas Kostenberger has argued that this kind of Greek pairing grammatically links synonyms or parallel words: so if to “teach” is positive then “to have authority” must likewise be.<sup>65</sup> However Belleville points out that this verse is not paralleling two verbs, but verbal nouns – the verb is “I *permit*...” She notes that such structures can pair terms in various relationships including: (i)

<sup>61</sup> C. C. Kroeger, “Ancient Heresies and a Strange Greek Verb,” *Reformed Journal* 29 (1979):12-15.

<sup>62</sup> Others, etg Trombley (1985) have followed this line.

<sup>63</sup> Kroeger & Kroeger (1992) ch 8 esp p. 103.

<sup>64</sup> This is one understanding of the 3 Macc 2:29 ref, and there are instances in later centuries.

<sup>65</sup> Kostenberger, et al (1995) pp.81-103.

synonyms (ii) antonyms [eg neither Jew nor Greek neither slave nor free Gal 3:28] (iii) natural progressions [eg neither sow nor reap... Mt 6;26]; and (iv):

to define a related purpose or a goal (eg “where thieves neither break in nor steal” [i.e. break in to steal], Mt 6;20)<sup>66</sup>

She argues that the natural meaning in 1 Tim 2:12 is this latter kind, to “teach so as to gain mastery”. Grudem (2004) p.319 objects to this:

When Jesus says “where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matthew 6:20), He is saying two things. Sometimes thieves steal without breaking in (as in the public marketplace, or when people are traveling on open highway, or elsewhere outdoors)...

This sounds very thin, like suggesting that “breaking and entering” might be two separate crimes. The NKJV renders this passage:

Matt 6: <sup>19</sup>“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; <sup>20</sup>but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

If Jesus really meant two entirely different crimes it seems odd that in verse 19 he used “and” (*kai*) rather than “or”. To “break in and steal” sounds very much like a set of acts with one leading to the next, and the “nor” in Mt 6:20 refers to the same “break in and steal” sequence. Moreover, the use of “nor” (*outē*) looks very similar in Mt 6:20 and 1 Tim 2:12. In the 1 Tim situation, too, there seems no way in which women could seize domination over men *except* through false teaching. Actually teaching is linked with other related issues several times in this letter:

1Tim 1: <sup>3</sup>you may charge some that they no teach other doctrine, <sup>4</sup>nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies...

The word is literally *heterodidaskalein* = “teach other”, and presumably included the fables and genealogies. In 1 Tim 6:3 it also speaks of those who “teach other (*heterodidaskalei*) and do not consent to wholesome words even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ”. The whole issue is about teaching that departs from that

<sup>66</sup> Pierce & Groothuis (2004) p.218

originally given. One commentator has even suggested that in the pastoral epistles the singular *didaskalia* is a technical term “denoting apostolic instruction”.<sup>67</sup>

It should be noted that Titus 2:3 says:

...the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behaviour, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers (*kalodidaskalous*) of good things...

It is the teaching linked with domination over men that is the problem, not teaching as such.

We have looked at the words and grammar of 2 Tim 2:11-12, but we now need to look at its literary context.

### **Prayer, Women and Dress**

1 Tim 2: <sup>1</sup>Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men... <sup>8</sup>I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; <sup>9</sup>in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, <sup>10</sup>but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.

The most natural way to read verses 8 and 9 is as referring back (before his digression) to the need for (public) prayer and supplication in verse 1. Men are to pray “lifting holy hands without anger and doubting”, and women “likewise in modest apparel with propriety and moderation”. The “likewise” can only mean that he wants the women, *like the men*, to “lift up holy hands in prayer”. The words that follow are simply describing one of the ways in which they are to do this. The issue is similar here (in the Roman Ephesus) as in Roman Corinth. Women are to wear “modest apparel” rather than the braided hair and costly clothes of the new “liberated” Roman woman described in Winter (2003). “Modest apparel” means the married *stola* – basically it is again saying “when you pray in public dress modestly eg with the back of your hair covered with a married woman’s veil”. If we assume (as evangelicals generally do) that Paul’s authority is behind this

<sup>67</sup> Quinn (1990) p.81-2.

letter<sup>68</sup>, it should be expected that (i) this veil is their “authority” (*exousian*) to publicly pray and prophesy (ii) any insistence on silence is to be contextually understood. This letter, like the Corinthian one, has a very specific situation in mind. Marshall (1998) p.447 suggests that the writer is addressing the most common such barriers to effective public prayer by the two genders in that particular society. We need to identify whatever the barriers are to effective public prayer in our churches, and deal with them.

The further admonitions in 2:9-10 and 2:11-12 must relate to some local situation, in which a group of women in Ephesus were dressing provocatively in the matter of the “new woman” with a licentious lifestyle, and seizing a directing authority and pushing some new doctrine rather than submitting to the apostolic teaching.

### **Teaching and Seizing Domination**

1 Tim 2:<sup>11</sup>Let a woman learn in quietness with all subjection. <sup>12</sup> But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness. (ASV)

The gospel is not about bustling about looking for new doctrines (as in 2 Thess 4:11) but learning in quietness and sober peace. Women should be in submission to the apostolic doctrine and not involved in invention of some new one. The apostolic doctrine was delivered to (Jewish) men - and a new theology should not be formulated by women [nor should it be formulated by Gentiles – though this is not in the present verse]. To do so would be to seize unlawful dominion over men.

### **Adam and Eve**

1 Tim 2: <sup>13</sup>For Adam was formed first, then Eve. <sup>14</sup>And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.

This is a point about time priority. Does Paul thereby imply rulership? It has often been argued that the creation of the man before the woman, and the naming of the woman by the man, both

<sup>68</sup> For convenience, therefore, I refer to Paul as the originator of 1 Timothy, without denying that there is a scholarly controversy.

imply rulership. But neither of these is very clear in ancient literature – however often the points have been copied from one commentator to another. Sometimes the supremacy of primogeniture (firstborn rights) is cited. Yet, as already noted, God chose Isaac not Ishmael, Jacob not Esau, Judah not Reuben, David not Eliab, Solomon not Adonijah – and Joseph’s enthusiasm for primogeniture was apparently not shared by his father in Gen 48:14-19. In spite of the limited provision of Deut 21:15-17, primogeniture seems more honoured by God in the breach.

It is also interesting to note that, as Richard Hess has pointed out, the ancient Mesopotamian creation story of Atrahasis (roughly contemporary with Hammurabi whose famous law code had some similarities to the Hebrew one) also spoke of creation, human rebellion and a flood. In its creation story and subsequent mentions the woman was described or mentioned first – yet “other sources for understanding the society of ancient Mesopotamia witness to a patriarchal society that exceeded ancient Israel in its value of the husband and subservience of his wife.”<sup>69</sup> First mention does *not* seem to imply rulership in ancient literature.

Let us think more closely about Paul’s reference. He elsewhere refers to Eve’s sin:

2 Cor 11:<sup>3</sup>But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. <sup>4</sup>For if some one comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough. (RSV).

