

FROM EQUALITY TO EXCLUSION: WOMEN'S ROLES IN THE FIRST-CENTURY
CHURCH

by

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Table of Contents

Part I: Preface and orientation to the New Testament world	4
<i>Community, Honor, and Shame</i>	5
<i>Procreation and Women's Honor</i>	6
<i>The Woman's Workplace</i>	8
<i>Laws Regarding Women's Roles</i>	9
Part II: Paul's view of women	13
<i>Disputed Pauline Writings</i>	12
<i>Pseudonymity</i>	15
<i>What does Paul say about women?</i>	16
<i>1 Corinthians 14:34-35</i>	18
<i>1 Corinthians 11:2-16</i>	20
<i>Galatians 3:28</i>	26
<i>Women in Paul's Ministry</i>	28
<i>Phoebe</i>	28
<i>Junia</i>	30
Part III: Trajectory, the Modern Church, and Conclusions	35
<i>Connecting the Past and Present</i>	33
<i>Conclusions</i>	35

Part I: Preface and orientation to the New Testament world

One summer in eastern North Carolina, I was sitting on an old school bus, repurposed for the camp at which I was currently working. I sat next to a woman who had come with a group from Maryland; we were on our way back from a canoeing trip. She and I were debating who in a marriage should make the decisions: husband or wife; the woman argued that the husband should make all final and important choices. I told the woman that I did not think it had to be one or the other. Regardless of the matter, I thought, the couple could discuss the situation and come to a conclusion together. I further shared that this belief was rooted in the fact that I felt called to ordination in the church. It would appear hypocritical if I were a leader of a congregation while not even being a leader in my own home. At this point she stated, “Well, maybe that scripture [which prescribes men as the head of the household] means that women shouldn’t be pastors.”

The idea of women holding leadership positions in the church is perceived differently among today’s Christians: some find the idea inconceivable, while others see women as necessary for a diverse clergy. The fact remains that female leadership in the modern Christian church is not common; even within the denominations that are most supportive of women as religious leaders, only 22.3% of said leaders are female.¹ As evidenced above, it is often biblical scriptures that are used to defend limiting women’s roles in the church, particularly scriptures found in letters written by Paul to the first-century church. This research will reveal that arguments using Paul’s letters to disqualify women from ordained ministry are misguided. Under Paul’s guidance, the first-century church—which in the beginning was simply a Jesus-

¹ Mark Chaves, Shawna L. Anderson, and Alison Eagle. 2014. *National Congregations Study*. Cumulative data file and codebook. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University, Department of Sociology.

following movement within Judaism—affirmed women not only as equals, but as leaders that were integral to the movement’s success.

This work will unfold in three parts. Part one seeks to understand aspects of women’s lives that were most important to society and will utilize several methods in order to fully understand the New Testament world. A sociocultural approach will reveal the customs of the period. The fundamental aspects of society found in this method will provide a solid frame by which to view the New Testament world; Bruce J. Malina and Peter Brown have both written extensively on the subject, and this research relies on their scholarly analysis for an accurate sociocultural context. Archeological studies found in the work of Tal Ilan will provide insight to life expectancy in ancient times. Furthermore, primary sources examined in Suzanne Dixon’s work, *Reading Roman Women*, will both support and challenge what has been traditionally concluded from historical documents. In the first section of this research, the goal is to capture what life was like for a woman in the Pauline world. I will breakdown women’s roles and expectations within the culture, including those surrounding honor, procreation, labor, and written law.

Following this introduction, the research will carefully examine the letters written by Paul. I will determine which letters scholars believe were actually written by Paul (although thirteen canonical letters are attributed to Pauline authorship). From these, I will select four passages which have frequently been referenced in the debate about women’s ordination; I will examine the four passages in the original Greek. Linguistic and literary analysis will be used to determine Paul’s intent while maintaining the context of the specific community framed within the culture of the first-century Mediterranean world. Finally, the research will look into the trajectory of the church, including what denominations say today about women clergy, and what

scriptures they use to justify their stance. The research will conclude that the first-century church was open to women leadership in the church, and then moved toward excluding women from important roles in the church.

Community, Honor, and Shame

In modern western societies, most people are individualistic, but this was not the case in the world of the New Testament. In collective culture, as was dominant in the New Testament world, communities were tightly knit, and familial relationships represented impenetrable bonds. Such connections could be expanded when two people married, thus intertwining the two families. One person's action as an individual was also their action as a spouse, child, parent, sibling, and community member all at once. There are many narratives, especially in the Hebrew Bible, where it is claimed that the God of Israel punishes the entire family, or even entire cities, as repercussions for the actions of one individual or relatively few people. This was because a person was inseparable from the community to which they belonged. Imagine a parent chastising a child as punishment because the actions of the child affect the parents. In the New Testament world, this ideology was realized. A person represented not only themselves, but their family and community, as well.

At the core of this New Testament culture was the honor/shame social model; it was ingrained into society and influenced each action a person made.² The goal was to be considered honorable by one's peers. Honor is can be likened to respect, yet honor means more than just that. There were two types of honor. The first was innate, in that a person was born with it; this was called ascribed honor. The other was acquired honor, and, as the name implies, it had to be

² This same honor/shame culture is still quite common in modern-day Middle East.

earned.³ In order to better understand honor, it can be likened to money. Some are born into richer (i.e. more honorable) homes than others; this is the ascribed honor. Yet, acquired honor, like money, had to be exchanged; there was a finite amount of honor to be distributed in a society. Two interacting people could never both gain honor; one would gain honor, while the other would lose it, thus being shamed.⁴ Honor could not be self-assigned. Ultimately, the community as a whole would determine whether a given action was honorable. In essence, one's worth was determined by the people around them.⁵ It is essential to look at ancient societies understanding the interconnectedness of community and how they viewed honor and shame, because this social model touched all aspects of the culture, specifically women's roles in this period.

Procreation and Women's Honor

The New Testament world was viewed dualistically: honor and shame, man and woman, strong and weak. In this culture, women were associated with shame and weakness. This was due to the fact that it was much easier for a woman to bring shame to her family rather than honor. A woman's ultimate goal was to produce legitimate healthy male children, and there were many ways this could go wrong. Because women were valued almost exclusively for their procreative abilities, this was the only way she might bring honor to herself and her family. Yet, this one task was difficult to complete successfully, and because there were many ways in which a woman might fail to reach this ultimate goal, females were often viewed as liabilities by their families. It was simply easier for a man to gain honor than a woman, thus male children were preferred to carry on or increase the family's honor.

³ Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 32.

⁴ Malina, *New Testament World*, 41.

⁵ Malina, *New Testament World*, 31.

