

The Quandary Concerning The Pauline Doctrine Of Women In Worship And Ministry

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"What we have here is a failure to communicate." Those words spoken by the guard to Paul Newman in the film *Cool Hand Luke* have become a catch phrase of our culture. These words also apply to the problematic nature of women's roles in today's Church. We have a situation in which a quandary exists in the form of squaring biblical passages, with particular regard to the Pauline epistles in this paper, to prevailing societal norms which not only stimulate women to aspire to ministry but have also provided for the conditions of the Mainline churches and Pentecostal churches to ordain women and give them authority over churches. At this point, there are two important qualifications to consider (which I believe makes our situation more compelling today): first, the concept of ministry is different in today's church from the more participative church of the first century; the second qualifier is that when people say ministry in today's church, they mean those positions which are "publicly acknowledged (paid)."¹ The intent of this paper is to look into the matter in such a way that will help reveal what positions the societal norms make desirable to women in balance (or contrast) with what the normative teaching of the Pauline epistles makes allowable for women.

It seems to this writer that most things can be put on a bipolar scale, and this whole matter of the interpretation of Paul concerning women's roles is a prime example. The two extremes are traditionalism and egalitarianism. The egalitarians represent the view that all roles in the church are open to women and men. There are, of course, the extreme egalitarians such as Dennise Lardner Carmody, and the more moderate egalitarians such as Aida Bensencon Spencer. The traditionalists are in favor of the traditional interpretations of Paul's writings, which see the role of women as restricted in the church and requires them to submit to the leadership of men. The extreme view would be held in modern times by James E. Bordwine, while the more moderate view would be represented by James B. Hurley. In dead center would be views such as the ones held by Roger Nicole, Clark Pinnock (circa mid 1980's), and John Stott. As always, the men in the middle get shot at from both sides. I have the greatest respect for Dr. Nicole and John Stott, even so, I find their positions lacking in conviction. In an

interview in "Christianity Today," Stott quotes from the Lausanne Covenant where it describes Scripture as being "without error in all that it affirms...our duty is to determine what it affirms."² He then adds a genuinely artful statement in the tradition of classic ambivalence when he says, "the purpose is not to dodge awkward issues or foster disobedience, but to make our obedience contemporary."³ Now that is an artful dodge that sounds good! He further believes that headship, although clearly taught and based upon the creation principle, does not refer to authority but to responsibility.⁴ Reason dictates and Scripture supports the idea that, without authority, you cannot have responsibility. His conclusion is exactly between the two poles. He is content that women can hold all offices in the Church, including pastor, if there is a board of pastors and the senior-most pastor is a man.

As for the extremes, there is passion and conviction. The egalitarian position is the much more militant and belligerent of the two extremes. Consider the words of Clark Pinnock, who is neither a defender of traditionalism nor afraid of controversy, "I would not expect my opinion to be welcomed in the circles of modern feminism. One feels considerable hatred (not too strong a word) for any suggestions that God might have created the sexes with an important role differentiation."⁵ Should you think that Pinnock is overstating the case, then hear the words of Dennise Carmody, "Insofar as Paul proved a major influence in Christianity, feminists rightly hold him accountable for a significant part of their suffering. As well, feminist theologians insist that his prejudice, if not misogyny, cannot be part of revelation. Otherwise, not just Paul, but divinity itself would be sexist."⁶ The traditionalists lack the fiery passion of the egalitarians, yet the extreme element holds to its idea tenaciously. In the older commentators, there is only a matter-of-factness in their patriarchal interpretations (as we shall see). However, some of the more modern traditionalists such as Bordwine are countering the militancy of the feminists. In his book, The Pauline Doctrine of Male Headship: The Apostle Versus Biblical Feminists, Bordwine starts his argument on the dedication page where he pays tribute to his father and father-in-law for their "manliness" and encourages his sons to walk in the "footsteps of our patriarchs." Throwing down the gauntlet, Bordwine maintains "we will vindicate our claim for the 'traditional understanding' of Paul is, in fact, the correct interpretation of what the Apostle wrote."⁷ And so, the combatants with differing degrees of conviction and contrasting interpretations of what Paul actually taught contest the issue of women's roles in worship and ministry.

