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Women in First Corinthians: A Perspective on Paul

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GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

Women in First Corinthians

A Perspective on Paul

A RESEARCH PAPER SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF BIBLICAL STUDIES
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MASTER OF ARTS

BY

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Women in First Corinthians A Perspective on Paul

As women struggle for acceptance as leaders within the Christian community there is no more controversial teachings about women found in the Bible than those of the apostle Paul. In one breath he writes to the church in Galatians, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal.3: 28 NRSV). When taken at face value this passage eliminates ethnic, social and gender barriers; in this verse Paul recognizes and addresses the dignity and worth of all humanity.

Then, there are other teachings of Paul, equally important to the church, which seem to contradict the idea that was presented to the church at Galatia. In other instructions to different Christian communities, it seems as if Paul is stating that women are to be subordinate in their position to men. These scriptures present a very negative view of the apostle's attitude towards women, and the roles they may pursue. One of the passages directed to the church at Corinth states, "women should be silent in churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says." (1 Cor. 14:34 NRSV). How we understand and reconcile these apparent contradictions found in Paul's writings can only be accomplished by studying the controversial passages.

The goal of this research paper is to illuminate the truth Paul is trying to convey, and help alleviate the tension found in the contentious passages that deal with women and their role in the Christian community. In this paper I would like to examine

Paul's teaching as he instructed the community in Corinth in regards to the roles women were to assume in the church.

I contend that these passages are not teaching the subordination of women or that women are not allowed in leadership roles within the Christian Community. Paul is speaking to Christian women within the framework of their culture, providing guidelines for worship and conduct within their cultural setting. The specific passages to be studied are: I Cor. 7:1-16; 1Cor. 25-39; 1Cor.11: 2-16; and 1 Cor.14: 34-35.

First, I will conduct an exegetical study of each text. This exegesis will include literary analysis, original language investigation, and an explanation of the historical context. By observing the content in an exegetical manner greater insight can be gained into the meaning of these problematic passages. This study will also give insight into what Paul intended the original readers to understand. I will be following the exegetical model provided by Gordon D. Fee in *New Testament Exegesis*.¹ This is not an extended exegetical study. The focus will be on the specific verses that will enhance the understanding of Paul towards women found within the community of Corinth.

Second, I will offer a social view of the Ancient Near Eastern cultural world in which Paul formulated his instructions to the church at Corinth. Wayne A. Meeks, Gerd Theissen, and Derek Tidball have made significant contributions to the understanding of the social world of the New Testament. These works have enlightened, and influenced, our understanding and interpretation of scripture.

Bruce Malina, Clifford Geertz, Lucy Marie and Mary Douglas have also made

¹ Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1993).

significant contributions in the link between history and anthropology. Howard Clark Kee has offered insightful suggestions on how to use sociology when studying scriptures.

By studying these scholars' works I hope to find constructive insights into this culture. I will present a model of cultural anthropology formulated by Bruce Malina. He states that, "Model-making or abstract thinking points to how we can understand a culture other than our own as well as our own."² I will apply this model specifically to the situation found in the church at Corinth.

By combining exegesis with a sociological model I hope to interpret the text in greater consideration of the Ancient Near Eastern culture. In presenting a clearer picture of that culture I hope to clarify what the apostle Paul was trying to convey to the original readers of this letter. I believe I can show that within the framework of the Ancient Near Eastern culture Paul is trying to bring order in the Christian community and not presenting a transcultural view of the subordination of women.

Historically, the passages under consideration have been used to set perimeters around the roles women could assume within the Christian Community. Matthew Henry states in his commentary, "the woman was made subject to man, and she should keep her station and be content with it."³ There is still misunderstanding and tension found in Paul's teachings in society, and the church today, as we read and apply the words Paul wrote. These passages are still used to limit the leadership roles of women within the church

² Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta, John Knox, 1981), 18.

³ Matthew Henry, *Commentary In One Volume* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1960), 822.

Recently, the Southern Baptist Denomination has declared that the subordination of women is clearly taught in the Bible.⁴

In writing this research paper, I hope to offer to the reader, a scriptural understanding of these passages that accounts for the social and cultural differences found in first century Christianity. This would then allow the reader a viable alternative to the traditional understanding of what Paul was teaching as he addressed the role of women in the Christian community.

⁴See Southern Baptists and the Subordination of Women at <http://www.cbeinternational.org.groothuisSBC.htm> available from Infoseek, June 29,1999.