The language about procreation reveals the ancient perspective of the differing roles of women and men. Men produced the ‘seed’ which was planted in the fertile soil of a woman’s womb.⁶ If a woman were unable to become pregnant, or the child was not healthy when born, the common thought was that the woman’s soil was barren, rocky and dry, or otherwise unfit for the seed; the fault never fell on the man. It was also believed that the woman’s mindset during conception could determine the sex of the child—as long as the woman thought hard enough about it, people believed that she would give birth to a male child. Unfortunately, this meant that if a child were born unhealthy or were a female, the mother may bear the blame for not having been in the right frame of mind at the time the child was conceived.⁷

The male physique was strong, hard, chiseled, and was believed to be the result of more heat in utero, while a woman’s physique was softer, more pliable—the consequence of less heat; thus, woman was a lesser and deformed version of man.⁸ If a woman bore female children, it could be explained by an inadequate temperature in her womb.⁹ It was an interesting paradox that the ancient people experienced. They believed that a woman’s body was a failed man; yet the woman’s physique was necessary for procreation.

It is worth noting that an infant did not become a child immediately when it was born. An infant may be born, but if the father did not take it up in his arms, claiming it for his own, it was not yet human. If a father were to leave the child, thereby deeming it unfit for rearing, it would be left outside the home (by a midwife, perhaps) and often died from exposure; there was

⁶ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christian* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1988), 21.

⁷ Brown, *Body and Society*, 20.

⁸ Brown, *Body and Society*, 10.

⁹ Interestingly enough, this concept also implied that it was possible for men to lose their heat, resulting in the decrease of their masculinity and honor. Brown, *Body and Society*, 11.

no value found in a child before a father's embrace.¹⁰ From this, we might understand how a man's opinion was situated higher than a woman's; she had little to no say in any procreative activities, and even when she gave birth, the man made the decision concerning which children to raise.

When it came to bearing children, the task was very dangerous for the potential mother. In addition to general lack of medical knowledge, women were believed to be at their childbearing prime in their early teens and were pressured by society to conceive at an age when they were still not fully developed. Also, physicians believed the optimal pregnancy term should last only six months and would begin inducing labor at this time with the result of premature births. To say that childbearing in ancient times was dangerous is an understatement. Even if a woman survived childbirth, the process took its toll on her health. Female remains found in burial sites are consistently younger than the male remains from this region and period, evidencing the detrimental effect childbearing had on women even if they survived childbirth.¹¹ If a woman were lucky enough to survive childbirth, the child still might be unhealthy, or it could be a girl. Unfortunately, this would mean that the woman has not yet fulfilled her duty as a female; thus she brings shame to her husband and family by not bearing healthy male children.¹²

The Woman's Workplace

When a woman produced children, she was expected to raise them and fulfill other domestic duties. Women were not to interact with men, with the exception of their husbands, family, and slaves belonging to the household, if they had any. Women were confined mostly to

¹⁰ Brown, *Body and Society*, 28.

¹¹ Tal Ilan, *Integrating Women into Second Temple History* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012), 212.

¹² Although, if a woman did eventually have a male child, she would gain honor.

the household, ensuring that it ran smoothly in the male's absence. The idea of an independent woman was not embraced in the way it is in modern western society. For a woman to be independent in ancient times meant that she was without family or community; she was most likely a prostitute, since this would have been one of few ways she might support herself without a husband or father. Women were not supposed to have to support themselves financially. The man was supposed to care for his wife, daughter (if unmarried), and mother (if widowed); therefore, if a woman were working for a wage outside the home, it was a sign that the man in her life was not fulfilling his duty. For the most part, if women worked, it was out of necessity. By studying epitaphs and other memorials made to commemorate the dead, Dixon deduces that women may have done a large amount of work outside of the general domestic duties in order to run a family business successfully, yet her husband would almost always take the credit.¹³ For example, she might work alongside her husband as a vendor, selling produce from the family farm, or as an accountant for the family butcher shop.¹⁴ Other potential occupations for women would have been an extension of traditional domestic duties, such as nurses, midwives, or wool spinners. Yet, even as "...the lines between domestic and commercial production were blurred [there was a] preference for commemorating women as wives and mothers [which] may simply reflect the value their husbands and families placed on those roles."¹⁵

Laws Regarding Women's Roles

Women's expectations were defined by the laws of the time. Both Hellenistic and Jewish determined how women were to relate to the males they would encounter in their life: father, husband, and son. In Roman law, women were placed under a tutor, or a guardian. The main

¹³ Suzanne Dixon, *Reading Roman Women* (London, UK: Duckworth, 2001), 114.

¹⁴ Dixon, *Roman*, 129.

¹⁵ Dixon, *Roman*, 132.

purpose of a tutor was to ensure that “the estate was not unnecessarily eroded.” This was realized in that “permission...of a *tutor* was necessary to validate certain legal acts which might reduce the estate.”¹⁶ In reality, this meant that a woman could almost never act without the approval of her male tutor. He would represent her in legal processes, and would sign important documents for her or as a witness. In singleness, the tutor was the father; in marriage, the tutor was the woman’s husband; and as a widow, often the son would become the tutor. There were even cases in which a freed female slave would remain under the tutorship of her previous male owner. Fundamentally, a woman was always a man’s responsibility.¹⁷

In Jewish culture, there were two major schools of rabbinic thought concerning the Law: Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel. The two schools disagreed in many regards to interpreting of the law, and their opinions on women differed as much as any other rabbinic subject. In general, Beit Shammai was more conservative. For example, in Beit Shammai, in only specific circumstances could a man divorce his wife. Beit Hillel, however, had fewer requirements for divorcing a wife. With this in mind, it would be assumed that Beit Shammai would give women less rights.¹⁸ In reality, neither school gave women much of any rights, yet given these circumstances, one of the two did provide women more protection. If we return to the previous example, it is evident that Beit Shammai is more favorable to women, because it is more conservative. If there are more requirements for validating a divorce, then it is less likely the divorce will happen. In a world where a woman had little to no individual rights, she was safest in a marriage where a man could provide and care for her. As discussed above, women were not expected to provide for themselves. Should a woman be divorced, the chances of her remarrying

¹⁶ Dixon, *Roman*, 77.

¹⁷ Dixon, *Roman*, 78.

¹⁸ Ilan, *Integrating Women*, 51.

were low since no one wanted to marry a divorcee, and she may be rejected by her family for bringing shame to them. Unfortunately, scholars believe that the ideas supported by Beit Hillel were the ones that persisted into Paul's day, and that they were the foundation of the Pharisees' principles.¹⁹ The common theme between the Hellenistic people and the Jews was certainly that women needed to be taken care of in every phase of life. It was common knowledge that women were incapable of conducting themselves morally; women never outgrew their inferiority.²⁰

¹⁹ Ilan, *Integrating Women*, 71.

²⁰ Dixon, *Roman*, 82.