Of course, there are always voices which try to add reason and calm to the storms in order to limit their destruction. David Dockery is one such voice who cautions that women's roles in the Church should be removed from political and sexist power struggles. He wisely sees that the Church is not a

place for women to declare their rights or for men to establish chauvinistic fortresses.⁸ The purpose of the Church is to glorify God—not our causes. In addition to this, it seems that we must establish some benchmark for deciding the way out of this quandary of competing voices. It should be hoped that the various positions that all would allow for Scripture to be that standard. Indeed, the exception would be the radical egalitarians of whom a few are ready to jettison biblical authority if necessary. In this category, we would find Dennise Carmody and Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza. Of course, as we shall see, the quandary is actually intensified by the hermeneutical methods of both parties.

The stage is now set with the players and their ambitions. At this point, we will embark into the quandary itself. This quandary, as put forth for the purposes of this paper, is defined as follows: there is a state of perplexity regarding the true teaching of Paul on women in the Church. This dilemma has its matrix primarily in four passages of Scripture (II Corinthians 11:2-16; I Corinthians 14:33b-36; Galatians 3:28; II Timothy 2:11-15), the involvement of women in Paul's ministry, and in the predispositions of the contending views.

In our grappling with this quandary, this paper intends to look first at the four passages which we will consider to be Paul's dialectic instruction on women in the Church. To accomplish this, we will not do an in-depth exegesis on the passages (this is not the purpose of this paper), but we will compare methods of exegesis and do a brief survey of where these methods have taken various commentators. We will then consider briefly some descriptive passages e.g. Romans 16:1, in order to see how Paul's practice compares to his teachings. Finally, we will again examine some prejudices in order to understand how people wind up where they do. The conclusion of this paper will then offer some thoughts on where the writer is in the midst of all this.

While preparing the research material for this paper, the writer found an article by David Dockery in which he outlines the hermeneutical principles of both the egalitarians and the traditionalists.⁹ These models are as follows:

Egalitarian

The existing translations of the Bible are biased against women. The partnership of the male and female was largely overlooked by Patriarchal Israel, although later books such as "The Song of Solomon" were reversing this trend. Christians shared the views of the first century. As time advanced, so did

their views, eventually slaves were emancipated—so should women be.

Paul's letters were to specific people with specific problems e.g. the women lacked education.

Paul's advice concerning women's roles should be correlated to what women actually did in the first century church.

Head may not always mean authority but can also mean source.

If you must interpret these Pauline passages literally, then you must also literally interpret I Corinthians 16:20; John 13:14; I Timothy 5:23.

Traditionalists

Feminism was not a factor in the early church.

Males dominate Scripture with only few exceptions.

The symbolism of Christ to the church in Ephesians 5:23ff demonstrates male authority.

Culture is not a happenstance situation—it is prepared by God.

The Virgin Mary exemplifies obedience.

There is a hierarchy in created order...women must defer to men and men in turn must be receptive and responsible.

The principles of obedience, submission, and authority are clear in Scripture. The male and female relationship is only one which points to the Trinity.

There are six additional questions which every honest interpreter must deal with: do the texts (especially here the four texts in question) transcend culture therefore establishing them as normative teaching; does apostolic practice equal apostolic precept e.g. Priscilla's instruction of Apollos was done orderly and in submission to church leadership therefore in this case practice is in line with precept; can we assume that for every command given in the context of cultural situations which are not timeless that this also constitutes these commands as being temporal; can we not interpret any difficulties in these passages by what is plainly taught in them; does the interpreter consider the passages in full measure i.e. compare these texts to other texts by the author, compare the text with similar epistles by other authors; employ a method of harmonization (especially applicable to traditionalists who are willing to let I Corinthians 11:2-16 stand in contradiction to I Corinthians 14:33b-36); does the interpreter seek the wisdom of the Christian community past and present and the enablement of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ In the case of the extremists in both parties these guidelines are not adhered to.

With these technical guidelines in view, we will now consider the respective views of the egalitarians, traditionalists, and conservative (by this title only their views on women's roles in the church is intended) interpreters. Again the purpose here (due primarily to the scope and intent of this paper) is not

to provide in-depth exegetical critique but rather to do a survey of the respective views and summarize their interpretations of the main points and key words in these four Pauline passages which are of paramount importance to the whole discussion.

The Egalitarian View

Earlier in this paper a general set of hermeneutical guidelines for feminists was put forth. It is obvious that they do not generally conform to the six questions and applications for doing hermeneutics which followed these guidelines. It must be stated that most of the extreme egalitarians take their own general guidelines much farther than historic methods of exegesis. Perhaps the best example of this is the *Multi-dimensional Model for Interpreting the Bible* by Fiorenza.¹¹ The key elements of this model are:

Suspicion rather than acceptance for biblical authority.