I Corinthians 7:1-7

Paul is writing to the Christians in the city of Corinth. Corinth itself was located on a small isthmus between the Aegean and Adriatic Sea. It was unsafe and risky to go around the southern tip of Greece by ship. Therefore, many of the ships were taken out of the water, placed on rollers and dragged across the land to resume their sea voyage. Corinth enjoyed a prosperous economy because of the merchant shipping industry.

Corinth also hosted the Isthmian games, which was an athletic event that was second only to the Olympic games. It was considered to be a very cosmopolitan location, with both an outdoor theater and a roofed theater. Sprinkled throughout the city were temples and shrines.

The Roman army captured and destroyed Corinth in 146 BCE. Its citizens were enslaved or executed and its buildings were destroyed. In 49 BCE, Julius Caesar refounded this location as a colony of Rome. Though Corinth was a Greek city, its customs, laws and political structures were decidedly Roman.

Paul founded the church at Corinth (Acts 18:1-11). Most scholars maintain Paul had previously corresponded with this church. This is the second letter that he has sent them. "First Corinthians, then, is really the second epistle written by Paul to the church in Corinth."⁵

The majority of Paul's letters were written to churches that had specific problems that needed to be addressed. First Corinthians, is found to be no different. In chapter

⁵ Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), 360.

seven, Paul is responding to specific issues, found in this community that have been brought before his attention.

Most scholars maintain that the Corinthian church had first written to Paul about the problems they were facing. Judging from the contents of the letter the church community raised questions pertaining to the issue of marriage and celibacy. Some have suggested that at chapter 7 Paul picks up a letter that he has received from the Corinthians and then responds to the questions that they have raised.⁶

Other scholars present a somewhat different scenario. They contend that this section is a not a response to questions directed towards Paul. Rather, they suggest that Paul is actually responding by questioning the statements that the Corinthians have made and then have submitted to him:

But there is little evidence of Paul answering written questions. Instead, a number of Paul's responses to the written topics open with a confident assertion that he qualifies immediately. This suggests that he has received a string of statements rather than questions, very straightforward or even provocative statements. He deals with them where he can by affirming the principle stated, then denying its practice.⁷

The Corinthian church is not necessarily looking for advice from their Spiritual Leader on certain issues. They are looking for a confirmation of their own ideas from Paul.

Paul's goal is to write a careful rejoinder, to a community that is somewhat hostile

⁶ Evelyn and Frank Stagg, *Women in the World of Jesus*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 170

⁷ Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 80.

towards him.⁸ The objective of this section of the letter would be to help change a misinformed or misguided belief about relationships of marriage and celibacy within the Christian community

Why would this community be concerned about marriage and celibacy? Jesus stated:

Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. (Luke 20:34-35)

Even though it is not possible to say that the Corinthian community knew of this particular teaching presented by Jesus, the Corinthians understood that they were living in a new eschatological age.⁹

If there were those in the Corinthian community that perceived that they had already entered this “new age,” then Paul would have to clarify their understanding about celibacy and marriage. Paul’s concern becomes how the eschatological understanding the Corinth community holds affects their relationships as they continue to function in society.

Paul’s concern appears two fold as he speaks about celibacy and marriage.¹⁰ The issues focus on these concerns, marriage and sexual conduct because there are those in this community that feel marriage has no place in the Christian lifestyle. They

⁸ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle To The Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 266. He suggests that this is not a friendly exchange between Paul and the church.

⁹ C.K. Barrett, “Corinthians, Letter to” in *Dictionary of Paul and His letters*, Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, Daniel G. Reid ed., (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 978.

¹⁰ Mary MacDonald, “Women Holy In Body and Spirit: The Social Setting of 1 Corinthians 7,” *New Testament Studies* 39 (1990): 163. She suggests that Paul is concerned with celibacy/marriage and immorality.

would also suggest that those who are married are somehow second class, or inferior Christians, because they continue to engage in sexual relationships. Their concern becomes is marriage still valid for the Christian and if marriage is valid is a sexual relationship acceptable between husband and wife within this context? Elaine Pagel states that:

Against those who devalue marriage and promote celibacy as a spiritually superior way of life, Paul insists that neither marriage nor slavery makes any believer a second- class citizen “in the Lord”: before God “there is no difference.”¹¹

This understanding holds that Paul is responding in some form to a letter that was addressed to him. The statements come from within the Corinthian Community which sees itself living in a new eschatological age and that Paul is trying to correct the view that is held. This view does alleviate to a degree some of the problems that are faced in Paul’s own presentation of marriage and celibacy. He is not advocating a theological precept about marriage for all Christians in all places. He is speaking directly to this community trying to correct a misunderstanding.