Part II: Paul's view of women*Disputed Pauline Writings*

There are thirteen books in the New Testament that claim Pauline authorship; however, not all are thought to have actually been written by Saint Paul. In fact there are only seven letters upon which scholars agree are authentically Pauline: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. The six remaining books are divided into two groups. The Pastoral Epistles, consisting of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, are almost unanimously labeled as pseudonymous letters. Fewer scholars are convinced that the other epistles—Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians—are not authentic Pauline letters, though many believe that they, too, are pseudonymous.²¹ There are two key ways in which scholars determine if a letter was written by Paul: 1) external evidence—textual evidence found in language and syntax of the letter, and evidence in content; 2) internal evidence—this would include stances on eschatology, salvation, ecclesiology, and women.

It is agreed that Paul composed his letters in Greek. This language was formulaic, following set rules and patterns. Within these bounds, the apostle Paul had a distinct style with which he wrote. A large reason scholars disavow Paul's authorship of some epistles is due to the fact that they differ greatly from the authentic letters in language and syntax. The disputed letters use words and phrases not found in any of the undisputed letters, and they arrange their sentences differently. Ehrman displays just one of many examples in 1 and 2 Timothy, where the greeting, “‘To Timothy, my...child...: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord’ (1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2)” is found in both letters addressed to Timothy.²²

²¹ Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 308.

²² Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 414.

Such wording contrasts with the greetings common in accepted Pauline letters; Paul never addresses another individual person as ‘child’ and all of the accepted letters say, “Grace and peace,” but omit ‘mercy’ (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Phil 1:2; 1 Thes 1:1; Phile 1:3). Also, the greetings in both letters to Timothy are shorter than the long-winded salutations common to the accepted Pauline letters. The authentic and disputed letters differ not only in grammatical structure, but also in vocabulary. Consider these numbers:

[Apart] from personal names, there are 848 different words found in the Pastorals; of these, 306 occur nowhere else in the Pauline corpus of the New Testament (even including [Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians]). This means that over one-third of the vocabulary is not Pauline. Strikingly, over two-thirds of these non-Pauline words are used by Christian authors of the second century. Thus it appears that the vocabulary represented in these letters is more developed than what we find in the other letters attributed to Paul.²³

In short, the language of the deutero-Pauline epistles simply does not reflect the same Paul found in the authentic letters.

When contrasting the disputed letters to the authentic ones, there are also differences in eschatology. Although each letter, of course, had a unique purpose and a different message for each of the communities Paul organized, there are common eschatological themes in the accepted Pauline writings. The seven authentic letters have a consistent theme of the imminent *parousia*. Paul writes in his letters that “the doers of the law will be justified” (Rom 2:13), using future tense to show that this justification process has not yet been realized. Conversely, the disputed letters support a realized eschatological view—in that the world has already been transformed: “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all” (Titus 2:11).

Language concerning salvation also differs between the accepted and disputed letters.²⁴

True Pauline thought concludes that, “all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were

²³ Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 415.

²⁴ Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 409.

baptized into his death...Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead...so we too might walk in newness of life.” (Rom 6:3-4)

Again, here, the tense is important. Authentic Pauline scripture would conclude that followers of Jesus are not yet transformed; it is a promise to be fulfilled. Contrast the scripture above to this from Colossians: “...when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him...” (2:12). Writers of the disputed Pauline letters tended to think that followers of Jesus were already living in a new era, that the eschaton was already active, while Paul most likely thought not yet.

When reading the deutero-Paul letters, there is a significant amount of instruction for ordering the church. For example, in 1 Tim, the author sets strict standards for bishops saying, “[they] must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money”. Similarly, the author instructs that deacons “must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money...” and so on. The authors of the deutero-epistles were concerned with hierarchal structure, and these organizational arrangements contrast greatly with accepted Pauline literature, which almost never address any sort of hierarchy in the church.

In addition to the lack of structure found in letters authentically written by Paul, the household codes of deutero-epistles differ greatly from the egalitarian statements found in the undisputed letters. The letter to Ephesians states “(wives), be subject to your husbands...For the husband is the head of every wife...Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands” (5:22-24). These *haustafeln*²⁵, or household codes, instructed women, children, and slaves to be obedient and submissive. Yet in Gal 3:28, Paul

²⁵ *Haustafeln*, or household codes (in English), are so named due to the fact that the first scholars to recognize and study the subject were German.

claims “(there) is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus”. And in 1 Corinthians Paul explains that “(the) husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does” (2-4). Considering everything discussed in part one of this research—that women had almost no rights in ancient times and were always inferior to men—this is huge statement to make: that women and men are equal. Consequently, scholars maintain that egalitarianism is a defining factor for authentic Pauline authorship, while the letters that instruct women to be silent and submissive are decisively not Pauline. An in-depth examination about how Paul actually viewed women will be discussed below.

Pseudonymity

The question remains: why would someone write in another person’s name? Although pseudonymous writing is problematic to modern day readers of the Bible, such was not the case in Paul’s world; there was no concern for plagiarism or forgery.²⁶ In the ancient world, not many people could read, and even fewer could write. The works of the famous writers of the time were studied and used to teach rhetoric and composition. In the same way that there were different schools of philosophy, the followers of a particular writer would do their best to imitate their idol. The act of pseudonymous writing was not frowned upon; in fact, it was an honor to have something written in your name—it meant that what you had originally written was worthwhile, or that your name was reputable. Writing in someone else’s better known name also gave more credit to your work and ideas; again, this was not against the ethical code of the day.

²⁶ Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 23.

Victor Paul Furnish applies this model to the New Testament letters: “[those] who judge these letters to be deutero-Pauline often describe them as attempts of later writers to interpret and apply the apostle’s teaching to needs and situations that he himself had not confronted and could not have foreseen.” In other words, people wrote in Paul’s name in an effort to reflect how they thought Paul would respond to a group of people or about a particular situation. Furnish continues, “[opinions] vary on how well these interpreters did their job and on how much they may have altered, whether intentionally or unintentionally, Paul’s actual views.”²⁷

As will be discussed at length later, there are only several instances where the undisputed Pauline letters restrict women in leadership roles; the most limiting instructions for women are in the deutero-epistles. This distinction is important, as this research seeks to understand women’s roles in the first-century church. The disputed letters do not accurately represent the earliest churches, because scholars believe them to have been written anywhere between the 70s to the 110s.²⁸ For these reasons, they will not contribute to the conclusion of this research.

What does Paul say about women?

In general, Pauline passages concerning women can be categorized into three groups: the restricting, the ambiguous, and the affirming.²⁹ Only one Pauline passage is categorized as restricting: 1 Cor 14:33-36. There is also only one passage in the Pauline letters that falls into the ambiguous category: 1 Cor 11:2-16. Each of these passages requires its own section for discussion. The affirming include statements that either describe women and men in egalitarian terms, or that recognize specific women as leaders within the church. One of these egalitarian statements, cited above, is Galatians 3:28; this passage will be discussed in length later. In

²⁷ Victor Paul Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 2009), 12.