The command of God not to eat the forbidden fruit was given to the *‘ādām*, not to the woman. What the serpent did was to cause her to doubt or deviate from that message given originally to the *‘ādām*. This is Paul’s fear here. They will turn away from the gospel as originally delivered, to follow some new heretical “gospel” (see also Gal 1:8). The woman in Gen 3 departed from

<sup>69</sup> Hess in Pierce & Groothuis (2004) -.85.

the clear word as given to the *‘ādām* and through him to her. Having done so, she seizes the guiding role from the *‘ādām* to lead him into wrong ideas and action. It is not a teaching role as such that is at issue, but that Eve was not in submission to the word of God as originally given. Paul’s fear is that, in the Ephesus situation, some women are similarly rejecting the message as originally given to the apostles, and seizing the guiding role to lead people into false teaching.

Paul notes that it was not the original recipient of the message and command from God who was deceived. It was one who had received that command indirectly through the original recipient. Paul is not concerned that the chosen apostles of Jesus will go astray (eg John if he was near Ephesus at this time). The apostles received Jesus’ words first hand, which was why they were appointed. His concern is that those who have received this message indirectly from the apostles will be deceived into doubting it – just as the woman doubted the command which came through the *‘ādām*.

When Paul speaks of priority it is a *time* issue, not about rulership:

Rom 1:<sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

Does this mean that throughout church history Jews should take the primary position in any church? We again may remember that all of Jesus’ chosen apostles were male *Jews* – not a single woman or Gentile was chosen. We may note that to this group of male Jews, Jesus gave authority:

- (i) To be his witnesses (Jn 15:27)
- (ii) To be guided by the Spirit into establishing the truth (Jn 16:13)
- (iii) To be the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20) and “first” appointments in the church (1 Cor 12:28)

Yet the principle “first for the Jew then for the Gentile” did not mean that Gentiles were never to become teachers following that

authority.<sup>70</sup> To first “learn in silence”, submitting to the recognised apostolic authority and doctrine, is contrasted with the deception of the woman because she ignored the words of instruction given in the Genesis account to the *'ādām* before she was even formed to be a one-flesh part of him.

It is, incidentally, to a Jew, Peter, that Jesus gives the “keys to the kingdom of heaven”. But the “keys” are the words of the gospel used to open the way first for Jews (Acts 2) and then Gentiles (Acts 10). Once used, they can be used by any missionary – Junia included – to open the doors to others. It is wrong to suggest that the keys are handed down, and not even the Roman Catholics believe that (to follow the pattern of Jesus’ choice of apostles) they have to be handed down exclusively to male Jews.

The apostolic doctrine was entrusted to Jewish men. Gentiles and women need to learn in “submission” (*hypotagē*) to this true gospel. In 1 Tim 1:6 Paul has already noted that some have “wandered away” – it is not an exclusively women thing. But it is about deviation from an originally given gospel. Paul has no objection when eg Priscilla takes aside the learned Christian rabbi Apollos and “explains to him the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18.26). Priscilla has learned the true gospel “in submission” from the apostles, and is passing it on. The problem at Ephesus is not orthodox women ministers, but women who seize unlawful authority and are not in submission to the true gospel as originally given.

Is Paul generalising that all women are more gullible than men and so unfitted to lead? As this is patently empirically untrue he would have needed to be particularly stupid and unobservant to make any such generalisation; but it is absurd to foist such a thought on this passage. If Paul really held such a doctrine then how could it be that it was on Chloe’s household (1 Cor.1.11) that he relied for accurate reports and assessments of the problems in Corinth? Why did he allow the Gentile woman Lydia to “persuade” him (Acts 16:15)? Why ever did he allow Priscilla to teach the learned rabbi Apollos? Given Paul’s track history, any exegesis/hermeneutics of

<sup>70</sup> The actual comparison in Paul’s language is “Jew and Greek”, but the NIV rightly renders its real meaning in Rom 2:10 as “Jew and Gentile”.

the passage that assumes that Paul had such an understanding must be mistaken.

### **Childbearing**

1 Tim 2:<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless she will be saved though the childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.

This has been variously suggested to mean:

1. Women can be saved only through having children.
2. Women will be kept safe through childbirth if they continue in faith... (the NIV)
3. The salvation of womenkind is through “the childbearing” – the birth of the One who was born without male help.

The first of these is absurd. In any case, in the situation of 1 Cor 7 Paul had encouraged men to leave women single – hardly a loving thing to do if their individual salvation depended on having children.

The second is blatantly obviously not true. Sometimes very godly women have difficult birth experiences, and many have died in childbirth.

The only interpretation that seems to make sense is one that assumes that Paul is continuing the “Eve” references. We should also note the change from the third person singular to third person plural.<sup>71</sup> This, surely, shows that this is *not* about general motherhood: bearing “the child” means bearing the Messiah. This was *uniquely* a work of a woman – no male seed was involved – and through it the salvation in the New Covenant implies that both sons *and daughters* prophesy because in Christ there is no male or female, Jew or Gentile. Both Gentiles and women, having learned<sup>72</sup> in silence, can have authority (*exousian*) – not seized violently (*authentēin*) but properly given and a part of mutual “subjection” (Eph 5:21) to proper authorities in the church. The

<sup>71</sup> Blatantly ignored in the NIV – you have to look in the margin to see it.

<sup>72</sup> Remembering that many rabbis did not think it right for women to learn Torah at all – a view Jesus himself smashed through in his words about Mary of Bethany.



words “they will be saved” in 1 Tim 2:15 is not just about a ticket to some future spiritual-heaven, for this is a modern evangelical emasculation [?] of the Jewish concept of “salvation”. It is about that present salvation which outworks from the death-resurrection of the Messiah, with both women and men being fully a part of the people of God and acting as the body of Christ in the world.

The fact that the apostles were all male does not imply that women are worth less than men, and the single most significant act of human obedience in salvation history was when Mary said “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” (Lk 1:38). This did not, of course, make her the “queen of heaven”, and Jesus himself placed it alongside any other act of obedience to a word from God (Lk 11:28). But the fact remains that “the childbearing” resulted from an act of female obedience with no input from any male. It is from this “childbearing”, the bearing of the Messiah without male help, that comes the full New Covenant redemption of women where they are prophesied to play a full prophetic role in leading the church.

But is this reading too much into the verse? Well, we know:

- (i) Paul made the Adam-Christ comparison (Rom 5:12-14; 1 Cor 15:45).
- (ii) In Gal 3:16 he takes Abraham’s “seed” to refer to Christ, and it is likely that he likewise took the “seed” in Gen 3:15.
- (iii) The earliest church took an Eve-Mary parallel alongside the Adam-Christ parallel: the second century Irenaeus, who championed mainstream faith against the kind of Gnosticism emerging in the heresies of Timothy’s Ephesus, wrote:

Mary, having a man betrothed, and being nevertheless a virgin, by yielding obedience, became the cause of salvation, both to herself and the whole human race...For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith. [*Against Heresies* xxii.4]

### **Was the type of heresy involved in 1 Tim relevant?**

What would be interesting to know is:

1. Did the practice of the heresy involve women practitioners acting in leading roles?

2. Did the content of the heresy involve female primacy in time or position?
3. Did the content of the heresy involve any alternative view of Adam and Eve?

This might be relevant, even if we conclude that Paul makes no direct reference to any of these. If we look, for example, at the seven “letters” in Revelation to Asia Minor churches (including Ephesus) we find that, whilst there are common themes, there are spiritual comments that reflect local themes. Thus eg the unexpected coming (3:3), the pillar (3:12) the “neither hot not cold” (3:16) and the eye salve (3:1) all parallel known local stories or features. Indirect allusions were common in this era.