With this understanding a closer of examination of the text itself is in order:

Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: “It is well for a man not to touch a woman.”² But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.³ The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.⁴ For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.⁵ Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self- control.⁶ This I say by way of concession, not of command.⁷ I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind. (NRSV)

¹¹ Eleaine H. Pagels, “Paul and Women: A Response to Recent Discussion,” *JAAR* 42 (1974): 541.

Most scholars infer that Paul begins by repeating back to the Corinthians what they have submitted to him. He appears to be quoting, if not verbatim, the gist of their sentiments: “It is well for a man not to touch a woman.”

Some translations have incorrectly interpreted this phrase as: “It is good for a man not to marry.”¹² This statement is in actuality a euphemism that the early church would understand to mean sexual intercourse. Gordon Fee offers this insight into the cultural meaning of this phrase:

The idiom “to touch a woman” occurs nine times in Greek antiquity, ranging across six centuries and a variety of writers, and in every instance, without ambiguity it refers to having sexual intercourse.¹³

Further, in this phrase the general word for man (ἄνθρωπος) is used and not the more specific word for husband or man (ἀνὴρ). Simon Kistmaker also notes:

“Moreover, the Greek has the indefinite noun γυνα (woman) which does not mean “wife.” The Corinthian slogan, therefore applied to any man and any woman.”¹⁴

With both the linguistic and cultural understanding this phrase does not reference marriage rather it refers to sexual intercourse for all men and all women.

Paul does agree in general that celibacy is a good thing. He does not seem to hold to any view that marriage and sex are evil.¹⁵ He has included in this quote the word well (καλὸν) This word can have moral overtones but it usually does not carry this connotation. The weight of the meaning of this word is more in the idea that this is something which is good, right, or honorable. By the careful use of this word it can be

¹² NIV and Amplified Bible are two such cases.

¹³ Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 275.

¹⁴ Simon J. Kistmaker, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993), 210.

¹⁵ Stagg and Stagg, 170.

understood that it is not wrong if a person chooses to have sexual relationships, it is a better choice to remain celibate.

Paul does disagree with how this community interprets this phrase in their marriage relationships. Having stating his position in verse one, he continues in verse two with his reason for disagreement: “But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman he own husband.”

The traditional view is that this verse is speaking to those who are unmarried. The implication of that teaching is that if unmarried person is unable to live without sex, if doing so would be a greater hindrance to them than living a sexually active life, than a person should marry. Marriage is then portrayed as a concession against sexual immorality rather than as an ideal way of life.

A more recent interpretation of this verse suggests that Paul is addressing those who are already married. He is advising them to continue with their sexual union in marriage. He uses the verb-*to have*. “The verb to have in this context means-just as it can in English-to enjoy sexual possession of another person.”¹⁶

Paul uses the plural in verse two when he talks about cases of sexual immorality. The literal interpretation would be, “because of sexual immoralities” (πορνείας). This word carries meanings of: prostitution, uncastity, fornication, of everykind of unlawful sexual intercourse.¹⁷

If one understands that Paul is advising married couples to have their own spouse in a sexual relationship and is not advising those who are unmarried to get married

¹⁶ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, (Louisville: John Knox, 1977), 114-115. He points out Paul’s previous usage of this verb in 1 Cor. 5:1.

¹⁷ Walter Baur, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 698.

then it can be argued that some men are being denied their conjugal rights. In being denied those rights the husbands engage in immoral activities. The use of the plural suggests that this was a current problem in this community, not that it might occur in the future.¹⁸

Just as verse two was an extended explanation of verse one, verses three and four now give greater clarity to the phrase, *to have*, which is the sexual aspect of marriage.