²⁸ Dating varies with each disputed letter. Furnish, *Moral Teaching*, 12.

²⁹ Lee Johnson, “Paul and Women,” Classroom reference worksheet, *Paul and His Letters*, Spring 2015.

addition to this, Paul describes marriage as an equal partnership between husbands and wives in chapter seven of 1 Corinthians. As briefly mentioned earlier, Paul states, “For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.” (1 Cor 7:4). In this same chapter Paul also tells men and women that they should be celibate, encouraging them to stay single in an effort to commit their lives to service of Christ (1 Cor 7:7-8). Paul goes further to elevate the status of virginity and celibacy, claiming that one can be honored in such roles. These ideas contrast greatly with the status quo of the time claiming that women can only gain honor by through bearing legitimate male children.

The passages that recognize women as leaders within the church are found in several letters (Rom 16; 1 Cor 1:11,16:19; Phile 2; Phil 4:3). In these passages, Paul thanks individual women for their service, and he refers to them as ‘coworker,’ ‘deacon,’ ‘fellow prisoner,’ and even ‘apostles’. It is noteworthy that in Rom 16, Paul recognizes, by name, 25 people—8 of which are women; it is counter-cultural that women were recognized in this fashion.

Additionally, this research will look further into two of the women mentioned in Rom 16 because they figure prominently in the early church.

In the following sections, the categories of Pauline scripture concerning women will be examined as they were initially laid out: restricting, ambiguous, and affirming. Before moving onto these particular analyses, another point must be addressed. Note that the three categories contain no scriptures found in disputed Pauline letters. This is because they fall into entirely different classification altogether. Because the Pastoral Epistles, Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians are believed to have been written after Paul’s death, the restricting passages found in these letters are considered to be the trajectory toward which the church eventually went—to

disallow women as leaders. But, this was not the case in the early church, as evidenced from the authentic Pauline letters.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35

Now, consider the following passage found in 1 Corinthians 14:33-36:

For God is a God not of disorder but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. Or did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached?³⁰

For a scripture which so blatantly limits women, this particular passage is surprisingly located in one of the undisputed Pauline letters. Scholars have been unable to come to a completely unanimous conclusion regarding this passage, specifically verses 34 and 35. Some scholars believe that these verses are authentically written by Paul; however, scholars such as Dr. Lee Johnson are not convinced.³¹

Some scholars speculate that these verses are an interpolation: an insertion written into the letter at a later date. In ancient times, prior to technological advances like the printing press, scribes would hand-copy famous letters in an effort to make a piece available to more communities; then, copies were made of the copies, and so on. When copying letters, scribes made notes in the margins. This would be done for any number of reasons. The marginal note may have been a comment, praise, or an argument (if the scribe disagreed with the text). Or perhaps the scribe skipped a line when copying the text and added the part they had accidentally omitted marginally. Then, when the copy with marginal notes was being duplicated—what was the next scribe to do with the marginal note? First, they had to decide if the marginal note should

³⁰ The New Revised Standard Version will be used unless otherwise noted.

³¹ Lee Johnson, "In Search of the Voice of Women in the Churches: Revisiting the command to Silence Women in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35." In *Women in the Biblical World: A Survey of Old and New Testament Perspectives*, edited by Elizabeth A McCabe, 135-154. (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 2009).

be included at all. Then, if they chose to include it, they needed to decide where to place it: in the margin again, or within the text?³² The scribes had defining decisions to make. For these reasons, it is logical to assume that the earliest (and closest to the original) manuscripts are the shortest—since scribes were more likely to add text rather than omit it.³³ Unfortunately, we do not have any original manuscripts; only the third and fourth iterations at best. A key component in determining the most authentic text is finding the one written first.

In the case of 1 Cor 14:33-36, the two scriptures in the middle (34-35) do not flow with the surrounding verses in terms of Greek grammatical rules. In Greek, certain endings cue the reader to know what gender and number the writer is referring. Verses 33 and 36 have endings which signify a gender neutral (also called neuter), plural audience (as in a group of both women and men). However, verses 34-35 are specific to women (which in Greek uses the feminine plural endings), which seems out of place amidst the use of Greek neuter endings in the vocabulary surrounding it. Perhaps the strongest piece of external evidence is that the text found in verses 34-35 are inconsistently placed in various manuscripts. In some of the oldest manuscripts available, the verses labeled as 34-35 appear in varying locations, suggesting that the text found in verses 34-35 was originally a marginal note, and different scribes included them in different places in line with the text when they copied it later on.³⁴ Scholars who view these verses as an interpolation believe that if we were to find a manuscript that is old enough (as in closer to the original), that verses 34-35 would not be in the text at all.

In addition to the external evidence cited above, verses 34-35 seem out of place in regards to content. If reading straight from verse 33 to 36, the message is more fluid. In the

³² Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 21.

³³ Johnson, "1 Cor," 140.

³⁴ Johnson, "1 Cor," 147.

larger context, chapter 14 addresses the Corinthian men and women about speaking in tongues and prophesying. This side note suddenly instructing women to be silent is inconsistent with Paul's explicit statement that women were praying and prophesying made earlier in chapter 11. Unfortunately, we presently do not have a copy of the letter to Corinth which omits these verses. This research accepts the argument of some scholars that 1 Cor. 14:34-35 is an interpolation and therefore, just as the deuterio- Pauline epistles, is not an accurate depiction of women's roles in the first-century church.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

The argument Paul writes in 1 Cor 11:2-16 is long, confusing, and conflicted. An initial reading comes across as unclear at best, and chauvinistic at worst.

I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you. But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ. Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head—it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved. For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear a veil. For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. But if anyone is disposed to be contentious—we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.

Paul introduces the topic with a custom commendation, as he usually does, then provides an analogy to acquaint the reader with the “head” theme which will continue throughout the argument. Paul tells that, when praying and prophesying, women should have their head “veiled” while men should not. If either deviates from this standard, they disgrace themselves.

Paul recalls the creation story to explain more about women and men. Finally, Paul asks his audience to “Judge for yourselves...” Paul is convinced that women should be “veiled” when prophesying and praying, but the issue is not one he is centrally concerned about. Unlike the previous Corinthian passage, scholars do not think this is an interpolation due to a lack of evidence supporting the idea. In order to understand what Paul is getting at in this passage, one needs to have an understanding of the linguistics, culture, and customs of the time. Particularly, there are some Greek words that prove challenging when translated to English, let us start there.

