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The Reputation of the Apostle Paul: Was he a misogynist?

Melinda Nelson
Lynchburg College

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The Reputation of the Apostle Paul:

Was he a misogynist?

Melinda Nelson

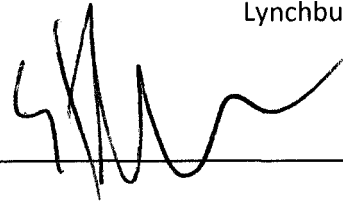
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Annette Evans, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Associate Professor and Chair of Religious Studies

Lynchburg College



Stephen Dawson, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Religious Studies

Lynchburg College



Delane Karalow

Associate Professor of Art

Lynchburg College

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Introduction

The Apostle Paul is a fundamental figure in the history, traditions, and beliefs of Christianity, yet his thoughts are sometimes viewed as controversial. Through his letters, Christians for centuries have learned about early Christianity and have been guided by Paul's writings into following the ways of Jesus as he is interpreted by Paul. However, Paul did not begin as a crusader for Christ; initially Paul was extremely opposed to this reform of Judaism and made his stance known through aligning himself with the Jewish Pharisees during the persecutions of Christians during the early years of Christianity. While Paul's letters and works have undoubtedly influenced Christianity, they have also influenced history through the actions of Christians citing his writings as apologetics to defend their actions. For example, many of Paul's letters that address women or pertain to women and their roles in both church and society; such as, 1 Timothy 2:9-15, Ephesians 5:21-30, 1 Corinthians 11:4-12 Galatians 3:28 and Romans 16:1-2 have been viewed as controversial in 20th /21st century societies. My thesis is that if one understands Paul and his writings on the subject of women within the original/ proper context these controversial verses and ideas may not be, in actuality, as controversial, offensive, or relevant to modern society or modern women as has been previously thought. Given his influence on both Christianity and history; understanding Paul and the specific context (time, place, to whom, purpose for writing, etc.) in which he is writing is paramount to understanding these complex writings and the true message behind Paul and his letters.

Placing Paul in Context

Paul's Life and Influences

Before Paul's writings can be examined, relevant facts from Paul's early life and influences must be considered. Paul, known at birth as Saul, was born in Tarsus between the years 4 BCE and 5 CE. (Wallace, p. 1). Tarsus was the principle city of Cilicia (in modern day Turkey), one of the largest trading centers on the coast of the Mediterranean. Due to the amount of trading, Tarsus was a fairly wealthy city and many people from all over the Roman Empire came there to live and work, making the population over a quarter of a million people (Wallace, p.2). Because Saul was born in a Roman Province he was given two names; the first was a Hebrew name, Saul, meaning "desired"; and the second was a Roman name Paulus, meaning "small". (Wallace, p. 8). Paul's family was an extremely devout Jewish family; his father was a member of the tribe of Benjamin and thus named him Saul after the first king of Israel. Significantly, Paul's father was also a Roman citizen which was an honor not often given to Jews. This citizenship was given to his sons, an acknowledgement which is seen in Acts 22: 25-28 when Paul is confronted by a Roman commander and asked about his citizenship. (Wallace, p. 10). Both his Roman citizenship and his residency in a global center like Tarsus was an advantage to Saul and would help him later in his life when conflicts arose between him and Roman authorities.

Being raised in a Hellenistic environment, Saul spoke fluent Greek, which can be seen in Acts 21:37-40 when Paul spoke Greek to a Roman military commander to stop a crowd from lynching him (Wallace, p. 11). Not only was Paul fluent in Koine Greek, common Greek, but also Classical Greek which spoke highly of his intellect and his education level. (Wallace, p. 11). While Paul was well versed in Greek and was exposed to Hellenism on a daily basis, he was still

a Jew. Saul and his family were Pharisees and centered their religion on the Law of Moses / the Torah (Wallace, p. 20). As a Pharisee, his education of studying the Pentateuch, would have started in the synagogue around the age of five; at age ten he would have moved on to studying the Mishnah (Jewish Oral Laws), and at the age of thirteen Saul would have begun formal rabbinic training (Wallace, p. 22). Paul may have left Tarsus at this time to study at the Hillel School in Jerusalem where he studied under Gamaliel I. At this point in his studies, Saul was also exposed to Greek writings and philosophy. (Wallace, p. 22-23).