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. (NRSV)

If the traditional understanding is held that marriage is to prevent sexual immorality an explanation is given that marriage is to include intimate relationship. If the understanding is maintained that Paul is addressing married couples who are denying one another their conjugal rights then these verses explain to a greater degree what the responsibilities are in marriage. It further shows why the spouse is obligated to fulfill those responsibilities within marriage. With either understanding he is clarifying the idea that marriage is to include a sexual relationship

Paul has carefully addressed both the women and the men. He has spoken equally to both husband and wife throughout this section. In their marital intimacy, women, and men are equally responsible to fulfill their sexual obligations to one another:

Exegetes have pointed out how Paul carefully repeats every injunction in 7:1-5 in order to make sure that husband and wife have equal conjugal obligations and equal sexual rights. Thus we can see that Paul has taken great care to give a double command covering each case of active sexual interaction between husband and wife.¹⁹

¹⁸ Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 278.

¹⁹ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1985) 224. Fiorenza is careful to state that she does not feel that husband and wife share mutuality in any other area. Paul is only talking about sexual relationships.

In verses three and four it should be further noted that Paul uses the adverb, *likewise* (ὁμοίως), and the word *authority*, (ἐξουσιάζει) when he addressed both men and women. This strengthens the understanding that Paul views a reciprocal relationship between both the wife and the husband, there is to be mutual consideration from each one towards the other.

In the use of the word *authority* in the marriage relationship it should be noted that both the husband and the wife have the same type of authority over each others bodies. Paul has been careful once again to direct the phrase to both husband and wife to show that they are equal in their responsibility to one another. “Each partner has authority over the body of his spouse, and both submit themselves to one another. Thus they experience complete mutuality.”²⁰

This would not have been the normal understanding of rabbinic teaching. Paul goes against the traditions that he grew up in when he made the statement about authority:

Paul does advocate an astonishingly egalitarian view of marriage – especially astonishing in view of his own background. Contemporary rabbinic discussion strongly endorses male domination as divinely ordained (the rabbis disagree only on degree of enforcement).²¹

As Paul is directing the married couples to continue to have intimate relationship he does allow for a time when sexual relationships may be discontinued. This time is set with well-defined perimeters:

Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then to come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

²⁰ Kistemaker, 212-213. Kistemaker is quick to affirm that the sexual relationship is the only place where there is complete mutuality between husband and wife.

²¹ Pagels, 541

To abstain from sex for a period of time would not have been an uncommon practice. There was debate among the Jewish rabbis centered on how long one could abstain. Craig Keener makes this observation:

Jewish teachers who were trying to formulate laws in this period differed on how long a man could vow to abstain from intercourse with his wife; one school said two weeks, and the other said one week.²²

Paul does not suggest a specific time frame for abstinence. Rather he refocuses the teaching to include guidelines, which would make abstinence acceptable. There must be a mutual agreement between both partners, it is limited to a specific time, the purpose should be a devoted time of prayer and the intent is that sexual relationships will resume once again.

Paul closes this section of the paragraph to the married couples with the paragraph with the statement:

This I say by way of concession, not of command. I wish that all were as I myself am but each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind.

It is not clear if Paul is making a concession to sexual relationships within marriage or if he is making a concession to the idea of marriage itself. Some contend that Paul is making marriage the concession.²³

If Paul is stating that his concession is directed towards the idea of marriage itself then he is making a controversial statement that goes against both the custom and the laws of his day. Augustus, in order to boost the birth rate among the Roman aristocracy made severe legislation in regards to marriage. Marriage was a way of ensuring the continued existence of the Roman way of life:

²² Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity, 1993), 466.

In order to strengthen the traditional Roman family, Augustus introduced severe marriage legislation and openly used religion to promote his marriage ideals. In order to increase the birthrate, he granted freeborn women with three children and freedwomen who had given birth to four children emancipation from patriarchal tutelage.²⁴

Antoinette Clark Wire feels that the concession Paul is speaking about is sex within marriage and not marriage itself. She affirms:

What he concedes is the return to sexual relations after times of prayer, or more broadly the practice of sex within marriage, since he goes on to say that he would prefer all people to be like himself but knows that some have this gift and some do not.²⁵

Wire feels that this particular concession points back to verse five. The issue deals with resuming the sexual relationship after the time prayer. She then suggests that Paul is making the concession in a broad context to include sex within the marriage relationship itself.

Fee also contends, as does Wire, that Paul is alluding back to verse five. He offers a different insight into the concession that Paul has made. He feels the concession is directed to the married couples. The concession itself would be the right not to engage in sexual activity for a limited time. Until this point Paul has encouraged married couples to engage in their intimate relationship and has given them supporting reasons for his view. Now he is allowing, for a brief period of time sexual abstinence within marriage:

But this is a concession to you; you are not to take this as a command. Thus even such a good thing as temporary abstinence for prayer will not be raised to the level of command.²⁶

²³ Staggs and Staggs, 171.