The Greek κεφαλή³⁵ translates literally as “head.” In the first-century, “head” had several meanings, much of which have carried on in modern understandings of the word. The most obvious meaning was literal, as in a person’s physical head. “Head” might also refer to the beginning or source of something. The idea that head equated to power or leading figure is common in both the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, especially in Ephesians and Colossians.³⁶ There is some argument over which of these Paul intends to mean throughout the passage when he uses κεφαλή. The first instance of κεφαλή is “...Christ is the head of every man...husband is the head of his wife...God is the head of Christ.”³⁷ Here, it would be more plausible that Paul is referring to the “source” meaning, rather than a leadership meaning, since in verse 8, Paul echoes the creation story from Gen 2: “Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man.” Additionally, a hierarchal system would go against Paul’s comments in

³⁵ Κεφαλή is used 3 times in v.3, twice in v.4, twice in v.5, once in v.7, and once in v.10.

³⁶ “Head.” In *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words: Word Studies for Key English Bible Words Based on the Hebrew and Greek Texts*, edited by Stephen D. Renn, 470-472. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005).

³⁷ Although the NRSV translates ἀνὴρ and γυναῖκός as “husband” and “wife”, it is more likely that these should be translated as “man” and “woman”. The Greek terms can mean both, and the latter translation is preferred because Paul is distinguishing between man and woman rather than husband and wife throughout the passage. Furnish, *Moral Teaching*, 112.

chapter 7. Either way, in the rest of the passage, Paul is certainly referring to κεφαλή in the literal sense, as the context is discussing the covering of the head.

The Greek verb κατακαλύπτομαι appears in this passage five separate times³⁸ in several forms.³⁹ In combination with the Greek word κεφαλή, κατακαλύπτομαι is translated as ‘veiled’ in the NRSV, or with the negating α prefix, ‘unveiled.’ However, this translation is misleading. The root verb, καλυπεω, means “to cover” or “to hide”. The prefix κατά can be translated differently depending on what type of word it is in conjunction with, but in this case can mean “around”, or “about”. Therefore, the phrase found in verse 5, “ἀκατακαλύπτω τῆ κεφαλῆ” may mean something like ‘no covering around the head’. Some scholars believe that Paul is referring to how the hair is arranged about the head, rather than an actual scarf or other garment to cover the head and/or face.⁴⁰ This is confirmed by Paul’s later analogy where he explicitly talks about women having long hair as a natural covering (1 Cor 11:15). It was custom in ancient times for women to keep their hair bound, rather than being loose. When in public, women’s hair would be arranged in intricate braids and often adorned with ribbons and jewels.⁴¹ Hair, which was undone or loose, was not socially acceptable.

It is possible that the women in the Corinthian church were influenced by some indigenous religions in the area. In indigenous worship, women were not only known to loosen their hair, but the practice was encouraged. When their hair was unbound, the spirit or spirits of the one being worshiped was believed to flow freely into the pinnacle of the body; since the spirits were thought to come from above, this was the most logical point of entrance. Then, the

³⁸ Once in v.5, twice in v.6, once in v.7, and once in v.13.

³⁹ In this research, I use *The UBS Greek New Testament* and Erberhard Nestle’s *Novum Testamentum Graece*.

⁴⁰ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York, NY: Crossroad), 1985.

⁴¹ Fiorenza, *Memory*, 227.

person would subsequently prophesize or pray with the guidance of the spirit influencing them through the head. Some scholars argue that the women in Corinth adopted this custom and were praying and prophesying with their hair unbound so that the Holy Spirit might flow in through them.⁴² If this were the case it is logical for Paul to object this practice. The first church was already at odds with traditional Jews of the day, and Paul was having difficulty convincing Jews that Gentiles should be included as people of Israel. If Corinthian women were wearing their hair during worship in ways that signaled a connection to their former indigenous practices, this would have reflected poorly on the Gentile Corinthian followers of Jesus and Paul. Paul's intent was that women needed to keep their hair bound, as a covering, so as to distinguish them from indigenous worshipers. Yet Paul does not explicitly speak about indigenous worship in the passage, possibly for fear that their group would be put under further scrutiny for being likened to a cult. Rather, Paul provides a different reason that women keep their hair bound, so that women and men can be distinguished.

Paul spends much time in his argument discussing men and women. "...Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife...[man] is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man..." Initially, it seems that Paul is developing a hierarchy, which, as mentioned above, is problematic when compared to his egalitarian statements like "no longer male and female" (Gal 3:28). Instead, scholars have argued that Paul is not establishing a hierarchy; rather he is creating a distinction between male and female. Scholars, like Furnish, believe that the Corinthians may have been taking the egalitarian statement "no longer male and female" too far, and women were keeping their hair like men, uncovered or unbound.⁴³ It is not certain that

⁴² Fiorenza, *Memory*, 227.

⁴³ Furnish, *Moral Teaching*, 111.

women were keeping their hair unbound for this reason or to mimic the practices of other indigenous religions. What is clear is that Paul believed women were not arranging or covering their hair properly, in order to distinguish themselves from the men. Unfortunately, these verses have been traditionally misinterpreted as restricting of women's participation and leadership in worship. This is an important distinction to make. Paul was not limiting women's roles—he was only making suggestions about how women were to present themselves in worship.

But even Paul's attempts to distinguish that man and woman are thwarted by his own argument. In verses 11 and 12, Paul says, "Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God." "Independent of" comes from the Greek *χωρίς*, which, according to Fiorenza may be better translated as "different from."⁴⁴ Therefore, if women and men are not different from one another in the Lord, why does Paul spend all this time advocating for such distinctions? It is possible that Paul believed the complete erasure of sexes would not happen until Jesus came back, and until then, he thought women ought to dress as women and that men should dress as men. Most importantly, at the end of each of Paul's seemingly hierarchal statements, Paul ends with "God is the head of Christ" and "but all things come from God" (v.3 and v.12). In the end, Paul reminds those hearing his letter that the source of all is God, and classifications of male and female do not matter.

Another translation issue comes from *ἐξουσίαν* found in verse 10 and translated as 'authority'. There is some dispute over whose or what authority is being discussed here. In the NRSV translation, *ἐξουσίαν* is translated as "a symbol of authority," which implies women ought to have her husband's authority over her head. NRSV notes that the Greek language does

⁴⁴ Fiorenza, *Memory*, 229.

not have “a symbol of,” so the statement would literally read as, “...woman ought to have authority on her head.” Scholars debate what this may mean. Translation is questionable, given the sole use of ἐξουσίαν here. A more faithful translation would be that women should have authority on their head in reference to the woman’s role in worship or in reference to God’s authority in the worship.⁴⁵ Regarding the previous discussion on the translation of κατακαλυπτον, this makes sense—that this “authority” would be the representation of authority in that a woman wear her hair properly (not loose) to show her/God’s authority (for her) to prophesy and pray, especially if women adorned their hair with jewels or decorative ribbons braided into it.