Critical evaluation rather than correlation.

Interpretation through proclamation.

Remembrance and historical reconstruction. (deconstructionism?)

Interpretation through celebration and ritual

She insists that the "women-church" has the authority to choose and reject biblical texts.¹² Furthermore this model gives feminists a way to reclaim the whole Bible, not as normative but as "experiential enabling authority."¹³ Her technique allows her to simply dismiss many Pauline texts without grappling with them. She can apply her grid and get the result she desires.

Another extreme egalitarian, Dennise Carmody, uses similar methods but also reflects a higher, biblical criticism. As she states it, Paul is shaped by "dubious assumptions".¹⁴ Her meaning on this point is that Paul actually believes the Genesis accounts to be true. That is why he appeals to the creation account in I Corinthians 11:8 and I Timothy 2: 13-14. She also accepts the recent theories which deny that Paul wrote the Pastoral letters. This idea as she holds it actually removes some guilt for the apostle as the Pseudo-Paul who wrote these pastoral-epistles is the paramount oppressor of women.¹⁵

Actually the contested authorship of the Pastorals is not of feminist origin. However there is no doubt that this issue is of some use for the feminist cause. Among those who espouse the idea of Pseudo-Paul are indeed some very fine scholars such as Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann. If their views are maintained then it can be argued that there is a strong impact from Jewish thought concerning church order and roles here.¹⁶ If in fact this passage in I Timothy 2 is a Jewish parenthesis, then the feminists can

legitimately argue that this is not in fact the way things were in the first-century church and this is not Paul's thought on the subject. The speculation behind Pseudo-Paul further strengthens the egalitarian argument by seeing this text as a response by second generation church leaders who are fighting various syncretistic movements in the church of their day.¹⁷ As I Timothy 2 is the second punch in the most damaging words against the egalitarian cause (by ordering them to be submissive, silent, and not to teach men) the removal of Pauline authorship here diminishes the number of texts they must contend with.

Not all egalitarians are of this liberal view of Scripture. There are of course, the less radical egalitarians who still hold to full access to church leadership for women. One scholar representing this view is Aida Besancon Spencer who wrote *Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry*. A book very well received by people with views all over the spectrum. Spencer accepts Pauline authorship of the Pastorals and has respect both for biblical authority and Paul.¹⁸ So she does not dispute what Paul is saying outright but she does go to great lengths to prove that he is an egalitarian. On the two most damaging passages to the egalitarian position, Spencer argues against any long-lasting restrictions against women in ministry being taught by them. Against the position (that we will examine under conservative interpretations) of Douglas Moo she argues that Paul is not arguing against women "weighing" prophecy.¹⁹ Her argument is that Paul is simply dealing with a temporary condition. With regards to I Timothy 2, Spencer goes to great lengths (seven pages) to argue that "silence" in verse 11 is a positive thing.²⁰ Even though she is guilty of what Pinnock calls "hermeneutical ventriloquism"²¹ in her handling of the text, there are still some very good points made in her argument. For example, it is certainly demonstrable that in the church the role of women was elevated by the fact they were being taught. This was not true of Judaism which restrained what women could learn. To learn in "quietness" was a noble pursuit and Spencer maintains the logical end of this process is that the students will graduate to teachers.²²

Moving ever closer to the center, we have views represented by Roger Nicole who states that these are indeed elements of I Corinthians 11 and I Timothy 2 which transcend culture and circumstance.²³ However, he sees no reason from those texts that women should not hold any ministerial offices in the church.²⁴ This certainly brings the two competing positions to a middle point. It is interesting that after Nicole concedes the egalitarian point that Stanley N. Gundry (an egalitarian) expresses both agreement and uneasiness with Nicole's stated position. In the end Gundry understands that Nicole's reservations (in particular his view of normative teaching which transcends culture) can come back to undermine the egalitarians.²⁵

The Traditionalist View

It is not the purpose of this paper to offer a balancing of views simply because for our purposes of dealing with the quandary the egalitarian and conservative views require more attention today. It is conceivable that a day might come in the future when a whole new movement arises to defend that the rules of women should be restricted and that men should assume total "ministerial" authority in the churches. But in today's church there is not much being done that is new under the sun with this view. In researching this paper, the writer found very few books such as *The Pauline Doctrine of Male Headship* which tackle the egalitarians using a wide range of contemporary resources yet continue to hold a rigid traditionalist position.