Saul's life and outlook as a Pharisee

During his time as a Pharisee, Saul was extremely zealous for the Torah and Jewish tradition and harshly opposed the rising movement of Christianity; so much so that he became a persecutor of Christians. One of the most memorable examples of Saul's persecution of Christians can be seen in Acts 7:54-8:3 with the Stoning of Stephen (Saul's first appearance in the book of Acts) and Saul's actions following the event. After Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrin for the charge of "blasphemy" verse 58 states, "Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of the young man named Saul". While Saul may not have been a member of the Sanhedrin he was obviously important in the persecution of Stephen. The examples of Saul's persecution continue in the following chapter:

"While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, 'Lord do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he died. And Saul approved of their killing him. That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria. Devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison". (Acts 7:58-8:3)

Based on these verses **the zealousness** and passion that Saul possessed was not only for the Torah, but also for the persecution of Christians. After this persecution Saul, being eager to prove himself to the Sanhedrin, went to the high priest in order to obtain letters to inform the synagogues of Damascus of the persecutions in order to be able to persecute Christians in Damascus (Acts 9:1-2)

On the way to deliver these letters to Damascus Saul had a “vision” of a “light from heaven”. “ He then fell to the ground and heard the words, ‘ Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?’ He asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ The reply came, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do’” (Acts 9:4-6). This would prove to be the most important moment in the life of Saul/ Paul. Following the vision, Ananias, a Christian disciple, was instructed by “the Lord” to find Saul. This was frightening to Ananias due to his knowledge of Saul’s reputation; however, Ananias obeyed because God told him that Saul, “is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before the Gentiles and kings before the people of Israel”(Acts 9:10-15).

After this conversion Saul begins to be referred to by his Roman name instead of his Hebrew name. He also begins preaching to Gentiles. First in Arabia, then he returned to Damascus before journeying to Jerusalem to meet the heads of the church and familiarize himself with the leading powers of Christianity (Sanders). After this meeting Paul moved West with his ministry towards Syria. Over the next 20 years Paul established many churches throughout Asia Minor and three churches in Europe (Sanders). Paul realized that his ministry was causing conflicts and problems for the church in Jerusalem. The main problem pertained to the “Jewishness” of the converts and whether or not Gentiles should convert to Judaism in order to convert to Christianity. Paul did not believe this necessary; however, Peter(a disciple of Jesus,

formerly known as **Simon or Simon Peter** who was recognized as the leader of the disciples and became the first pope of the Roman Catholic Church) (O'Connor) did find this conversion to Judaism necessary. The solution was for Paul to be the apostle to the Gentile converts and for Peter to be the apostle for the Jewish converts (Sanders). After this meeting Paul continued his mission and visited churches to encourage followers and spread Christianity. During his travels he collected money for the church in Jerusalem. Shortly after his arrival in Jerusalem to deliver the money Paul was arrested at the Temple and was imprisoned by Roman guards. Christian history holds that Paul was executed in Rome possibly during the persecution of Christians during Nero's reign in 64 CE. (Sanders).

The Authorship of the Pauline Epistles: Did Paul write all the Works Accredited to Him?

Christianity attributes 13 letters in the New Testament to Paul; however, a modern scholarly debate has brought the authorship of certain letters under scrutiny (Crossan). An academic consensus has been reached by many biblical scholars that the letters written to Timothy (1 and 2 Timothy) and the letter written to Titus were not written by Paul, but were written in Paul's name shortly after his death (Crossan). Also, the works of Ephesians, Colossians and 2 Thessalonians are viewed among biblical scholars as questionable in relation to the authorship of Paul. Similarly to the letters to Timothy and Titus; Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians are written in Paul's name; therefore, they affect his reputation as a biblical figure and Christian authority.

Controversies within the Book of 1 Timothy

1 Timothy 2:9-15: Women in Authority :The controversy: Can women hold positions of

authority?