Scholars are somewhat baffled by the phrase “because of the angels” also found in verse 10. The English word, angel, is a transliteration of the Greek ἄγγελος, which literally translates as to mean ‘messenger.’ In the New Testament, ἄγγελος is understood as a messenger of God, and a celestial being. Some scholars, who hold that Paul is indeed arguing for the need of a garment covering, believe that this reference indicates that the women had to cover themselves in order to not attract the angels with their beauty.⁴⁶ However, this seems far-fetched. If indeed, women bound and adorned hair as a symbol of authority, then this may be a sign to the angels of the woman’s role in the worship experience. Most likely, this was a case in which Paul’s intent was probably easily understood by his followers because there were customs of which he could assume his intended audience was aware.⁴⁷

Despite all of the inconclusive language throughout this section, one point is clear: women are prophesying and praying in worship at Corinth. Paul has no qualms with this basic

⁴⁵ Francis Watson, *Agape, Eros, Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000), 69.

⁴⁶ Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, Jacqueline E. Lapsey, “Women, Veils, and Worship (1 Cor. 11:2-16),” in *Women’s Bible Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 562-563.

⁴⁷ Furnish, *Moral Teaching*, 113.

practice—just the fact that women are doing this with their hair not properly arranged. This is an important affirmation to note. Paul assumes that women are praying and prophesying. His argument that they dress a particular way does not change their role in worship, only the way that they appear.

Galatians 3:28

Galatians 3:28 is arguably the most pivotal of all statements Paul makes. When writing to the church in Galatia, Paul is dealing with some amount of controversy. The Jews and Gentiles are disputing over whether or not the Gentiles need to follow the Law as laid out in the Hebrew Bible. Paul claims that Gentiles need not adhere to the Law, because faith is greater than works, and through Jesus, they are freed from the Law. At the peak of his argument, Paul reminds the Galatians, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.” Paul concludes that baptism removes all societal labels: race, ethnicity, status, and even gender.

Scholars have agreed that the statements, “no longer Jew or Greek...slave or free...male and female” are all part of a baptismal creed common in that time. When one was baptized, these words would be spoken to and over them, signifying that they are now clothed in Christ and have left all earthly labels behind.⁴⁸ This formula appears in several other instances in Paul’s letters, notably in 1 Cor 12:13, but omitting “male and female” in this occurrence. Some scholars believe Paul decided to leave out the male and female portion because earlier in this

⁴⁸ Furnish, *Moral Teaching*, 106-107.

letter, Paul needed to distinguish men and women, as they have taken the statement further than Paul thought it should go. In explaining this complex scenario, Fiorenza eloquently states...

Paul, then, wanted to maintain the tension between the new and the old, the age to come and this age. On the one hand, the old hierarchy associated with men and women, slaves and free has been overcome; on the other, wholesale emancipation from societal constraints is illusionary enthusiasm that hinders the advancement of the gospel and threatens the unity of the church.⁴⁹

Thus, Paul, as will be explained later, is attempting to teach about Jesus' ability to remove all societal labels while remaining within the societal constraints of the first-century. Should their group have a reputation too radical, then they would be in danger of the Roman government.

A close reading of verse 28 will also reveal a difference in the third clause: "Jew *or* Greek...slave *or* free...male *and* female" (emphasis added). This can be explained by the roots of the first-century church. Remember that this is only a branch within Judaism. By this point, the Hebrew Bible had been translated to Greek, known today as the Septuagint; this was the version that Paul would have been familiar with. In its account of the Genesis creation story, the Greek for "male and female" is copied verbatim in Gal 3:28. Paul echoes creation story here to explain his belief that the Law, even the narratives depicting creation of the sexes, has been completely undone by Christ.⁵⁰

As discussed above, the implications of Gal 3:28 were huge. Here, we have Paul explicitly erasing societal boundaries. This statement gave way to the commune of Jews and Gentiles, women leading in first-century churches, and slaves seeking freedom. Whether or not the first-century world was ready for such radicalization will never be known, as will be seen in the trajectory toward which the church began to go.

⁴⁹ Fiorenza, *Memory*, 207.

⁵⁰ Furnish, *Moral Teaching*, 108.

Women in Paul's Ministry

Women played an integral part in Pauline communities. This is evidenced throughout Pauline literature, particularly toward the end of Romans, where out of 25 names mentioned, ten women are recognized, and eight by name.⁵¹ The women participating in Paul's ministry were not restricted to traditional gender roles, but were opening their houses to host churches, preaching and prophesying (as discussed above), and making significant contributions to the first-century church. Among those mentioned, two particular women require a closer analysis: Phoebe and Junia.

Phoebe

Phoebe is only mentioned once in the entirety of Paul's letters. At the end of Romans, Paul writes, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well" (Rom 16:1-2). Phoebe is given the titles *διακονόν*, and *προστάτις*. The Greek terms are essential here, because some English versions of the Bible have not stayed true to original meaning in translation. The Greek *διακονός* is transliterated as "deacon" in English. Yet, at this point in church history, offices had not been established; the church had a very loose structure. In fact, the Greek word that Paul uses for church, *ἐκκλησία*, literally translates to "assembly"; the church was no more than a gathering of people who followed Jesus' teachings. Consequently, the title *διακονός* which Phoebe receives is understood to mean something different than the church office definition used today. Furnish explains "To be a 'deacon,' male or female, was to be engaged in *servicing others*."⁵² However, it is also understood to mean something beyond this basic

⁵¹Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, Jacqueline E. Lapsey, "Women in Ministry (Rom. 16:1-16)," in *Women's Bible Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 555-556.

⁵²Furnish, *Moral Teaching*, 119.

definition. Phoebe is being introduced among a group of people who are quite important to Paul; the fact that she is at the beginning of this list signifies her importance. When Paul reveals that Phoebe is a *διακονός* of the church in Cenchreae, she is more than a mere servant—Paul is distinguishing her as a prominent leader within the church at Cenchreae. Some versions of the Bible misleadingly translate *διακονός* as “servant” which greatly diminishes Phoebe’s role in Paul’s ministry.⁵³ Worse still, a few translations use “deaconess” as a translation⁵⁴. This particular translation is grossly inaccurate for several reasons: 1) *διακονός* is a masculine term, and the feminine form was not used until several centuries later; and 2) Paul also uses *διακονός* when referring to men, such as Apollos and Timothy (1 Cor 3:5-6; Phil 1:1).⁵⁵ Therefore, the use of ‘deaconess’ rather than ‘deacon’ simply because the genders are different of the persons being described would be an incorrect translation.

Paul also calls Phoebe a *προστάτις*. In the introduction, the role of a *tutor* was explained as one who was a like a guardian to a woman. Similarly, in Hellenistic culture, patrons and benefactors were common links in the social system. They were fundamental to society. A patron would offer his/her financial aid, while the debtor would then owe some favor to the patron.⁵⁶ In this sense, Paul is essentially asserting that Phoebe likely had a high status, a good reputation, and the financial means to aid the church. This definition means much more than “helper” as the NKJV and NASB translate.