Paul, unfortunately, gives us little clue as to what exactly the heresy was in Timothy’s Ephesus at this time. The later “letter” in Rev 2 notes that Ephesus had been troubled by “false apostles”, and had rejected them, and mentions the “Nicolaitans” about whom we know little except that they were a group who compromised with idolatrous practices (cf Rev 2:14-15). In the pastoral letters themselves we find that Hymenaeus and others (1 Tim 1:20 2 Tim 2:18) were teaching that the resurrection was past already. In 1 Tim 4:5-7 we find that there was false teaching involving (i) demons (ii) forbidding marriage (iii) forbidding meat (iv) “profane old wives fables”.

The use of allegorical understanding as one level of interpreting OT stories was, of course, prevalent amongst both Jewish and early Christian commentators. The first century Jew Philo of Alexandria, for example, believed that Adam and Eve were actual historical people (and the Torah was absolutely inspired), but that *at another level of interpretation* “Adam” could be seen as reason, and “Eve” as passion.<sup>73</sup> Paul himself believed Isaac and Ishmael were historical people, but used them as an allegory to represent faith and works in Gal 4.

Gnostics, in contrast, believed that *all* interpretation of biblical narratives had to be made allegorically according to a secretly imparted “knowledge” – and the belief systems that emerged were

<sup>73</sup> Philo *On the Creation*. See also our *Reason, Science and Faith* pp.194f.

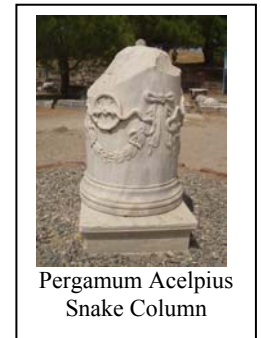
totally different from Jewish and Christian belief. Gnosticism usually held that the physical universe was the creation of a lesser deity or demiurge (Yahweh) and was inherently inferior or evil. Spiritual liberation came through this secretly imparted “knowledge” – not a cognitive knowledge but an understanding that much of religion was allegorical myth dealing with the higher spiritual forces. Denying a physical resurrection, denigrating marriage, and involvement in “fables” would all fit well with this. It is against such ideas that the letters of John emphasize *true* “knowledge” (36 times in 1 Jn) and the corporeality of the Christ (1 Jn 4:2); 2 Pet 2.16 insists that the accounts of Jesus’ life are not “cunningly devised fables” meant to teach Gnostic spiritual truth; and the pastorals letters to Timothy and Titus repeatedly speak disparagingly of such fables (1 Tim 1:4, 4:7, 2 Tim 4:4, Tit 1:4). Thus most people think that what was involved in Timothy’s Ephesus was some kind of emerging version of what later became Gnosticism.

The exact form of belief in Timothy’s Ephesus is impossible to reconstruct. Much Gnostic material (including the most famous works found at Nag Hammadi) dates from much later. Moreover, Irenaeus’ major work *Against Heresies* (c180AD) states:

a multitude of Gnostics have sprung up, and have been manifested like mushrooms...(xxix.1).

The Orphites, for example, held that the primary light spirit Bythus began a process of generations of spiritual beings. Ialdabaoth is in conflict with his mother Sophia (= wisdom). He produced a son, Nous (= mind or reason) in the form of a serpent. He also made the first man, and emptying him formed a woman. Other spiritual beings called her Eve and begat angelical sons through her. Then Sophia sent the serpent “to seduce Adam and Eve to transgress the command of Ialdabaoth.” Eve listened “as though it had proceeded from a Son of God” and yielded. Ialdabaoth, thwarted by his mother Sophia in his desire to begat sons through Eve, “secretly emptied Adam and Eve of the light by which they had been sprinkled”, and cast down his son the serpent into the lower world. Later he sent a deluge because they did not worship him, but his mother Sophia “opposed him in this point

also and Noah and his family were saved in the ark by means of the besprinkling of that light which proceeded from her.” There are reams of this kind of garbled spirit-world narrative reproduced and critiqued both in Irenaeus and in the work by Hippolytus *Refutation of All Heresies* in the early second century. Orphites, like the Naassenes described at length by Hippolytus, seem to have venerated the serpent, and thought enlightenment, not sin and death, resulted from the seduction. The snake was, of course, in Asia Minor, associated also with the god of healing Asclepius.



Pergamum Asclepius  
Snake Column

Kroeger and Kroeger collate some of the materials on this, though there is no immediate connection with Ephesus. The Orphites (as above) did have a kind of prima mother figure Sophia, though female dominance as such is not a major feature of Gnostic myth. In the immediate context of Ephesus, of course, was the great Temple to Diana or Artemis (built originally, according to legend, by the Amazons). New Christian converts burned their books of magic associated with this cult (Acts 19:19). Artemis was a daughter of Zeus, who chose her own human male lover – a fable played out at the feast of the Lord of Streets in which the priestess of Artemis pursued a man, like Artemis chasing Leimon.<sup>74</sup> There was not, however, a dominant high priestess of Artemis in Ephesus at this time, so no obvious reason to suppose that there was a direct expectancy of a dominance of females. Nor, in fact, is this what the epistle indicates anywhere else. Thus, whilst it could possibly have been a secondary thought in Paul’s mind as the comments were made, it does not offer any immediate context to the heresy.



Artemis

<sup>74</sup> Cited by Belleville in Pierce & Groothuis (2004) p.219.

Probably the best clue for us is in the passage already noted:

1 Tim 4: <sup>1</sup>Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, <sup>2</sup>speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, <sup>3</sup>forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. <sup>4</sup>For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; <sup>5</sup>for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. <sup>6</sup>If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. <sup>7</sup>But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness.... <sup>12</sup>Do not let anyone look down upon you because you are young.

Why not only “fables” but “old crones fables”? Secular philosophers could contrast sober philosophical discussion with such old crones tales;<sup>75</sup> but they knew their power in popular and mystery religions. As already noted, these were not harmless proverbs, but powerful emerging Gnostic myths that could lead into immoral lifestyles. Perhaps some older women were seeking to dominate and alter the original male-delivered apostolic teaching with such things.

We will probably never have any certain way to know the details behind 1 Tim 2:12. However we should note that Paul also says in the Pastoral letters that the elder women do have a teaching role:

Titus 2: <sup>2</sup>that the men elders be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; <sup>3</sup>the women elders likewise, that they be reverent in behaviour, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; <sup>4</sup>that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, <sup>5</sup>to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.

Of course this does not tell us what *kind* of teaching he envisaged, but this is the point. We need to think about the kind of teaching from the context. The *kind* that he spoke of in 1 Tim 2:12 involved

<sup>75</sup> Epictetus *Diss* 2:16:39; Strabo *Geog* 1:2:2-8; Lucian *Philops*.9.

domination of men, and overthrow of the doctrine delivered to male Jewish apostles.

### Summary

It may be noted then how we have approached this controversial passage:

- (1) **Exegesis:** We looked carefully at literary context, word meanings, etc to see what was being said to Timothy.
- (2) **Hermeneutics:** We fitted this into the general plan of eschatology, which includes eg “to the Jew first and also to the Greek”, but which also includes the equality of Jews and Greek (and male and female) in Christ.
- (3) **Hermeneutics:** Application to today means we all remain subject (*hypotagē*) to the good-news as once given by the Jewish male apostles, and now enshrined in the NT; but rightful authority (*exousian*) (not wrongful seizing of authority (*authentian*)) can now be exercised by Jew and Gentile, master or slave, male or female, because in Christ they are equal.