The New Testament book of 1 Timothy is a letter written to a Pauline disciple. The letter was written in Laodicea soon after Paul left Ephesus in order to travel to Macedonia to spread the *gospel*. Unlike many letters written by Paul, this letter is not written to a church, but to a disciple, friend, and companion. While this may make a difference in how the letter is written, the heart of the letter, like many others from Paul, is to instruct the church at Ephesus. Specifically, Paul is addressing false teachings that are being spread within the church and amongst the newly formed Christian community. (Levine, p. 8). Paul announces this purpose in verse 7: “ For this I was appointed a herald an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and trust. Through verse 7 Paul is assuring the people of the church at Ephesus that he is aware of the false doctrines and that his doctrine is true, he is not lying.

1 Timothy 2:9-15:

“⁸I desire, then that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument; also that 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.”

The above section of Timothy “ranks among the most problematic of texts in the entire New Testament” (Kimberley, p. 481). The reason for the difficulty of this passage is “the blatant chauvinism that it appears to reveal and express” (Kimberly, p. 481) At first glance this section appears to give commands to women on modesty, ministry, and childbearing. The verse also uses the transgression of Eve in order to show women as the weaker and more deceivable sex. (Levine, p.8). However, when placed in context, both historical and societal, 1 Timothy 2:9-15 is

focused on the larger issue plaguing Paul in both 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy; the issue of false teachers and their doctrine circulating in the church at Ephesus (Levine, p.8).

1 Timothy 2:9-10 Modesty in Appearance :The controversy: Are women to be modest?

“.....⁹ also that the women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided, or with gold, pearls or expensive clothes,¹⁰ but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God.”

Before examining the text itself the context surrounding the passage must be examined. 1 Timothy 1:3, 1:4, 1:7, 1:19 all discuss false doctrine in the church (Kimberly, p. 484). Given that the following chapter 4 also addresses false doctrine (Kimberly, p. 484), the argument for this particular paragraph to follow the same theme as the chapter preceding and following these verses is easily made. Furthermore, 1 Timothy 2:8 states, “ I desire, then, that in every place men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument”. Verse 8 sets the context for which the following verses are intended. Paul is giving commands to men about proper worship practices. The sentence continues into verse 9 stating, “ also that the women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with hair braided, or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes”. Paul is commanding the women of Ephesus to dress modestly and without material adornment is meant in the same way that verse 8 is directed towards the men of Ephesus; in worship, specifically public worship (Barnes, p.1135). Public appearance for the church held immense importance to Paul. Paul desired the church to be in high social standing in the community in order to represent Christ in a positive, socially acceptable manner. Both Jewish and Greco-Roman standards for women taught against adornment because it represented material extravagance and sexual/ marital infidelity (Levine, p.8). Paul does not directly say that these commands for the Ephesian women apply specifically to worship; however, verse 8 supports this

notion, as does the phrase used in verse 9, “in suitable clothing.” Previously, Paul had informed the women to dress “modestly and decently”; the clothing spoken of in this verse must be suitable for a condition or occasion; this occasion is worship or any occasion that directly associates the women with the church (Barnes, p.1135). Verse 10 continues by explaining how women should adorn themselves modestly: “but with good works as is proper for women who profess reverence to God”. In this verse Paul is reminding the women of Ephesus of what is important to Paul, to God, and what should be more important to them: reverence to God, not the love of material adornment that false doctrine appears to be spreading through the church at Ephesus (Levine, p.8).

1 Timothy 2: 11-12: Learning and Teaching/ Authority: The controversy: Are women allowed to teach?

“¹¹ Let a woman learn in silence with full submission.¹² I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent.”

These verses have been viewed as a “universal principal” that does not allow for women to be involved in ministry at all times and places; however, these specific instructions are only written in 1 Timothy. Given that this restriction on women is only mentioned during this section of 1 Timothy, a letter regarding false doctrine, the instructions are only meant for the women of Ephesus because they have accepted false doctrine (Levine,p.8). Paul informs the women, having accepted false doctrine, that they have no authority to teach and are to learn in silence because they could potentially abuse the power and authority given to them for teaching in order to pollute the church with false doctrine. Paul does not address abuse of power by men in this paragraph because the women of the church were being specifically targeted and used to infiltrate the church (Levine, p.8). Also, the abuse of authority by men is addressed separately in

different areas of both 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy (Levine, p.8).