In the earlier commentaries there is general agreement on the interpretation of these four Pauline passages. One rarely even finds discussion on the interesting particulars such as the meaning of the veil, or if Paul's reference to the Genesis ordinances could have actually been centered in the Fall and thus mitigated by Christ's atonement. The veil is presented as a symbol of subjection for women.²⁶ When praying to GOD the woman ought to have her head covered so as not to draw attention to her asserting authority.²⁷ In discussing headship, the earlier commentaries for the most part offer no other meaning for *kephale* except as "authority." They do argue that this headship is applicable to functions only, and not to an ontological inequality.²⁸ Although this assertion is not only offered as the meaning of the text, it also is a very positive view of women from Paul's day even to much of this Age. However, as we shall see the egalitarians do not take any consolation in this interpretation. Looking at the older commentaries through today's eyes, one also wonders at the willingness to refrain from working through the apparent contradiction of I Corinthians 11:5 and I Corinthians 14:34-35 in which women go from speaking in the church to absolute silence. So much for the hermeneutical concept of harmonization. One attempt at reconciliation of the two texts is that in Chapter 11 Paul is addressing private meetings and in Chapter 14 he is addressing public meetings. This argument is very weak when one considers the fact that many public church meetings in those days were in the private homes.

The I Timothy 2 passage is treated in much the same way. William Hendriksen maintains that "by nature" women should not exercise authority over men (or even yearn to!) by lecturing them in public.²⁹ Again there seems to be this blind spot to I Corinthians 11:2-3. He does argue that this prohibition has nothing to do with spiritual equality but with her physical and functional inequalities. The text in Galatians appears to be in the background here and we will deal with this text in more detail as we consider the

conservative view.

The Conservative View

There are many details concerning the various interpretations of these four texts which simply cannot be covered in this paper. However as we now come to the conservative view, we will look more closely at the texts in question. The reason this is done at this point is because this view serves to critique both of the extremes while attempting to arrive at the interpretation which honors the six basic hermeneutical questions and applications put forth earlier in this paper. There can be no doubt that many of these conservatives are trying to be gracious to prevailing ideas in the egalitarian view, yet they still maintain, for the most part, the ideal of *Sola Scriptura*. Just as there are many active voices in the egalitarian camp, so too there is vitality among the conservatives.

Now we will look at the passages in turn as we put forth a summary of this view.

I Corinthians 11:2-16 is the more balanced of the texts because it allows for the roles of women in the church while at the same time providing certain parameters for these goals. Dr. Reggie Kidd maintains that verse 2 in this text is a key to understanding why Paul writes this passage and to what he is responding too. It seems that the Corinthians are already aware of the letter to the Galatians (which is very likely) and they have made an inference from Galatians 3:28 that the lines between the sexes were irrelevant. This inference does not please Paul.³¹ Paul's response in the following verses is to hold on to the firmly established traditions and to counter the impropriety and immorality which they were guilty of-much to his dismay.³² The normative teaching in this text which serves to guide us through the cultural-principle minefield, is centered in the concept of headship in verse 3. The word for "head" here in the Greek transliterates to *kephale*. Now it has been stated that the egalitarians interpret this work to mean "source" or "origin". The brief mention that it has received so far in this paper is in no way indicative of the exhaustive research which has been done by scholars from both sides in this area. One of the outstanding scholarly works done by either side is that of Wayne Grudem.³³ This is a comprehensive word study which centers in biblical usage of the word (from the Septuagint and New Testament Greek texts) and also includes the use of the word in the common culture of that day. Most conservative scholars (that have been investigated for this paper-and I will take them as a representative poll) and many modern scholars from the traditionalist view cite Grudem's work. Conversely, scholars from the egalitarians have tried to

impugn Grudem's work, and in the writer's estimation without much success. The orthodox trap for those who argue "source" for *kephale* in verse 3 is that they must become Arians.³⁴ The other teaching here which irks the feminists is the functional subordination inferred in the Trinity and the submissive attitude in Christ for the Father.