In none of these conclusions do we have to “adapt to modern culture”. We do not need some dodgy “redemptive movement hermeneutic”<sup>76</sup> which tends to hint that we today may know better than the divine Christ himself on issues like slavery and egalitarianism. God *did* speak to us in these last days, the final word in his Son – there is no progressive revelation beyond the Christ. But church leadership was never meant to be restricted to Jewish males. It is open to Gentiles and women as long as all those who follow accept in submission the apostolic doctrine given by those original Jewish male apostles.

<sup>76</sup> As advocated by William J Webb.

## Part 7: Leadership Today

### 7.1 The Controversy Today

#### Introduction

Churches today vary both in their style and manner of leadership and in the extent to which women can be involved. Some continue to bar women from the highest levels of church leadership, though churches like the Methodists, Free Methodists, Nazarenes, Salvation Army, Baptists, and United Reformed have women leaders and ministers – albeit these may be few in number. The Church of England began ordaining women in 1994, and voted in 2006 to allow ordination of female bishops – albeit in face of opposition from some anglo-catholic and evangelical groups.

So what kind of pattern today is in harmony with the New Testament one for church leadership and the role of women in it?

No church today reflects completely the NT pattern of leadership, if, indeed, that NT pattern was itself standardized. For one thing there are no “apostles” in the sense of the twelve+Paul. For another, we now have the agreed New Testament Scriptures, whereas in the early church the determination of doctrine (albeit female figures like Priscilla were involved) was far more crucial. Can this system be replicated? The British Brethren church, for example, tried to do so, but of course could not – and the sober contemplative Brethren meetings did not look very much like the kind of meal/get-together/casual-hubbub of prophecy, tongues, etc, which is pictured in 1 Corinthians.

Actually this is not really a problem. Clearly some of the features of the early church are, in any case, cultural. What a church should do is to look for the features that are *transcultural* and basic to spiritual growth and health, and ensure that these are fulfilled in their own culture and context.

So clearly the leadership in the NT church is generally male. What is the more noteworthy is the extent to which, in Paul's churches, females are identified in leadership roles. What we then need to do is to see whether we are violating any transcultural principles in our own actual systems today.

The following half dozen pages will attempt to do this for my own Free Methodist church – one in which we do clearly allow suitable females to become “elders”, “superintendents” or “bishops”, but in which the overwhelming majority of “ordained” people in practice are male. Hopefully the comments, although specific to our own offices, will resonate with some other church parallels, so the comments will be relevant to other denominations too.

#### Ministers

The Free Methodist handbook (p.126) identifies “ministers” thus:

Ordained ministers commit themselves to equipping the whole body of believers to these ends. Biblically and historically, they are set apart for the study and proclamation of the Word of God, intercessory prayer, the winning of persons to Christ, the administration of the sacraments and the defence of the gospel.

Thinking about female “ministers”, we should note the following:

##### **(1) The Term “Minister”:**

Phoebe is termed a “minister” in the church, the male form of the word is used, and there is no indication that she was a “minister” in any sense different from Paul, Tychichus and Epaphrus.

##### **(2) The study and proclamation of the word of God:**

The phrase the “Word of God” appears throughout the Acts (eg Acts 4:31; 6:2; 6:7; 8:14; 11:1; 12:24; 13:5; 13:7; 13:44; 13:46; 17:13; 18:11). In context it basically means presenting the good news of the Kingdom of God, ie evangelism. Junia was an “apostle” ie a missionary, and Euodia & Syntyche were fellow evangelists who laboured with Paul. Plainly this is a female role.

##### **(3) Intercessory Prayer:**

We note that Paul actually met Lydia at a women's prayer meeting, and both women and men led intercessory prayer in Corinth and in Ephesus to which 1 Tim was written.

**(4) The Winning of Persons to Christ:**

Again, Euodia, Syntyche, Junia, and probably Priscilla were involved in this. There is not the slightest hint that it is a “male role”, nor that they could talk only to women.

**(5) The Administration of the Sacraments:**

Here, of course, the modern Free Methodist church (like other holiness churches) departs from John Wesley. To him, administering the “sacraments” was a function of an ordained priest, the other functions were all those of lay preachers (including women). Modern denominations generally put the two together in a way Wesley specifically denied.

But what are the “sacraments”? The word “*sacrament*” comes from Latin, and is generally part of the later church misunderstanding of the Greek word *mysterion*. As it is not a biblical word it is not altogether clear what is meant, but traditionally it includes the Lord’s Supper, baptisms, and marriages. So let us consider these three functions.

**Lord’s Supper:** In the early church they “broke bread from house to house” (Acts 2:46) and since at least one church met in the house of a woman it seems unlikely that women did not “officiate”. In truth, in Corinth *no one* seems to have officiated, which is why it was such a shambles. The idea that we need someone “ordained” to “officiate” may be a relic from ideas of “priesthood” and later transubstantiation/consubstantiation that developed in the Catholic and through this in Reformed churches. John Wesley himself, as an Anglican devoted to the 39 Articles, retained Anglican ideas of ordination, which were inherited from Catholicism. His lay people, as noted, were *preachers* not men ordained to conduct sacraments.<sup>77</sup> But there is no indication in the New Testament that a particular class of person had to lead a breaking of bread or communion service. Obviously, bearing in mind 1 Cor 11:2 a communion (like a prayer meeting) needs to be done reverently, and church may wish to appoint people to ensure this. But, given that Scripture itself contains no grounds for restriction, if a church decides to restrict it, then it will be the

<sup>77</sup> See also Synder (1980) ch.8.

church’s decision as to the nature of the restriction and whether this is gender-independent.

**Baptism:** There is no indication in Scripture that administering baptism is especially restricted to any class of persons, and we are seldom told even who perform it. The key thing is that whoever does it acts *on behalf of and representing the church*. It is for the church to decide who can act in this capacity.

**Marriages:** As far as concerns marriages, there is no indication that Paul or the early church leaders officiate in marriages, and 1 Cor 7 makes it clear that as far as Paul is concerned a marriage contracted under pagan law is just as valid. The particular form wedding ceremonies may take is purely cultural, and there is no biblical justification to restrict taking marriages to “ordained ministers”, nor to men. Again if the church chooses to make any such restriction, it is purely for our convenience and the church can decide to let appointed women as well as men officiate.<sup>78</sup>

**(6) The Defence of the Gospel:**

In terms of defending the faith, Junia is described as a “fellow prisoner”. “Apologetics” (ie writing in defence of the rationality of faith) is not particularly cited in the NT as a specific role, but there is no reason to suppose that women as well as men could not perform it well.

**Overseers**

In the Free Methodist system:

Election to elder’s orders constitutes the acknowledgement of the annual conference that the person so elected has met all the biblical (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1) and ecclesiastical requirements to serve as an overseer in the church. Only an ordained elder may serve as a ministerial delegate to the General Conference, a conference superintendent or a bishop.

Three terms are used here: “elder” “overseer” “bishop”. The FM handbook seems to use “overseer” to mean “elder”, and a “bishop”

<sup>78</sup> This was, of course, a point made strongly during the Anglican/Episcopalian synod debate over admitting women to what they call the “priesthood”. The NT concept is priesthood of all believers, so any specialism is the church’s decision.

is an elder higher in a hierarchy of elder-superintendent-bishop. The term “licensed pastor”, just to add to the terminology, means an unordained minister appointed to pastor a church.