1 Timothy 2:13-15: Eve, Childbirth, and Redemption: The controversy: Does Paul blame women for sin entering the world?

“¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵ yet she was saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty”.

Verses 13-15 states, “ 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”. Paul references the creation narrative in Genesis 2 and the narrative of the Fall of Humanity in Genesis 3 to usher in the saving force for the misled women of Ephesus and conclude this section about false doctrine. In these verses Paul’s intention is not to remind women of Eve’s deception or to blame women, universally, for the Fall/ sin. On the contrary, Paul is informing the women of Ephesus that have been deceived, like Eve, and that, like Eve, there is redemption for them (Kimberly, p. 482).

However, the most debated of these verses is verse 15 that appears to inform women that their salvation is contingent upon bearing children. Considering that Paul emphasized faith by grace over works righteousness the notion of “birthing a baby” would not give a woman salvation in the eyes of Paul and does not coincide with Pauline teachings (Kimberly, p. 482). One theory for this section is to read the entire paragraph as a command to reflect Christian morals and values, but that would make the morals and values universal to all Christian women. Again, Paul only discusses, through this letter, the issues plaguing the women of Ephesus and never decrees these commands as key factors and principles of Christianity. Another, more plausible, theory is a translational error/ complication. In verse 15 the word represented in

English as “childbearing” is *teknogonias* in the Greek translation (Kimberly, p. 483). While this word is commonly translated as ‘childbearing’ the word can also be associated with the phrase ‘the birth of the child’. The meaning of the verse is quickly changed when making this distinction. The article ‘the’ is immensely important in how this verse is translated. The article notes a specific birth; the specific/ important birth “having significance for all” is the birth of Jesus Christ (Kimberly, p.483). The birth (life, death, and resurrection) of Christ redeemed Eve who was deceived by the serpent and the women of Ephesus that were deceived by false doctrine.

Controversies in the Book of Ephesians

Ephesians 5:21-30: Christian Marriage: Emancipative, not Stifling: The controversy:

Are women to be submissive to men?

Written to the Christian community of Ephesus in Asia Minor (Turkey), Ephesians is one of two letters, along with Colossians, that addresses the domestic life of its recipients (Johnson, p.428). However, while this letter is attributed to Paul, scholarly debate has sparked theories of the letter being attributed to a later author. Writing works in an “honorable predecessors” name was a common practice in the 1st century CE ; therefore, the letter has come under suspicion of being written in a later time than Paul’s life would have allowed (Johnson,p.428). Regardless, the letter is written in the Pauline style and addresses themes and churches that were well known to Paul. (Johnson, p.431) For these reasons Ephesians is still attributed to Paul. The purpose of the epistle is to explain a “new life in Christ” (Johnson p. 428) and to inform followers of how to behave in their new life as Christians.

Ephesians 5:21-30

“Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body”.

Ephesians 5:21-33 is focused primarily on marriage between Christians. Often this verse is abused in order to serve a patriarchal agenda of a completely submissive wife with no reciprocity within marriage (Mollenkott, p. 44) However; this is far from the meaning the author intended for the audience at Ephesus. The Ephesians were under Roman rule and were attempting to adapt to the expectations placed on them from Greco-Roman society and their Christianity. Greco-Roman society was deeply patriarchal and contingent on ancestral laws that stratified class and encouraged slavery (Mollenkott, p. 43). Christianity broke these laws, and patriarchal ideas, by making all people equal in Christ. For this reason, Greco-Roman society was “sensitive” to the social-political implications that Christianity held. (Mollenkott, p. 43). Often this passage is viewed as adapting Christianity to the views of Greco-Roman society (Mollenkott, p. 43), but on the contrary this “sensitivity” only led to the authors complex explanation of a Christian marriage through the analogy of Christ and the church.