Rom 16:1-2 are Paul’s letter of recommendation for Phoebe; he encourages the church in Rome (to whom Phoebe likely read this letter) to trust Phoebe as he does and welcome her.⁵⁷

⁵³ New King James Version, English Standard Version, and New American Standard Version are among some of the bibles which uses “servant”.

⁵⁴ The Women’s Bible Commentary notes that the RSV uses “deaconess” (pg 555).

⁵⁵ Furnish, *Moral Teaching*, 119.

⁵⁶ Dixon, *Roman*, 89.

⁵⁷ Newsom, “Rom. 16,” 555.

Phoebe was an important figure in the church at Cenchreae and a wealthy contributor to the church. Interestingly too, Paul does not address her with any familial ties. Often times, when women are mentioned anywhere in the bible, not just Pauline literature, they are introduced generally as they relate to males: mother, daughter, or sister of someone. But here, Paul only defines her as his sister in Christ. Paul is recommending Phoebe as herself, and defining her significance while not being tied to a male figure.

Junia

Among all the women Paul cited in his letters, Junia's case is the most intriguing. She is mentioned once in the New Testament, as a brief greeting in Rom 16:7, only a few verses following Phoebe's debut. I provide the Greek text here followed by the NRSV translation:

ἀσπάσασθε Ἀνδρόνικον καὶ Ἰουνίαν τοὺς συγγενεῖς μου καὶ συναιχμαλώτους μου, οἵτινες εἰσιν ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις, οἳ καὶ πρὸ ἐμοῦ γέγοναν ἐν Χριστῷ.⁵⁸

Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.

Alongside a man named Andronicus, who is presumed to be her husband, Junia is called a relative, an apostle, and one who was “in Christ before [Paul] was”. In the case of this verse, there are problems both in the Greek manuscripts and in the translation from the Greek to English. Recall that we do not presently have any original documents written by Paul. Scholars have collected the most authentic documents and pieced them together into compilations of the Greek New Testament, the two most popular of which are the UBS and Nestle's *Novum Testamentum Graece*. The original manuscripts were written in all capitals (no lowercase lettering), with no spaces, no punctuation, and no accents; these functions developed later. The Greek New Testament compilations serve to make the Greek text easier to read, by providing

⁵⁸ The *UBS* Greek New Testament

spaces between words, accents, punctuation, and capitalization of proper nouns. Here, in verse 7, we find the Greek name Ἰουνίαν. The feminine form of the name would place an accent on the iota (Ἰουνίαν), while the masculine form would place a circumflex on the alpha (Ἰουνιᾶν). Those who compile the Greek manuscripts include either the accent or circumflex as they attempt to interpret Paul's meaning. In English, the feminine form of Ἰουνίαν is Junia while the masculine is Junias. English Bible versions vary in their use of the masculine verses the feminine form (this is based on which Greek New Testament they used). Notably, the KJV uses Junia, while the 1973 edition of the NIV reads Junias.⁵⁹ In his work on Junia, Eldon Jay Epp charts how the various Greek compilations of the New Testament have accented Ἰουνίαν. A trend is evident in the chart: the usage shifts from feminine (as early as 1516 C.E.), to masculine (beginning 1927 C.E.), and then back to feminine (in 1982 C.E.).⁶⁰ Essentially, Epp reveals that the only reason Junia was changed to Junias was because one scholar thought it was implausible that a woman could be an apostle.⁶¹

In the first-century church, Paul had several qualifications for apostles.⁶² First, they had to have encountered the risen Christ.⁶³ Second, the person had to have suffered because in the ministry of Jesus' teachings; Paul mentions that Junia and Andronicus were imprisoned, so this would certainly qualify. And thirdly, the person had to have a fruitful ministry. Junia and Andronicus were likely long time followers of Jesus, since Paul says that they were in Christ before even himself and at this point Paul has been working to further Jesus' teaching for twenty or more years.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Eldon Jay Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 66.

⁶⁰ Epp, *Junia*, 62-63.

⁶¹ Epp, *Junia*, 67.

⁶² Epp, *Junia*, 70.

⁶³ It is possible that Junia has had a vision of Jesus.

⁶⁴ Furnish, *Moral Teaching*, 124.

Unfortunately Junia's significant role continues to be diminished. Some scholars are convinced that, yes, Junia is in fact a feminine name. However, they then attempt to justify translating ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις as “noteworthy *in the eyes* of the apostles”.⁶⁵ This too is an incorrect translation of the Greek. For the phrase is clearly to be translated as “distinguished among the apostles”. Andronicus and Junia were not only apostles, they were “prominent” among them as some English translations properly reflect.⁶⁶

Women's roles in Paul's churches have been obscured through translation and cultural bias. As evidenced in the cases above, Phoebe's role is diminished as she is called a ‘servant’ and ‘helper’ rather than her proper titles of ‘deacon’ and ‘patron’. Junia's name is changed to reflect that of a man's. Instead of these stories concerning leading female figures, the language of the deuter-Pauline letters dominate today's discussion of women's roles in the church.

Quickly and easily, opponents of women's ordination will cite verses like 1 Tim 2:8-15:

...the women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided, or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes, but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God. Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.

In the final part of this research, I will attempt to explain how this transition from equality to exclusion may have occurred.

⁶⁵ HCSB

⁶⁶ CEB, NRSV, ISV

Part III: Trajectory, the Modern Church, and Conclusions

Connecting the Past and Present

There appears to be a trajectory toward the exclusion of women's leadership roles in the church as we move forward through history. Many factors play into this storyline, but I wish to emphasize the following: pressure from Roman government, effect of other historic writings, and influence of the church fathers.

The earliest Jesus-followers were under the close watch of the Roman government.⁶⁷ In his history, the *Annals*, Tacitus writes that the emperor Nero blamed the burning of Rome on the Jesus-followers.⁶⁸ Certainly, when viewed from the outside, the earliest churches were very different from the socially acceptable Roman culture. As explained before, Jesus-followers were a subset of Judaism. Jews were already scrutinized by Roman government for practices such as circumcision, taking a day of Sabbath, and kosher dietary restrictions.⁶⁹ To make matters worse, Jesus-followers, during the Eucharist ritual, were basically claiming to eat and drink the body and blood of the person they worshiped; outsiders thought they were cannibals. In addition to all this bad publicity, the first-century church was claiming that women and men were equal, and it encouraged women and men to be celibate and not marry. Certainly, this crossed a line with the Roman government, and Jesus-followers soon faced much social pressure to keep men and women in their separate roles. Some argue that the deuterio-Pauline epistles were written in response to Rome's watchful eye.