²⁴ Fiorenza, 225.

²⁵ Wire, 84.

²⁶ Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 284.

The concession being addressed is the right to abstain from sex within marriage not that marriage is the concession.

Paul now focuses the verses to himself. He refers to the gift God has given him. The widely maintained view is that the gift Paul refers to is his own celibate state. Scholars point to verses 8, 9, and 36 through 38 in this passage in which Paul expresses preference for singleness.

Paul does understand that his celibacy is a gift (χάρισμα) which has been given to him. Some married couples could have been using his example of celibacy as a way of justifying their celibacy within marriage, which led to acts of sexual immorality. He affirms that celibacy is strictly a gift from God. Those who are married should not be celibate within their marriage relationship. His desire is that all would have the gift of singleness but he knows that all have not been given this gift. There are others who have the gift of marriage.

Charles Kingsley Barret comments in his commentary on 1 Corinthians:

In the present verse Paul begins by stating his unqualified Christian desire that all men should live in obedience to God ...see the notes on vii.29, and in freedom from fornication, the inordinate and disobedient expression and release of the urges within them. This he can in God's name require absolutely. But he recognizes that there are more ways than one in which the claim can be fulfilled.²⁷

Paul expects that whether a person has the gift of celibacy or the gift of marriage that each one honor that gift and live in obedience to God. If the gift is for marriage then it is to be a full marriage, including intimate personal relationship.

In this passage Paul is addressing a specific issue brought before his attention. Even though he seems to prefer the single life there is nothing to suggest that he finds

²⁷ Charles Kingsley Barret, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Blacks New Testament Commentary (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1968), 158.

anything morally wrong with marriage. Further, Paul is not against a sexual relationship between husband and wife. Rather we find that Paul encourages married couples to offer one another reciprocal, conjugal rights.

There are no negative connotations directed towards women. In his careful choice of words Paul has addressed both husband and wife throughout this section of the letter. Paul is expressing the desire that all people live in obedience and fullness in the gift that God has called them to, whatever that gift may be.

1 Corinthians 7:8-16

In this section Paul shifts his focus to those who are unmarried, the widows and those those spouses who are nonbelievers.

⁸ To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. ⁹ But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion. ¹⁰ To the married I give this command-not I but the Lord-that the wife should not separate from her husband ¹¹ (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. ¹² To the rest I say-I and not the Lord-that if any believer has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. ¹³ And if any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. ¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. ¹⁵ But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. It is to peace that God has called you. ¹⁶ Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife. (NRSV)

Some scholars suggest that verses 8 and 9, because of their awkwardness, are one digression. This was a common type of literary device employed during this time period used to establish a contrast between ideas.

The passages surrounding these verses are speaking to those who are trying to dissolve their marriages either through abstinence or divorce. These specific verses are speaking to those who are unmarried or widows:

Verses 8–9 are a digression Paul uses to establish a contrast between single persons concerned to stay single (7:8-9) and married persons wishing to become single (7:10-6).²⁸

If the view is held that this is addressing those who are currently unmarried the issue becomes for them to remain as they are. This then can lead the reader to understand that Paul is once again confirming a concession for marriage in verse 9.

²⁸ Keener, *Bible Background Commentary*, 467.

If verses 8 and 9 are read as a continuation of verse 7, rather than a digression, then a shift occurs from marriage to celibacy. Paul is aware that not all have the gift of celibacy. He previously suggests that there are other gifts. He is opening a way for those without this gift to remarry. Conzelman states that: "it is an individual gift that can not be acquired by imitation."²⁹ Paul is then able to continue with the main issue in the following verses which is the dissolution of marriage in which he will also counsel those people to remain as they are.

Paul begins this section by using the phrase: "To the unmarried and the widows." Traditionally, it has been taught that he is speaking to those who have never been married and the widows. Fee makes a strong case that Paul is really addressing widowers not those who have never been married. Fee contends that this word unmarried (ἀγάμους), should be understood as widower. First, throughout this passage Paul has been addressing husbands and wives. This would fit the literary pattern that Paul has established. Second, he points out that the Greek culture had a specific word for widower but that it was never used in the Koine period, ἀγάμους was the word used in its stead. Third, he also notes that in verse 11 Paul uses the same word for the woman who has separated from her husband and in verse 34 he contrasts this word with virgin:

Indicating that in his regular usage it denotes not the 'unmarried' in general, but the 'demarried', those formerly but not now married. On balance, 'widower' seems to be the best understanding of the word here.³⁰

²⁹ Hans Conzelman, *1 Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 120.