Ephesians 5:21: On women being subject to men.

²¹Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. ²²Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.”

Verse 21 plainly commands Christians to be subject and to serve one another in reverence of Christ (Mollenkott, p.44). The author writes a very simple guideline to the Ephesian

community: be subject and servants to one another. Just as Christ was a servant, the Christians of Ephesus are to be servants. However, verse 22 is often claimed to imply that a different type of relationship takes place between a husband and a wife: that a wife is to be subject/ submissive to her husband without any reciprocation. (Mollenkott, p. 43). Neither verse contains implications of the author making a change between the two relationships; that of Christian to Christian and husband to wife. If both husband and wife are Christians, then they are commanded by verse 21 to be subject to each other out of “reverence to Christ”, this does not change because of the lesser relationship of husband and wife. Wives are to be subject to their husbands, but husbands are also supposed to be subject to their wives as Christians. Due to the tension between Christianity and Greco-Roman societal expectations the author could not blatantly command , “ as wives must submit, so must husbands submit” or “as slaves submit, so must masters submit” (Mollenkott, p.48). By phrasing the verse in such a way that the verse appears patriarchal to Greco-Roman (non-Christian) citizens, the letter and the message is not seen as a threat to the social-political structure of the community.

Ephesians 5:23-25: The role of Husbands

“²³For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”

Upon first inspection this verse portrays the man as the “head” of the wife; therefore, the husband makes the decisions and holds authority over his wife. However, this is a modern view accredited to scientific and biological knowledge about the head and brain that first century people did not hold. (Mollenkott, p.50). If the author had desired for the husband to be the

“head”/ ruler of his wife intellectually, then the body part used would not have been the head, but instead the heart. (Mollenkott ,p. 50). In the first century the common belief was that the heart was where the human psyche was located. All intelligence, emotion, morality, and contact with God came from the heart. (Mollenkott, p. 50). By referring to the church as the body and comparing the church to the wife, the wife is then the body to the head that is the husband, analogous to how the church is the body to Christ. The body cannot survive without the head; this is true, but similarly the head cannot survive without the body. (Mollenkott, p.50). Verse 23 is not about husbands ruling over their wives, but of interdependence between husbands and wives like that of a head and body and the church and Christ. Furthermore, the passage is commanding husbands to sacrifice for their wives in the same way that Christ sacrificed for the church. While this may seem extreme, it demonstrates the amount and strength of the love that a husband is to have for his wife. Wives are not asked to sacrifice in this way because women in Greco-Roman societies were not given the same privileges and powers as men; therefore, they had nothing to sacrifice (Mollenkott, p. 49).

Ephesians 26-27: Made Holy through Cleansing: The image of the Bride

“²⁶ in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ so as to present the church to himself in splendor; without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind-yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish”

The intention of verses 26 and 27 is to parallel Christ’s action for the church and the bride’s action before getting married. (O’Brien, p. 421). In verse 26 the ‘her’ being referenced is not the wife, but the church. In order to make the church holy, Christ cleansed her “with the washing of water by the word”. The word “word” in this verse is better translated as “through the word” meaning the word of the gospel (O’Brien, p. 423). Christ cleansed the church “through the word”

of the *gospel*; in a similar way a bride is cleansed before marriage. A marriage custom of ancient Hebrews was to bathe the bride before the nuptials (O'Brien, p. 421). While the author is not speaking to Jews or Hebrews the imagery is believed to be borrowed from Ezekiel 16:8-14 (O'Brien, p. 421). Verse 27 continues to parallel the two events by saying, "as to present the church to himself in splendor. . ." The church is cleansed in order to present the church in splendor, just as the bride is bathed to present herself, in splendor, to her husband. The verse continues by describing how both the church and the wife are presented as spotless, holy, and without blemish. For modern people this parallel is not terribly extreme considering brides in many cultures wear white and present themselves as virginal to their husbands during their nuptials. Finally, the presentation of the church and the wife to their husband is analogous to the exclusive, permanent relationships between both Christ and the church and the husband and wife (O'Brien, p. 421).