### **Correlating with Biblical Terms**

Firstly, we have to note that these FM terms cannot directly correlate with the biblical terms. The NT uses two terms: (i) “*presbyteros*” (= elder) and (ii) “*episkopos*” (= overseer or bishop). There are fairly clear indications that they refer to the same group of people. The term *episkopos*, however, is a more general word for office used of Judas’ apostleship in Acts 1:20, and the verbal form is used in Acts 6:3 of the selection/appointment of men to serve at tables (ie a social function). The accent may be on caring and shepherding – as when Jesus is called the “shepherd and *episkopos* of your souls (*psyches*)” (1 Pet 2:25). Acts 20:28 again links these functions and applies them to the “elders of the church” (20:17).

We may also note:

- (i) Paul instructs Timothy to appoint “elders” in every church, it seems unlikely that there would be only one in a church – though perhaps in a local house-church there might be. There is obviously no indication that there was a “senior pastor” in churches.
- (ii) It is unlikely that many of them would have been “full time” (actually Paul wasn’t, he made tents for a living).
- (iii) It seems unlikely that Nympha or Lydia would have been excluded from any such authoritative role in their own houses in the culture of that time.

### **Taking Care**

The essential function of “taking care” implied in the term *episkopos* is actually the duty of everyone in the church. Just as we all (male and female) act as “priests” mediating God to each other, so also we all “take care” of each other:

Heb 12: <sup>14</sup>Pursue peace with all people, and the holiness without which no one will see God, taking care (*episkopountes*) lest anyone fall short of the grace of God...

### **An Imprecise Office**

This is really why the biblical offices of elder/presbyter are “fuzzy” or imprecise. They are “appointed” but the term used is a general one for appointment – it does not mean some kind of almost magical ceremony only to be reversed by a similar operation. No disrespect is intended to other traditions in saying this, but the New Testament church simply does not divide people into “ordained” and “laity”. The “appointment” of elders seems to be purely local - *some* group of people has to speak for any given church. But it fuzzes over into a general idea that senior people will give leadership. This is why Timothy is told (1 Tim 4:12) to let no one despise his youth, because he received his gift through the laying on of hands of the elders (4:14). Almost immediately Paul tells him “Do not rebuke a (male) elder but exhort him as a father.” (5:1). Then Paul adds that he should “Treat female elders as mothers, younger women as sisters...” This is here translated provocatively as “female elders”, but the point is that it is only the context that tells us whether the word is meant in the usual sense of an older man/woman, or as a specific “post”.

Undoubtedly Paul uses “male” language in describing the “overseer” in 1 Timothy – but then he often uses male gender language but means it inclusively. It is only when he wants to make some particular gender-specific point that he remembers to refer to female gender. Women too, then, are “sons of God”, and the logic of this would be that they have the same privileges as male sons. In 1 Tim 4:12 Paul says “let ministers be husband of one wife” yet, as we have noted, Phoebe is described as a “minister” and presumably did not have one wife (neither, strictly, did the apparently wifeless Paul). It seems, as noted, unlikely that 1 Tim 4:11 refers to ministers’ wives, especially as it comes *before* the reference to ministers being “one-woman men” in vs.12. This is the point where he remembers that women too can be ministers, but at this time there was no feminized word “deaconess” (this was invented later). Phoebe was a minister, not a “minister-ess”.

In 1 Tim 4:4 the overseer must rule well his household and have *his children* in submission, and 4:12 has the (man) minister ruling

*his children* – not “his own wife and children”. Since, as noted, women were “despots of the household”, it is doubtful how far a patriarchal model is assumed.

Later in the same chapter we find (1 Tim 5:17):

Let the **elders** who **rule well** be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine

One presumes that Priscilla “laboured in the word and doctrine” if she was really able to help put Apollos straight. So was she a (female) elder? The softer word for “rule” is again used in the church context here.

## Oversight in the Free Methodist Church

### Oversight

It is not entirely clear who exercises the oversight function in the local FM Church (and this applies to many other churches). The Heb 12:14 principle would, of course, indicate that in the *pastoral* sense it should be everyone. When it comes to the decision-making, effectively in the FM church it has been the official board – though in some churches now it might be the pastor’s cabinet since the system is more amorphous. There does not seem to be any particular function that involves decisions by the minister acting alone – the assumption is generally of corporate leadership involving so called “lay” people as well as “ordained” – though the term “lay” is itself, of course, a non-biblical word. In Biblical terms, therefore, it is not possible to simply identify FM ministers with “elders” or “overseers”, and assume that no one else in the church shares this role. The overseeing function may be led by the pastor, but it resides in a church group which includes “lay” people, and both men and women. The identification of these people as “elders” in NT terms is not straightforward either – because some of it may in practice depend on the person rather than the post as such. This nebulosity, actually, may well reflect a parallel though not identical nebulosity in NT times.

### Preaching and Teaching

As far as concerns preaching and teaching, this is a function that Ministers spearhead (and in the UK increasingly dominate), but which traditionally has also been a function of “Lay Ministers”.

This latter function was gradually amended through successive handbooks from the concept of a lay preacher/teacher until it became so amorphous as to be meaningless; it has now been effectively officially abolished even though our UK churches retain the title anyway! Since Phoebe was a minister, it is hard to see how women could not be involved in this role. “Lay ministers” were, of course, “appointed”, and since the biblical word “ordain” simply means to be appointed (as were the ministers in Acts 6), the terminology becomes fuzzy.

The bottom line is that there would be no clear rationale in excluding, on any biblical grounds, women from the particular post of “elder” as defined in the FM church system.

## So From What Would We Exclude Women?

### Who Should we Exclude?

We should definitely exclude any not willing to be in submission (*hypotagē*) to the message of the gospel as originally delivered to Jesus’ chosen male Jewish apostles (as per 2 Cor.9:13 and 1 Tim 2:11). We should also exclude any who wish to teach “old-crones Gnostic-fables” in order to seize dominating sway over men. Once we have filtered these out, we would also need to think carefully about any married women who are not living in healthy biblical relationship with their spouse or who have spouses who are not supportive (though come to think of it, the same usually applies to male candidates) as this would make their task difficult. In practice, “ordination” of married people in our church today involves dedication of both husband and wife – and this would apply whoever was to be the “ordained” person of the two.

### What is left open?

It is not possible to think of a present-day church leadership post that should not be open to a suitable woman. There is no biblical or rational warrant for drawing a distinction between a minister and elder, an elder and senior minister, a senior minister and a superintendent, of a superintendent and a bishop. All believers are “priests”, church leadership is consensual and collective, and all teaching involves being subject to and expounding a gospel already delivered through the apostles and enshrined in Scripture.

In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female. This is not a future post-resurrection vision - it is a present situation. The gospel message was originally delivered to apostles who were all Jews, free, and male. The message to the first-formed 'ādām was later known to the woman; in parallel the NT Gospel message became later known as enshrined in Scripture. Having come first to the Jew, it came also to the Gentile. All church leadership positions are open to Gentiles, and all are open to women. This is not going "beyond" the New Testament, it is certainly not assuming that we know better than Jesus or Paul, it is just applying principles they already applied.