James Hurley has an interesting interpretation of the veil and covering of women which is shared by some people from both camps for various reasons. His interpretation goes like this: there is insufficient evidence that the women in this culture (Jewish or Graeco-Roman) would have worn head coverings. This fact, coupled with the actual language of the text, is better interpreted to mean coiffure.³⁵ The wearing of the hair "up" was a sign of honoring one's husband. For a woman to let her hair flow down her back was a sign of repudiation and such a woman should shave her hair off which would dishonor her.³⁶ This is important because it demonstrates truly what is cultural here, the prevailing hairstyles and their significance, versus that which is timeless—the honoring of the husband. This passage does not only refer to the man's headship in the home, but in the church as well.³⁷

One final issue here is the issue of Paul's foundation for the timeless principle—the Creation. Feminists argue that Paul is arguing from the Fall and so this "curse" has been lifted by Christ's redemption. But Paul is not arguing from the Fall here but from Creation which has not been negated.³⁸

I Corinthians 14:33b-36 is a more difficult passage to interpret. There is some question about where the passage belongs within the context of the chapter or whether it even belongs there. Gordon Fee has stated that this passage is an interpolation and doesn't belong in the book. D. A. Carson insists that this is not the case. His research along with the most other conservative scholars finds "no strong manuscript evidence for dismissing this text as a later addition."³⁹ Carson notes the tension between Chapter 11 and Chapter 14 but can find no satisfying answer from traditionalists who ignore not only Chapter 11 but the descriptive passages as well.⁴⁰ He arrives at an interpretation which resolves not only the tension between this text and Chapter 11 but which fits first century church practice as well. Carson's interpretation sees Paul in I Corinthians instructing these Christians on the importance of knowing what prophesy, utterances, or teaching is true. Therefore these prophecies must be "weighed" or judged very carefully and the ban for women in this text has to do with participating in these judgements.⁴¹ This also infers that women are to have no authority over men in these matters.

Galatians 3:28 is the "Emancipation Proclamation" according to the egalitarians. Yet according to Kidd "The paradigm at which Paul demurs most

markedly from deriving a revolutionary praxis from the slogan "there is neither...nor" is that of male and female."⁴² This is clearly seen in other passages where Paul treats the male and female relationship. So what does it mean? Conservatives believe the key to understanding this is that Paul is not talking about "body life" but the access to the body.⁴³ The question set forth in Galatians is not "who may minister?" but rather "who may become a son of God and on what basis?"⁴⁴ Understandably (given their predispositions), egalitarians bolt at this interpretation. But the question is, "Does this interpretation do justice to the purpose of Galatians?"

The final of the four texts is II Timothy 2:11-15. Accepting Pauline authorship of the Pastorals places us in the mindset that this is one of Paul's last letters. After years of missionary endeavors working with women clearly gifted to serve the church, does he now forbid them to? Forbid seems out of the question, and yet it does appear he places restrictions on them.⁴⁵ Moo interprets the text to allow women to teach children and other women and to participate in the affairs of the church i.e. to vote in church matters, however, he does not allow them to teach men in any setting.⁴⁶ Other conservatives would agree with Moo and even go a step further by allowing women to teach in settings where men are present, but without having the authority of the pastorship or eldership.⁴⁷ The argument from the feminists that women were not allowed to teach within the Ephesian setting because of ignorance (which involved them in the false teacher's doctrines) is fallacious. Why? Because women can learn the truth, but they must do this quietly and in teaching, they may not exercise authority over men.⁴⁸ This dispels ignorance. Women have learned and can impart teaching e.g. Priscilla. The absolute reason for this restriction of women's ministry is creation order.⁴⁹

We now turn to the descriptive Pauline passages in order to examine another aspect of this quandary. The descriptive passages afford the egalitarians their most fertile grounds for successful arguments. At this point, they are willing to suspend their suspicions of biblical authority (at least certain portions of it) and to embrace Paul's practice if not his propositions. One of the egalitarian points of contention is that traditionalists must correlate their interpretations of Paul's letters by what the women were doing during his ministry. Spencer points out that these women who are named in the salutary portions of the epistles are called "co-workers."⁵⁰ The word for co-worker here does not mean "helpers," but, is better translated "colleagues." She also argues that "Junias" in Romans 16:7 is a woman whom Paul calls an apostle. It would certainly appear that, if Paul is as rigid against women ministering in the church as the traditionalists interpret him to be from our four passages, then he had a difficult time putting his own precepts into practice.

The conservative response to these passages presents a much more viable argument than does that of the traditionalists (which tends to be circular and evasive). So we will devote the rest of this section on the descriptive passages to their arguments. The conservatives are not only willing to discuss the descriptive passages in light of what women were actually doing, but the I Timothy 3:11 and Titus 2:3 texts as well.