Ephesians 28-30: How husbands should love their wives.

“²⁸ In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, ³⁰because we are members of the body.”

In prior verses husbands are commanded to love their wives as Christ loves the church, this in no way makes the husband a Christ figure, but creates an analogy for the husband to understand the way in which he is supposed to love, as well as, creating a daunting task for the husband. However, the writer gives the husband a slightly easier example to follow when he cannot be as perfect as Christ-to love his wife in the same way that he loves himself (Barnes, p.1007). However, the emphasis is not on self-love (Johnson, p. 434), but to love in the way that is commanded by Christ (Mark 12:31). The idea is a much simpler explanation and a more

attainable goal than telling a husband to love the way that Christ loves. Verse 29 emphasizes that in the same way a husband cares and nourishes his body and as Christ does the same for the church, a husband is to also nourish and care for his wife (Barnes, p.1007). Verse 30 continues with reminding both husbands and wives that they are both part of the body of Christ, the church, and because of this they are both equal.

Ephesians 31-33: Becoming One.

“³¹ For this reason man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. ³² This is the great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. ³³ Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband”

The conclusion of this passage is given as an explanation of why marriage joins man and woman together and reminds both husbands and wives how to love. Verse 31 explains that a man is to be joined with his wife, as one, after marriage. The phrase “will become one flesh” identifies that in a Christian marriage the husband and wife are joined, they are one; therefore, they are equal. Also, this verse draws upon Gen. 2: 24 in showing that marriage is not a social construct, but was ordained by God since the creation of the first couple (Johnson, p. 431). The author recognizes the confusion and the “mysteriousness” of the workings of marriage and cites that as his reason for comparing it to the relationship between the church and Christ. Finally, the author concludes with reminding husbands in the proper way to love their wives and informs the wives to respect their husbands.

Controversies in the Book of 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 11:4-12: The controversy: Are Women to be Veiled?

Corinth during Paul’s time was an extremely wealthy and heavily populated Roman

colony. With a diverse population of Roman citizens, Greeks, and Jews, Corinth was a prime location for Paul to spread the *gospel*. During his time spent in the colony Paul founded the church at Corinth. After his departure from Corinth, Paul received news of immorality in the church and began a correspondence with members of the Corinthian church. Through these letters Paul was asked for his opinion and guidance on matters affecting the believers at Corinth. Paul answers these questions in 1 Corinthians, thus making the epistle an “occasional” epistle and not a set of universal laws or Christian codes. Therefore, the commands given and the issues addressed in 1 Corinthians 11: 4-12 are specific to Corinth and the problems being faced by that particular church during their correspondence with Paul. During his correspondence Paul was increasingly concerned and committed to three aspects of worship and the church: 1) honoring God by applying scripture to worship; 2) believers showing respect to each other, and 3) the testimony or view of the church to unbelievers. (Pratt, p. 345). All three are reflected throughout 1 Corinthians and are the reasons for 1 Corinthians 11:4-12.

1 Corinthians 11:4-12:

“ Any man who prays or prophecies with something on his head disgraces his head, but any women who prays or prophecies with her head unveiled disgraces her head- it is one and the same thing as having her head shaven. 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 shaven, she should wear a veil. For a man ought not to have his head veiled since he is the image and reflection (glory) of God; but woman is the reflection (glory) 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 (have freedom of choice regarding 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 from woman; but all things come from God.”

1 Corinthians 11: 4-6: Men’s and Women’s Head Coverings

“Any man who prays or prophecies with something on his head disgraces his head,⁵ but any woman who prays or prophecies with her head unveiled disgraces her head-it is one and the same

thing as having her head shaven. ‘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’.