³⁰ Fee, *First Epistle To The Corinthians*, 288.

Some scholars disagree with Fee's interpretation that unmarried means widower. They would agree that Paul does include widowers in this group, but they believe Paul is speaking to a wider audience which includes those who have never been married.³¹ They suggest that the use of the masculine definite article with the word unmarried (τοῖς ἀγάμοις) does include both men and women who are not married. Technically this would include widows even though it is used in the masculine suffix, because they were also unmarried. The use of a feminine definite article with the word widow, (ταῖς χήραις) does set the group apart from the unmarried. The widows are being set apart from the unmarried because this group presented a special concern or obligation to the church.

Others also suggest that Paul uses the definite article before the word "widows" to speak directly to the widows within the Corinthian community. This would not preclude that this statement could also be directed towards a larger audience.³²

Either reading could be a viable option as to the meaning that Paul was conveying. In light of the literary pattern established, the further usage of the word unmarried and in light of verse seven, some of the issues are understood in a clearer fashion if this passage is understood to address both widowers and widows.

He is speaking once again to both men and women specifically to those have lost a spouse and have not as of yet remarried:

In 1 Cor. 7:8 "the unmarried [m] and widows" clearly refers to men and women once with but now without a spouse, whether by separation/divorce or death of the spouse.³³

³¹ Kistemaker, 217.

³² Cleon L. Rogers, Jr and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 361.

³³ Stagg and Stagg, 172.

Further, by what Paul has written, most scholars agree that he is unmarried at this time. It does not state that he has never been married or if he is widower. It only suggests at this time that he does not have a wife. For Paul never to have been married would have been possible but rather unlikely in view of his status as a rabbi:

Unmarried rabbis were few, and marriage appears to have been obligatory for a Jewish man ... S.B. ii 372, though one cannot suppose that this rule was universally observed.³⁴

Paul refers to his own unmarried state and suggests that this is good. He is referring to his own abstinence, based on the gift God has given him. He is not stating that he the unmarried state is the best for everyone.

As Paul continues his thought in verse 9: "But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion."³⁵ The traditional view held is that he is following the same line of reasoning that he had already suggested in 7:2. If there is a struggle with self-control then it is better to marry. Those who hold this view suggest that he does not mean that marriage is a fail-safe guarantee against fornication. Paul offers this as an alternative to being overcome with desire.

If, as was stated earlier, this verse is read as a continuation of verse 7, that celibacy is a gift along with other gifts, then the primary concern is with fornication. The concern is to prevent any from engaging in illicit sexual activity because they are not practicing self-control.

The translation *aflame with passion* is actually one word in the Greek, *πυρουσθαι*, which means fire. There are two ways to understanding this word fire. It

³⁴ Barrett, 160.

can be used either in the sense of burning with passion or possibly to burn in judgement.³⁶ It is written in the present passive infinitive form which denotes a continued action, a person is being continually enflamed with emotion. This does not mean that a person will commit acts of sexual immorality, but that they are consumed with an inward sexual desire. If a person is consumed with the need for sexual gratification then it makes it impossible for that person to come to God and keep their mind on the activities for which they have been called. It also suggests that God has not given them the gift of celibacy. If one is *aflame with passion* then Paul's advice is to marry.

What is very significant about the words that Paul has written is that he offers the widows an option to remain single. In this culture, this alternative was usually not available for the ordinary women:

Widows at first were expected to remarry after a one year period, but following protests, this period was extended to three years. Only those who were over fifty years of age were allowed to remain unmarried.³⁷

Paul, by giving the widows an option to remain single, is actually standing against both the cultural obligation to marry and against the prevailing laws that had been. This does not say that all these laws were followed and upheld in each province of Rome, but the Corinthian church was located in an urban center that had been established by the Roman government primarily with Roman soldiers. So, Paul's statement would not be seen as upholding the cultural norms of that day.

It is also noteworthy to mention that women were often married between the ages of 12 and 15. Paul could also be addressing very young women.³⁸ With the advice to

³⁵ The NIV incorrectly translates this phrase "if they can not control themselves."