The Pauline epistles and the rest of the New Testament describe liberating as well as broad roles for women in ministry.⁵¹ It is unlikely that I Timothy 2:12 intends to limit or scale back these roles as this would be inconsistent with the descriptive passages. However, in none of these passages is ordination, especially as it is practiced today, mentioned specifically.⁵² The egalitarians will counter with the passages in Romans 16. In verse one, Paul calls Phoebe a *diakonos*, which translates "servant." The egalitarian response is that this is also the word used for "deacon," thus, Paul is referring to her as a deaconess. She is also a "servant of the church" at Cenchrea, thus strengthening the case that she has an official capacity. But this is not required in the text.⁵³ The second major reference from Romans 16 is in verse seven where Junias (and we shall concede this to be a woman) is called an apostle. What is to be said of this? The term "apostle" is used in different senses in the New Testament. There are the eleven original Apostles (Acts 1:26) and, of course, Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, yet fully equal to the eleven (I Corinthians 15:7-9). There is also the more general usage of being sent-out as a representative of a person or body.⁵⁴ In this sense, Paul and Barnabus are sent out. A modern day correlative office would be that of missionary. This does not relate to what would be called a "preacher" or woman elder.⁵⁵

Another descriptive passage is Philippians 4:2-3, regarding the case of Euodia and Syntyche. Egalitarians would argue that these women must be important officials in the church for two reasons: they were co-workers with Paul who had shared in the ministry with him and because their quarrel was potentially damaging to the church. Again, we cannot doubt that there were a number of women who had important parts to play in the missionary and church-planting ministries of Paul. The question, which eludes us however, is exactly what these roles were.⁵⁶ Whether they spoke exhorting public crowds, taught women's Bible studies, or engaged in prayer ministries cannot be known. Perhaps in the story of Thekla from the "Acts of Paul" there is some trace of the true situation.⁵⁷

Finally, we will look at the descriptive passages I Timothy 3:8-13 and Titus 2:3. In these passages, Paul does parallel the women servants with their male counter-parts.⁵⁸ Hurley maintains that the position here of "women" in the text makes it unlikely that wives of deacons is meant. Had this been the

Apostle's intention, he could have easily made this known.⁵⁹ Also, after discussing the qualifications of the women, Paul immediately returns to the subject of deacons. So what does Paul have in mind in this passage? Hurley believes that the office of deacon here is one of function and ministry. It is clear from the word *diakonissa* that there was such a ministry in the church.⁶⁰ But what is not clear is that this office was one which required ordination. Titus 2:3 presents a syntactical problem for the ordination of women as elders because the word used for the office is not the same word used in either verse two (elderly men) or three (elderly women). The word denotes chronological years and not office.

So what conclusions do we draw from the descriptive passages? We observe Paul, formerly Saul the Pharisee, setting off on missionary journeys with women playing vital roles. We see women who are gifted to prophecy, teach (especially notable here is Priscilla who teaches Apollos), and to serve in many other vital ways. We see women who have prominent roles in the early churches and women who are sent as emissaries to churches on Paul's behalf. It is a revolutionary ministry for women, no doubt similar to that of Jesus' own ministry. It is no wonder that Nicole argues that Christianity has improved the lot of women and his point concerning the progressive nature of God's revelation concerning women's roles is also an excellent point.⁶¹

But there are things which cannot be seen, as well. As mentioned earlier, we do not see Priscilla, of her own initiative or even on her own, alone, going to instruct Apollos. We see abuses, not only by women in the early church, but they seem to have been prone toward false doctrines. Perhaps, as the feminists maintain, this was due to their lack of theological training, but this does not change the Canon. There is not enough evidence to say that this lack of instruction would constitute a renunciation of clear Pauline teaching when the situation was corrected. When Paul gives orders for women to learn (implying that they should be taught) he does not prescribe a level at which they may then teach men authoritatively. It is clear that the restrictions on women's roles are more profound than cultural practices, and, in fact, we do not see these restrictions explicitly violated in any descriptive passage.