In verses 4 and 5 Paul is comparing standards for men and women. Paul is stating that both sexes have certain standards, not just women and not just men. Prayer and prophecy in these verses are considered to be “expounders of divine will” in public assemblies (Barnes p. 753). Verse 4 explains that for a man to have his head covered during public worship does disgrace to his “head”, not his physical head, but to Christ as his head* (Barnes p.753). During pagan worship rituals, men would often cover their heads with their togas or clothing (Pratt, p. 348). If Christian men were to do this it would be dishonoring Christ by mixing false religion with Christian worship. Due to this being culturally specific this command to the Corinthians is not an absolute rule (Pratt, p. 348). For example, God commanded Aaron to wear a turban while ministering (Exodus 28:24, 37-39) and throughout Christian history men have worn head coverings for various reasons; decoration, warmth, etc. . . Paul’s teaching is in response to pagan influence in Corinth, but not a universal rule for all Christian men (Pratt, p. 348).

In contrast, women are to keep their heads covered during prayer and prophecy as not to dishonor their “heads”; their husbands*. Paul is saying that women are allowed to pray and prophesize publicly, but their heads have to be covered. This practice of covering a woman’s head to show respect for her husband is also a situational command. This sign of respect was a cultural practice for the women of Corinth. Also, this command is only addressing married women, not single or widowed women of the church (Pratt, p. 349). Verse 6 continues by saying if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair or have her head shaved. The practice of shaving a woman’s head or cutting her hair was a societal punishment in Corinth for

*See Section on 1 Timothy 2:9-15

adulterous women (Pratt, p. 349). Paul is saying that a woman who does not veil herself is showing her husband the same dishonor and disrespect that a woman who has committed adultery has shown her husband because this was the view held by Corinthian society. This teaching emphasizes Paul's desire to have the church represented properly and viewed as favorably as possible by the Corinthian community.

1 Corinthian 11:7-10: Images, Reflections, and Angels

“For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection (glory) of God; but woman is the reflection (glory) of man.⁸ Indeed man was not made for woman, but women for man.⁹ Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman from man.¹⁰ For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head (have freedom of choice regarding her head) because of the angels”

In these verses Paul is going into deeper detail of his reasoning for the veiling of women. Paul uses Genesis 2 as his source for this teaching. Man was made in the image of God and should not imitate pagan rituals because he was made for God's glory (Pratt, p. 349). Similarly, woman was made for man and is the glory of man; therefore, she should honor her husband by veiling her head. While this may be misinterpreted as man being more important to God than woman, the verse says that “woman is made in the reflection of man”, not in the “image of man”. By stating the difference Paul is showing that women are not completely “derivative of man”, but were created by God as a reflection, making woman both the glory of man and of God (Pratt, p. 351).

The verse continues by saying a woman should have a “symbol of authority on her head”. The Greek version of this verse lacks the phrase “symbol of” (Welborn, p.2015); however, even

interpreting the verse in this way the emphasis is still on the cultural implications of an uncovered head. The head covering was culturally specific and was viewed as a sign of the husband's authority (Pratt, p. 351). Also, the Greek is more correctly translated as "the woman ought to have authority over her own head". This translation emphasizes the veiling being the woman's choice and not something that should be forced upon her, but also her responsibility to her husband. Paul continues by saying women should make this decision "because of the angels". This phrase could mean one of two options; the first being actual celestial beings that were believed to watch over the church (1 Corinthians 4:9,6:3, 11:10, 13:1) or these angels could be messengers (Luke 7:24,27, 9:52, Acts 12:15, James 2:25) that would report to Paul any false practices or immorality happening in the church (Pratt, p. 352) Either way the responsibility is still placed on the woman and these "angels" are merely observing the acts of the church.

1 Corinthians 11:11-12: The interdependence of Man and Woman

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

Paul continues by qualifying " in the Lord" stating that the following comments are for Christians (Pratt, p. 352). The following comments show that Paul believes men and women to be interdependent; this is a reflection of believers being equal in Christ. Paul cites Genesis 2 in referring to woman coming from man; Eve was formed from Adam's rib. Paul then explains that while woman came from man, man also comes from woman because men are born from women. Paul is showing that both men and women are dependent upon each other; therefore, men and women should respect each other equally. While Paul states these facts for the relationship between men and women/ husbands and wives, he reminds them both that everything comes

from God. This clears up any possible misunderstanding that may have appeared due to verse seven's statement that "woman is the reflection of man" by showing that woman was created by God; therefore, women are important to God and are to have a relationship with Him.