The deuterio-Pauline letters take a drastic turn from the baptismal creed of Gal 3:28. The writers of these letters write about reestablishing an order. As surmised above, the Pastoral

⁶⁷ Robert Louis Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven: Yale University, 2003), 49-50.

⁶⁸ Dr. Kathy Dawson *Lecture* (Introduction to World Religions: East Carolina University, April 21, 2016).

⁶⁹ Wilken, *Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 52.

epistles are the books that construct a hierarchy in the church and in the household. It is possible that the writers of the Pastorals both accepted Paul's teachings and their own; they thought equality would come for all, but not yet—not until Jesus came again. The deutero-Pauline authors may have shifted their stance away from the egalitarian Paul to ensure the church's survival as it was being pressured by the Roman government and society.⁷⁰ However, there are other explanations; some scholars, such as Dennis R. MacDonald, suggest that the deutero-Pauline letters were written in the same time as another text which was not canonized: Acts of Paul and Thecla.⁷¹ The book features themes which are very empowering to women, and there were almost certainly groups which embraced this ideology.⁷² There were also those who did not agree with these teachings. MacDonald offers the explanation that the Pastoral Epistles were written in reaction to these practices which empowered women, and brought them back to order.⁷³

Following the deutero-Pauline letters, the church fathers became prominent around a hundred years later. Some of the biggest names of this period, like St. Augustine and Tertullian, were infamous for their opinion of women:

What is the difference whether it is in a wife or a mother, it is still Eve the temptress that we must beware of in any woman.....I fail to see what use woman can be to man, if one excludes the function of bearing children.

St. Augustine

In pain shall you bring forth children, woman, and you shall turn to your husband and he shall rule over you. And do you not know that you are Eve? God's sentence hangs still over all your sex and His punishment weighs down upon you. You are the devil's

⁷⁰ Some have argued that the church may not have survived to this day if it had not taken a step back from being so radical.

⁷¹ Dennis R. MacDonald, "The Pastoral Epistles against 'Old Wives' Tales" in *The Writings of St. Paul*, edited by Wayne A. Meeks and John T. Fitzgerald, 303-318. (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2007), 310.

⁷² The Acts of Paul and Thecla tells a story about Thecla, who is betrothed to a man. Upon hearing Paul preach on celibacy, she decides to follow his god and teachings. The story goes on to tell about how Thecla's, fiancé, mother, and hometown try to have her killed, but to no avail. In the end, she ends up traveling with Paul and helping him with churches.

⁷³ MacDonald, "'Old Wives' Tales'," 310-311.

gateway; you are she who first violated the forbidden tree and broke the law of God. It was you who coaxed your way around him whom the devil had not the force to attack. With what ease you shattered that image of God: Man! Because of the death you merited, even the Son of God had to die... Woman, you are the gate to hell.

Tertullian

In both of these quotes, the men hark back to this idea that women can only be saved through childbearing, a concept both discussed in the introduction of this research and embodied in 1 Tim 2:15. Yet, in Paul's letters, he taught that women (and men) might be saved through celibacy. The church experienced a serious backlash when Paul began promoting equality and reproductive rights for women. Unfortunately, this repercussion has reverberated through history and is still quite evident today.

Conclusions

Today in America, 57.7% of churches state that women can be religious leaders. While this is a majority and therefore encouraging, the reality is that only 11.4% of churches actually have a female in the main leadership role within their church.⁷⁴ Unfortunately, some of the largest denominations of Christianity in the United States, such as The Roman Catholic Church, Southern Baptist Convention, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Presbyterian Church USA do not ordain women.⁷⁵ The Southern Baptist Convention states, "While Scripture teaches that a woman's role is not identical to that of men in every respect, and that Pastoral leadership is assigned to men, it also teaches that women are equal in value to men."⁷⁶ It is likely that the scriptures to which they are referring come from the Pastorals as in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's stance on the ordination of women:

The LCMS believes that those Scripture passages which say that women should not "teach" or "have authority" in the church (see, for example, 1 Cor. 11 and 14; 1 Timothy

⁷⁴ Chaves, *National Congregations Study*.

⁷⁵ *2012 Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*, National Council of Churches.

<http://www.infoplease.com/world/religion/largest-us-churches.html> Accessed April 22, 2016.

⁷⁶ <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/positionstatements.asp> Accessed April 22, 2016.

2) mean that women ought not hold the authoritative teaching office in the church--that is, the office of pastor. Women are allowed to hold other offices in the church, as long as these offices do not involve the one holding them in carrying out the distinctive functions of the pastoral office. The involvement of women in non-pastoral aspects of the worship service (for example, reading the lessons, etc.), is left to the judgment of individual congregations.⁷⁷

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod notably refers to not only text in the Pastorals (1 Tim 2), but also some of the problematic texts in 1 Corinthians discussed earlier. Chapter eleven's translation concerning 'authority' here is altered to justify restriction of women's leadership roles, and there is strong evidence that the verses being referred to in chapter fourteen are an interpolation.

On the other hand, there are also churches in the United States who do ordain women, some of the largest being the United Methodist Church, Church of God in Christ, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The denominations that do ordain women have a different interpretation of scripture when defending their stance on women's ordination. For example:

The International Pentecostal Holiness Church does ordain women into the ministry. Many serve as missionaries, evangelists, and some serve to pastor local congregations. Also, we do allow women to teach classes that might include men in the class. IPHC does not interpret 1 Timothy 2:12 as an absolute prohibition but rather a statement reflecting particular circumstances in Paul's churches in the first century.⁷⁸

Paul was a leader in a radical movement that directly challenged the social norms of the day. When the baptismal creed "no longer male and female" was spoken, it threatened the social structure of the Roman government, and people like Jesus and Paul were killed probably for supporting such beliefs. The opposition of the surrounding society is what directed the church in

⁷⁷ <http://www2.cbeinternational.org/new/E-Journal/2007/07spring/denominations%20first%20installment--FINAL.pdf> Accessed April 22, 2016.

⁷⁸ <http://www2.cbeinternational.org/new/E-Journal/2007/07spring/denominations%20first%20installment--FINAL.pdf> Accessed April 22, 2016.

a trajectory toward excluding women from leadership roles. The New Testament clearly depicts these two differing stances on women's roles in society. This research has shown that a strong argument can be made to support women's leadership in the church today, yet some churches vehemently stand by the conservative scriptures which restrict women's roles.

In the end, it is up to a denomination's interpretation of scripture that will lead them to making a stance on the ordination of women. A close study of such scripture is crucial in this process. It is essential to understand the context of when the scriptures were written and the motives of those who wrote them, and then, scripture might be understood as it was originally intended to be perceived. That was the objective of this research: to understand Paul's goals and his perspective of his churches. This research revealed that there is evidence of women in leadership roles in the first-century church. The root beginnings of the church were founded on women working equally alongside men.

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