Let us pray that in our own rising generation we have no fewer than in NT times of modern Lydia's, Chloe's, Priscilla's, Phoebe's, Nympha's, Junia's – and even Euodia's and Syntyche's (though we hope they will get on better!). Let us prayer that we have no fewer Susannah Wesley's, Mary Bosanquet Fletcher's, Phoebe Palmer's or Catherine Booth's than our forefathers (and foremothers). We need them on church boards, on pastors' cabinets, as lay and as trained and ordained ministers, superintendents and bishops. Let us live out Kingdom Values where we are all sons of God through faith, and in Christ there is no Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female.

*Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...*

*Susannah Wesley, John Wesley's mother, was running a kind of housegroup and her minister husband Samuel felt she should stop...*

*She wrote to him:*

*"If after all this you think fit to dissolve this assembly do not tell me you desire me to do it, for that will not satisfy my conscience; but send your positive command in such full and express terms as may absolve me from all guilt and punishment for neglecting this opportunity for doing good when you and I shall appear before the great and awful tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

*Susannah Wesley 1711*



*"I know no want but that of more grace I have a husband in everything suited to me He bears with all my faults and failings in a manner that continually reminds me of the text, 'Love your wives as Christ loved the church.' His constant endeavour is to make me happy; his strongest desire is for my spiritual growth He is, in every sense of the word, the man my highest reason chooses to obey."*

*Mary Bosanquet Fletcher 1782*



*"We believe that hundreds of conscientious, sensitive Christian women have actually suffered more under the slowly crucifying process to which they have been subjected by men who bear the Christian name than many a martyr has endured in passing through the flames."*

*Phoebe Palmer 1859*

*"It is clear then that lalein may mean something different from mere speaking, and that to use this word in a prohibition does not imply that absolute silence or abstinence from speaking is enjoined; but, on the contrary, that the prohibition applies to an improper kind of speaking, which is to be understood, not from the word itself, but, as Dr. Robinson says, from "the context."*

*Catherine Booth 1860*







"Men had better busy themselves  
in building up the temple of God,  
than to use their time in pushing  
from the scaffold their sisters,  
who are both able and willing to  
work with them side by side."  
B.T. Roberts 1891

## Bibliography

- Beck & Blomberg (2001) James R Beck & Craig L Blomberg *Two Views of Women in Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan)
- Brown (1986) Colin Brown (trans/ed.). *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. [4 vols]. (Exeter: Paternoster).
- Bruce (1982) F F Bruce *Commentary on Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans)
- Cranfield (1975) C E B Cranfield *Romans* (2 vols) (Edinburgh: T & T Clark)
- Davis (1966) D B Davis *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Cornell Univ Press: Cornell)
- Deesley (2000) Alex R G Deesley *Marriage & Divorce in the Bible and the Church* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill)
- Dunn (1988) Word Bible Commentary: *Romans* (2 vols) (Dallas: Word)
- Fee & Stuart (1993) Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its (sic) Worth*. (Bletchley: Scripture Union)
- Fee (1953:1987) Gordon Fee *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans)
- Fee (1988) Gordon D Fee *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* (Massachusetts: Hendrikson)
- Foh (1979) Susan Foh *Women & the Word of God* (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co)
- Grudem (2004) Wayne Grudem *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Oregon: Multnomah)
- Haskins (1993) Susan Haskins *Mary Magdalene, Myth and Metaphor* (HarperCollins, London)
- Hurley (1981) James B Hurley *Man & Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Leicester, IVP)

- Jewett (1976) Paul K Jewett *Man as male and female* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans)
- Keener (2004) Craig A Keener *Paul, Women and Wives* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson)
- Kittel (1964-76) G Kittel and G Friedrich (eds) *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [10 vols]. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76. Liddell, *A Greek-English Lexicon*,
- Klein et al (1993) William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg & Robert L. Hubbard. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. (Dallas: Word)
- Kostenberger et al (1995) Andreas Kostenberger, Thomas Schreiner and H Scott Baldwin *Women in the Church...* (Grand Rapids; Baker)
- Kroeger & Kroeger (1992) Richard Clark Kroeger & Catherine Clark Kroeger *I Suffer not a Woman* (Grand Rapids; Baker)
- Marshall (1999) I H Marshall *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans)
- Marshall (1999) I H Marshall *The Pastoral Epistles* (London; T & T Clark)
- Marston (1984) Paul Marston *God and the Family* (1984: Eastbourne, Kingsway)
- Marston & Forster (2000) Paul Marston & Roger Forster *Reason, Science and Faith* (Eugene, Wipf & Stock)
- Melton (1991) J G Melton, "The Encyclopedia of American Religions," Triumph Books
- Osborne (1997) Grant R Osborne. *The Hermeneutical Spiral*. (Illinois: InterVarsity)
- Pape (1977) Dorothy Pape *God & Women* (London, Mowbrays)
- Pierce & Groothuis (2004) Ronald W Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis *Discovering Biblical Equality* Downers Grove; IVP)
- Roberts (1891) Benjamin Titus Roberts *Ordaining Women* (Rochester, Ernest Christian Publications)
- Quinn (1990) Jerome Quinn *The Letter to Titus* (New York, Doubleday)

- Sanday & Headlam (1902) W Sanday and A C Headlam *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark)
- Snyder (1980) Howard Snyder *The Radical Wesley* (Downers Grove, IVP)
- Snyder (2006) Howard Snyder *Populist Saints* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans).
- Thiselton (2000) Anthony C Thiselton. *The first Epistle to the Corinthians : a commentary on the Greek text*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans).
- Trombley (1985) Charles Trombley *Who Said Women Can't Teach?* (Gainville: Bridge-Logos).
- VanGemeran (1996) William A VanGemeran (ed.). *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*. [5 vols]. (Cumbria: Paternoster).
- Webb (2004) William J Webb *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals* (Downers Grove; IVP)
- White (1896) A D White *A History of the Warfare of Science With Theology in Christendom* (reprinted by Dover, 1955, 1960)
- Winter (2001) Bruce Winter *After Paul Left Corinth* (Carlisle: Paternoster)
- Winter (2003) Bruce W Winter *Roman Wives, Roman Widows* (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans)
- Wire (1990) Antioinnette Clark Wire *The Corinthian Women Prophets* (Minneapolis; Augsburg).
- Witherington (1998) Ben Witherington III *The Paul Quest* (Downers Grove; IVP)
- Wright (1992) George "Knight III *The Pastoral Epistles* (Carlisle; Paternoster).