With these summary comments on the four didactic passages and the descriptive passages put forth, we now return to the crux of the matter—what predispositions cause people to choose their positions in this matter? Are we more sensitive to the culture and its causes, or to the Bible as being the Word of God, thus deserving the believer's respect and obedience? Too often for too many of us, the answer is both. When the answer is both, we often succeed at neither. The amazing thing is that most believers know this, and yet still struggle. No one has presented an interpretation that has gotten

the truth nailed down. Yet, we must ask ourselves, "Are we willing to accept what is plainly evident and from there, act with charity for our fellow believers?" The writer does not judge the hearts of those of any position on this matter. However, in trying to evaluate each position in the quandary, there are some evident predispositions.

In the egalitarian group, there are men and women. Many of them are very able scholars and, without a doubt, people of noble aims. The most disturbing characteristic is the evident lack of commitment to Scripture as God's Revelation. Patricia Gundry, one of the leading voices in the egalitarian cause, is quoted as saying, "...In fact, objective interpretation and objective hermeneutics is a myth."⁶² Biblical Woman: Contemporary Reflections on Spiritual Texts, by Dennise Carmody, is a book which absolutely dismisses Biblical authority. She affirms more "Contemporary" than she does "Spiritual Texts."

And it is more than a biblical hermeneutical method, it is also in sheer attitude. Consider the following statements by Fiorenza:

I do not use the term women-church as an exclusionary term, but as a political-oppositional term to patriarchy.⁶³

Feminist biblical interpretation must therefore challenge the Scriptural authority of patriarchal texts and explore how the Bible is used as a weapon against women.⁶⁴

The valid question to these leaders is, "Why even carry on a Scriptural debate if you do not believe in the concept of 'Scripture'?"

The traditionalists are probably more guilty of being "uncharitable" than they are of being unbiblical. However, there are some legitimate questions here, as well. Is it profitable for us, as believers (especially "Reformed" believers), to ever stop reforming? Is it wise to sit on a view or interpretation without examining it in the light of new questions? If the answer is the same, then so much the better. Certainly, believers must grasp the authority of the Bible and trust its truth to be timeless and sufficient in all things. But this does not mean we may grow cold and stale in our doctrines as the world is ever providing false answers to fresh debates.

James Hurley is identified as a conservative (according to the criteria set forth by the writer) by this paper. His words in the preface of Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective are refreshing to those who love Scripture and want to be relevant living witnesses of the power and timelessness of the

Word of God. Hurley does, indeed, by the six questions and applications of hermeneutics, handle the Bible with respect and yet, academic responsibility. Along with D. A. Carson, David Dockery, Wayne Grudem, John Piper, and the majority of other conservatives are non-belligerent in their confrontations and open to dialogue. One quote that particularly captured this posture was Carson's response to Fee's throwing out I Corinthians 14:33b-36:

With all respect to a brother whose textual prowess is far greater than my own, his arguments in this case sound a bit like the application of a first class mind to the defense of a remarkably weak position.

There is a barb here, for sure, but it is wrapped in respect and a touch of humor. One of the saddest things in any movement is when people cannot laugh at and among themselves. The conservatives need to maintain respect for Scripture and be wary of undue compromise; they need to maintain their respect for all parties and yet no be intimidated by any party; and they need to love those who disagree with them and still love God and the truth of His Word more than all. I believe that they can do these things, indeed they must—with passion.

And now, to my own conclusions. The Pauline quandary concerning women in worship and ministry is even more complex than I realized when I began this project. Perhaps there will be some Providential breakthrough which will help us in our struggles with the full meaning of the four focal passages which were cited in this paper. I believe that it is important that we continue to let the descriptive passages inspire us as men and women in the Church. As men, may we recognize that God gifts women for the ministry and as witnesses of His grace. May we provide wise leadership as Paul did, which will help our sisters serve God in the Church; and may we never lord any authority over them, even as pastors should not abuse their authority with the Church of Jesus Christ. As for the women, may they celebrate the gift of womanhood and its inherent God-given roles. May they utilize their spiritual gifts in ministry while not attempting to usurp that which God does not desire for them. As for our predispositions, may we offer ourselves unto God, not being conformed to this world's views, but may our minds be filled with the desires of God. Does this sound difficult? It is!

Finally, to the specific conclusions. What should women do and what does God, based upon His Word, not wish them to do? My conclusions are identical to those of Hurley⁶⁵ and Dockery⁶⁶:

Women may serve as teachers (though they may not teach men

authoritatively).

Women deserve ministerial opportunities as they have been gifted.

Women may serve as deaconesses in a church which sees the legitimate ministry of the *diakonos* as servant, and not administrator/elder.

Women may not be ordained as elder/bishop/presbyter.

Women may not be senior pastors.

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