Controversies in the Books of Galatians & Romans

The controversy: Was Paul an Egalitarian? Does he see women as equal?

Galatians 3:28: Equality in Christ

While the above verses have been misconstrued and reconstructed to work in favor of a patriarchal society, Paul does make equality between Christians clear in Galatians 3:28. Before writing this letter to the Galatians, Paul was involved in a discussion with the council in Jerusalem about observing Jewish law (Briggs, p. 2041). Paul's stance was that Gentiles did not need to follow Jewish laws and traditions. This epistle from Paul is in response to this struggle and particular opponents of Paul's teachings in Galatia (Briggs, p. 2041). Galatians 3:28 expressly shows Paul's view of Jews and Gentiles, but Paul also reveals his view of equality between men and women in Christ.

Galatians 3:28:

"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"

Paul uses these three distinct hierarchical separations due to a recitation that many Ancient Jewish men spoke daily; "Blessed is God who has not made me a Gentile, who has not made me a boor (slave), or a woman" (Levine, p. 339). This phrase emphasizes that Gentiles were of a higher standing than slaves and slaves were of a higher social standing than women. However, while this recitation is troubling to modern people Paul completely demolishes this idea as one that should not be held by Christians. Paul plainly states that all are equal and one as Christians, meaning that not only are Jews and Greeks equal, but men and women are also equal in Christ.

Romans 16:1-2: Phoebe

During his closing remarks to the Romans Paul acknowledges people who are important to himself and his cause of spreading the gospel. Given that Paul had never met the believers in Rome the expression of gratitude towards these people says an immense amount about the character and authority of those he commends in his letter (Elliot, p. 1975).

Romans 16:1-2:

“I commend you to our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchræ,² 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”.

In these verses Paul describes Phoebe as a deacon and has given her the job of delivering the letter to the Romans. Firstly, Paul shows that he is certainly not against women teaching or having authority because Phoebe was given the role of a deacon. This role was similar, if not the same, as the role of a minister in the early Christian church (Elliot, 1997). Furthermore, Paul has entrusted Phoebe to deliver the letter. Not only did Phoebe have to deliver the letter safely to the Romans, but she also had to read, explain, and circulate the message among the Christian community in Rome (Crossan, p. 114). This shows that Paul obviously found her worthy and competent enough to do his bidding in Rome. Given that Paul had never met the Romans, Phoebe was an ambassador for Paul showing that Paul did not have a problem with Phoebe or women teaching, learning, and having authority in religious matters.

Conclusion

After placing Paul and these “controversial” writings within proper context the true intentions of both the man and the writings become clear. Paul was an educated man of faith who addressed both church and domestic issues through a societal lens. Paul’s goal throughout all of his writings, regardless of controversy, was to spread the *gospel* and to represent Christ in a

positive and socially acceptable way. His aims and goals are reflected in the language he used to explain and address issues regarding women and their roles in both society and the church.

Paul's concerns and ordinances for women addressed issues and concerns on a case by case basis and were not intended to be universal codes for Christianity. The issue of universality in the writings of the Apostle, it seems, is not with Paul, but with the societies interpreting his works. Through 1 Timothy 2:9-15 Paul shows his desire for proper teaching and doctrine within the church not only to show the church as a positive representative of Christ, but also to continue the spiritual growth of the Christian community to which he is writing. By examining Ephesians 5:21-30 the context expresses Paul's sentiments as focused on interdependence between husband and wife, not a nonreciprocal relationship based on the submission of wives to husbands. The explanation by Paul of modesty and veiling of women seen in 1 Corinthians 11:4-12 is not an oppressive command for modesty, but a societal norm within the city of Corinth during the correspondence between the church and the Apostle. Galatians 3:28 and Roman 16:1-2 are the true indicators of Paul's attitude towards women as a man who did not care about gender because of his belief that all people are equal in Christ. In conclusion, Paul was not a chauvinist, misogynist, or a woman-hater; Paul was a man who believed in equality in Christ, who knew the societal issues and implications of the questions he addressed, and answered these questions in the most Christian and least conspicuous way that he knew.

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