## Index

'ādām, 69, 70, 71, 127, 143  
 'iš, 69, 70  
 'iššā, 69, 70  
 Abigail, 72, 86  
 Abraham, 75, 84, 129  
 Adam and Eve, 81, 84, 124, 130, 131  
*adelphoi*, 49, 62, 64  
 Agabus, 37, 38  
 Alexander, 113  
 Anabaptists, 29, 31  
 Andronicus, 57, 58, 97  
 angels, 98, 102, 103  
 Anna, 37, 38, 75, 106  
 Antioch, 37, 59, 61, 62, 63, 64, 68  
 Apollos, 50, 66, 94, 110, 115, 127, 141  
 apostle, 27, 32, 39, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 66, 82, 97, 105, 117, 136  
 apostles, 17, 23, 32, 38, 39, 46, 49, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 61, 62, 63, 67, 68, 76, 90, 97, 115, 126, 127, 129, 130, 134, 135, 142  
 Apostolic Constitutions, 28  
 apostolos, 54, 56  
 Apphia, 93  
 Aquila, 86, 93, 94  
 Aramaic, 18, 59, 60  
 Aristotle, 26  
 Artemis, 132  
 Augustine, 29, 69, 102  
 Augustus Caesar, 100  
 authentēin, 112, 117, 119, 120, 121, 128  
 authentēō, 117, 119, 120, 121  
 authentēs, 118, 120, 121  
 B T Roberts, 13, 31, 53, 76  
 baptism, 54, 138  
 Barnabas, 37, 45, 55, 57, 62, 63, 65, 66, 67, 68  
 Belleville, 118, 119, 120, 121, 132  
 Bible College, 10, 16  
 breaking of bread, 11, 54, 108, 137  
 Cappodocians, 31  
 Catherine Booth, 13, 90, 112, 143  
 cheirotoneō, 45  
 childbirth, 71, 128  
 Chloe, 90, 94, 110, 127, 143  
 Christ, 10, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 32, 36, 37, 38, 43, 46, 53, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 65, 67, 77, 78, 80, 81, 83, 89, 90, 94, 95, 97, 98, 99, 115, 116,

122, 125, 126, 128, 129, 131, 133, 134, 136, 137, 143  
 Christian leadership, 47  
 Chrysostom, 28, 57  
 church leadership, v, 10, 11, 33, 43, 66, 91, 134, 135, 142  
 Cleanthes, 110  
 complementarian, 9  
 complementarianism, 89  
 consensual leadership, 63  
 consensus, 45, 61, 62, 63, 68, 89  
 Corinth, 12, 93, 94, 99, 109, 110, 123, 127, 136, 137, 148  
 Corinthians, 18, 28, 38, 62, 80, 98, 100, 103, 104, 116, 135, 146, 147, 148  
 Council of Jerusalem, 67  
 Cranfield, 97, 146  
 cultural, 14, 16, 17, 20, 23, 31, 101, 103, 107, 109, 112, 114, 135, 138  
 David, 71, 86, 125  
 deaconess, 53, 140  
 deacons, 42, 51, 67  
 Deborah, 34, 35, 45, 72, 86, 90, 91, 105  
 democracy, 62  
 diakonos, 50, 96  
 dream, 44, 45, 75, 106  
 dreams, 44, 45, 75, 106  
 Dunn, 95, 96, 97, 146  
 egalitarians, 10, 78, 88, 89, 120  
 ekklesia, 62, 105, 107  
 eklegomai, 61  
 elders, 21, 36, 40, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 53, 58, 62, 63, 66, 67, 68, 91, 101, 133, 136, 139, 140, 141  
 Epaphras, 95, 96  
 Epaphroditus, 57  
 Epaphrus, 50, 136  
 Ephesus, 40, 46, 51, 53, 66, 113, 114, 123, 124, 126, 127, 129, 130, 131, 132, 136  
 epileomai, 49  
 Epimenides, 110  
 episkopos, 39, 40, 50, 66, 67, 139  
 Esther, 72  
 Euodia, 136, 137, 143  
 Euripides, 121  
 Europe, 66, 92  
 evangelical, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 22, 32, 89, 99, 113, 114, 129, 135  
 evangelicals, 18, 19, 22, 23, 123  
 exousian, 98, 101, 103, 107, 108, 117, 120, 124, 128, 134  
 fables, 53, 122, 130, 131, 133, 142

family, v, 9, 11, 72, 76, 86, 88, 115, 132  
 Fee and Stuart, 15, 16, 20  
 female elders, 49  
 female leadership, 21, 90  
 Free Methodist, v, 11, 12, 13, 14, 136, 137, 138, 141  
 Gamaliel, 60  
 Gentile, 62, 63, 66, 76, 92, 93, 96, 109, 126, 127, 128, 134, 143  
 Gentiles, 46, 51, 54, 55, 56, 59, 63, 65, 76, 94, 100, 101, 124, 126, 127, 128, 143  
 Gnosticism, 129, 131  
 Greek, 14, 18, 19, 24, 43, 51, 60, 65, 72, 78, 79, 82, 83, 90, 99, 102, 104, 109, 110, 112, 114, 115, 118, 119, 121, 126, 127, 134, 137, 147, 148  
 Greeks, 87, 109, 110  
 Gregory of Nyssa, 28  
 Grudem, 10, 31, 32, 78, 79, 82, 89, 117, 118, 119, 122, 146  
 gynaikas, 51, 112  
 gynē, 18, 112  
 Hannah, 72  
 head, 41, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 88, 91, 98, 99, 100, 103, 108, 117  
 headcoverings, 99  
 Hebrew, 14, 19, 59, 60, 69, 70, 72, 82  
 Hellenists, 60  
 hermeneutical, 16, 17, 20, 23, 39, 103  
 Hess, 70, 125  
 heterae, 100  
 hierarchical, 9, 90  
 hierarchichalists, 89  
 Hippolytus, 132  
 household, 27, 42, 43, 82, 83, 92, 93, 94, 108, 116, 127, 140  
 Huldah, 35, 45, 86, 91  
 husband, 34, 35, 40, 51, 52, 67, 72, 75, 76, 77, 78, 81, 82, 83, 85, 87, 88, 89, 91, 93, 94, 99, 100, 103, 105, 106, 111, 114, 116, 121, 125, 140, 142  
 husbands, 13, 42, 51, 52, 77, 84, 85, 87, 88, 90, 101, 104, 107, 111, 114, 133  
 Hymenaeus, 113, 130  
 hypotagē, 116, 127, 134, 142  
 hypotassō, 83, 85, 90, 91, 111, 116  
 Ignatius, 28  
 Irenaeus, 129, 131, 132  
 Isaac, 71, 125, 130  
 Jacob, 71, 125

James, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 63, 65, 68, 146  
 Jerusalem Council, 62  
 Jesus, 9, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 31, 32, 36, 37, 38, 40, 43, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 65, 66, 67, 69, 70, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 83, 84, 88, 90, 94, 106, 111, 115, 122, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 131, 133, 139, 142, 143  
 Jew, 24, 27, 38, 65, 72, 82, 90, 94, 100, 105, 109, 115, 120, 122, 126, 127, 128, 130, 134, 143  
 Jewish, 33, 46, 47, 59, 60, 61, 67, 69, 72, 73, 75, 76, 92, 94, 101, 105, 106, 109, 115, 116, 118, 124, 127, 129, 130, 131, 134, 142  
 Jews, 43, 44, 46, 51, 54, 59, 60, 76, 101, 109, 110, 126, 127, 134, 143  
 John, 12, 14, 28, 30, 37, 38, 54, 65, 73, 75, 81, 84, 126, 131, 137  
 Joseph, 71, 125  
 Josephus, 118  
 Josiah, 35  
 Judah, 71, 125  
 Judas, 37, 39, 54, 63, 139  
 Julia, 94, 97  
 Junia, 57, 58, 59, 67, 90, 97, 105, 127, 136, 137, 138, 143  
 Kingdom of God, 16, 17, 26, 111, 136  
 Kingdom of Heaven, 24  
 Klein et al, 16, 147  
 Kostenberger, 121, 147  
 Kroeger, 120, 121, 132, 147  
 kybernesis, 41, 42  
 leadership, 9, 12, 21, 33, 35, 41, 42, 43, 46, 50, 52, 59, 62, 63, 67, 76, 79, 135, 136, 140, 141, 142  
 Levites, 36  
 literary context, 19, 114, 123, 134  
 LXX, 60, 115, 120  
 Lydia, 86, 90, 92, 93, 94, 105, 109, 114, 127, 136, 139, 143  
 male leadership, 10  
 marriages, 86, 90, 137, 138  
 Marshall, 51, 53, 83, 124, 147  
 Mary, 59, 74, 75, 94, 97, 106, 128, 129, 146  
 Mary Bosanquet Fletcher, 12, 13, 143  
 masters, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 90

Mennonites, 30  
 minister, 12, 13, 25, 39,  
     50, 53, 67, 91, 95, 96,  
     101, 105, 108, 133, 136,  
     139, 140, 141, 142  
 Miriam, 34, 72, 105  
 missionary, 37, 58, 59,  
     127, 136  
 Moses, 15, 33, 35  
 Mrs Crosby, 12  
 neither male nor female,  
     24, 65, 90, 115  
 New Covenant, 15, 35, 36,  
     37, 38, 44, 45, 50, 63,  
     75, 76, 87, 103, 106,  
     107, 114, 115, 128, 129  
 Noadiah, 35  
 normative, 20  
 Nympha, 93, 105, 139,  
     143  
 oikodespotein, 42, 43  
 Olympas, 94  
 Onesimus, 25, 27  
 Origen, 69  
 Orphites, 131, 132  
 overseers, 46, 141  
 pastoral epistles, 26, 96,  
     123  
 patriarchal, 9, 34, 74, 79,  
     84, 86, 125, 141  
 patriarchalism, 11  
 Paul, iii, 12, 18, 19, 21,  
     22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27,  
     28, 29, 31, 32, 38, 39,  
     40, 41, 42, 43, 45, 46,  
     48, 50, 51, 52, 55, 56,  
     57, 58, 59, 60, 62, 63,  
     65, 66, 67, 68, 71, 72,  
     76, 77, 80, 81, 82, 83,  
     84, 85, 87, 88, 90, 91,  
     92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97,  
     99, 100, 101, 102, 103,  
     104, 105, 107, 108, 109,  
     110, 111, 112, 113, 114,  
     115, 116, 117, 118, 119,  
     120, 121, 123, 124, 125,  
     126, 127, 128, 129, 130,  
     132, 133, 135, 136, 138,  
     139, 140, 143, 147, 148  
 Peter, 39, 44, 45, 46, 47,  
     48, 54, 55, 59, 63, 84,  
     87, 97, 107, 110, 127  
 Pharisees, 18  
 Philemon, 27, 28, 93  
 Philetus, 113  
 Philip the evangelist, 38,  
     107  
 Philo, 70, 72, 130  
 Phoebe, 12, 13, 21, 50, 53,  
     59, 90, 91, 95, 96, 97,  
     105, 136, 140, 142, 143  
 Pierce & Groothuis, 10,  
     12, 22, 23, 31, 32, 70,  
     83, 90, 119, 122, 125,  
     132, 147  
 Plain meaning, 15  
 Plutarch, 79, 100  
 poimainō, 46, 49  
 politically correct, 42, 64,  
     115

preach, 10, 13, 53  
 presbeterion, 43  
 presbyteras, 49  
 presbyteros, 40, 43, 139  
 presbytēs, 41  
 priests, 36, 37, 43, 139,  
     142  
 primogeniture, 71, 125  
 Prisca, 93, 94, 97, 112  
 Priscilla, 21, 86, 93, 94,  
     105, 112, 115, 127, 135,  
     137, 141, 143  
 progressive revelation, 17,  
     21, 134  
 prohistemi, 41, 42, 50, 82  
 prophet, 17, 34, 35, 37,  
     38, 44, 45, 75, 105  
 prostatitis, 95  
 Quakers, 30  
 Qumran, 102  
 Rabbinic, 72  
 Reformed theologians, 13,  
     24, 29  
 Richard Baxter, 29  
 Roman Empire, 26, 103  
 root fallacy, 19, 118  
 Ruth, 12, 72  
 sacraments, 12, 136, 137  
 Sadducees, 18  
 Samaritan, 49, 72, 75  
 Sarah, 72, 84  
 Scripture, 11, 14, 17, 20,  
     22, 31, 33, 34, 47, 81,  
     86, 135, 137, 138, 142,  
     146  
 shepherd, 40, 46, 48, 49,  
     66, 139  
 Shepherd of Hermas, 28  
 Silas, 37, 57, 58, 63, 65  
 slave traders, 27  
 slavery, 13, 21, 22, 23, 25,  
     26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31,  
     91, 134  
 slaves, 17, 23, 24, 25, 27,  
     28, 29, 30, 40, 42, 90,  
     91, 101, 106, 107, 109  
 sola scriptura, 14  
 Solomon, 71, 125  
 sons, 39, 44, 65, 75, 106,  
     115, 128, 131, 140, 143  
 sons of Korah, 35  
 sophists, 110  
 Spirit, 18, 34, 37, 39, 40,  
     44, 45, 46, 54, 61, 62,  
     63, 65, 66, 75, 77, 106,  
     107, 110, 126, 133  
*stola*, 88, 103, 123  
 submission, 42, 47, 82, 89,  
     112, 113, 116, 124, 126,  
     127, 134, 140, 142  
 Susannah Wesley, 12, 90,  
     143  
 Syntyche, 136, 137, 143  
 Talmud, 10, 72  
 Targum, 60  
 Temple, 36, 110, 132  
 Tertullian, 28, 102  
 the childbearing, 128, 129  
 the multitude, 61, 62  
 the Twelve, 58, 59

- Thiselton, 102, 103, 148  
 Timothy, 22, 42, 47, 50,  
   53, 56, 57, 58, 65, 113,  
   115, 117, 120, 124, 129,  
   130, 131, 134, 138, 139,  
   140, 146  
 Titus, 25, 40, 45, 49, 56,  
   57, 67, 113, 115, 123,  
   133, 138, 146, 147  
 Torah, 35, 60, 105, 128,  
   130  
 traditional, 9, 11, 100  
 transcultural, 17, 23, 32,  
   86, 88, 103, 135, 136  
 Tryphaena, 94  
 Tryphosa, 94, 97  
 Tychichus, 50, 96, 136  
 Tychicus, 95  
 Webb, 22, 23, 31, 32, 89,  
   134, 148  
 Wesleyan-Arminian, 11,  
   31  
 wife, 18, 34, 35, 40, 42,  
   43, 51, 52, 55, 67, 69,  
   72, 75, 76, 77, 81, 82,  
   83, 85, 87, 88, 89, 91,  
   94, 99, 100, 103, 105,  
   106, 114, 116, 121, 125,  
   140, 141, 142  
 Winter, 99, 100, 101, 102,  
   110, 112, 123, 148  
 wives, 27, 51, 52, 53, 77,  
   84, 85, 87, 88, 90, 101,  
   104, 109, 114, 116, 130,  
   133, 140  
 woman, 12, 18, 34, 35, 38,  
   42, 49, 51, 59, 61, 66,  
   69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74,  
   75, 76, 78, 83, 86, 87,  
   92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97,  
   98, 100, 101, 103, 104,  
   105, 109, 111, 112, 114,  
   117, 121, 123, 124, 125,  
   126, 127, 128, 131, 137,  
   140, 142  
 Word of God, 136, 146