³⁶ Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, 738.

remain single given to all widows it does afford women the opportunity to live under their own authority.

Paul continues by addressing the married believers. As this passage is studied it must be remembered that this letter was addressing specific issues found within this particular community. The concerns about marriage and divorce centered on asceticism. These particular verses were not meant to establish church law but to address the Corinthian's specific concerns.

Paul is careful to begin his discussion with the qualification that this is a command that comes from the Lord: "To the married I give the command—not I but the Lord." He is referring back to what Jesus taught, not offering his own teaching.

There were two prevailing thoughts within Judaism during this time about divorce. The school of Hillel and the school of Shammai both had different teachings based upon Deuteronomy 24:1.

The debate between the two schools of thought was centered on the meaning of the words "something objectionable about her." Both schools followed the law of Moses that allowed for divorce (Deut. 24:1-4). Jesus teaching presented a completely different understanding about divorce. In Mark 10:2-18 Jesus differed by prohibiting divorce for any reason. If a person entered the married state they were to remain in that state:

Not even the higher evaluation of the celibate life should lead to the dissolution of a marriage once it has been contracted; an *a fortiori* argument will lead to the conclusion that no other ground will suffice.³⁹

³⁷ Fiorenza, 225.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 225. Fiorenza observes that, "Paul's advice to widows who were not necessarily 'old'—since girls usually married between twelve and fifteen years of age."

Jesus had addressed a Jewish audience and Paul is speaking to a Gentile audience, but what Paul has focused on is that Jesus taught that divorce was not allowed. He is requiring what Jesus required, so Paul calls upon the Lord's authority in this matter.

As we read verses 10-11 Paul addresses both the husband and the wife. He addresses the wife first by saying: "that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife."

Paul does use two different words in this verse, χωρισθῆναι, *to be separated* when he addresses the women and uses the word, ἀφίεναι, *send off* when he directs his thoughts to the husband.

In Judaism, only the husband could divorce his wife, the wife could only sue to divorce her husband. In Roman culture, either a man or a woman could sue for divorce from their spouse. This particular terminology could just be reflecting the legal cultural and understanding of this day.

Even though Paul does use language that would preclude any type of divorce or separation between spouses he also understand that divorce can happen. His use of the words, *but if she does separate*, (ἐὰν δὲ καὶ χωρισθῇ) suggests to some scholars that divorce is a possibility even though this is not something that a Christian women should seek to do.

Hans Conzelmann has offered a different understanding of this phrase; he states that this phrase:

Does not mean the conceding of exceptions ("if she separates herself after all"),

³⁹ Barrett, 162.

but refers to an already existing situation: “if she has separated herself” – despite the linguistic difficulty of *εαν* with the aorist subjunctive referring to the past.⁴⁰

Paul suggests that if divorce does happen then the woman is not to seek remarriage. He also recommends that she reconcile with her husband if feasible. There does not appear a direction for the man to the same but in the overall context of this passage suggests that Paul would expect a husband to do the same thing. Even though there is divorce or separation involved Paul does not exclude any from the Christian community. They are to be allowed to continue in fellowship.

Beginning in verse 12 Paul proceeds to give direction to Christians married to non-believers: “To the rest I say—I and not the Lord-.” Paul makes a distinction between his teachings and those of Jesus. Jesus was in a different cultural setting when he presented his teaching on divorce. He was speaking to the Jewish community where husband and wife would share the same belief system. Christianity at the time of Jesus teaching had not been established and there was no precedent set about non-believers and Christians being married.

Paul is addressing the first generation of Christians. He has a completely different set of circumstances to deal with. He had to skillfully determine from the teachings of Jesus how to address this very sensitive issue. He realized that: “if a Christian is married to a non-Christian, some practical modification of Jesus teaching is necessary.”⁴¹ Therefore, he makes it clear that this is his teaching. That does not mean this teaching is not to be taken as guidance for the situation that is found in this setting.

⁴⁰ Conzelmann, 120.

⁴¹ Margaret E. Thrall, *The First and Second Letter to the Corinthians*, Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: University Publishing House, 1965), 53.

The rest of verses 12 and 13 equally address both men and women. They are reminded to remain as they are and not to divorce if the non-believer chooses to stay within the relationship.

In understanding the next few verses about marriage it is important to take into account that Paul is still dealing with feelings of antipathy about marriage and sex itself within this community. If it is questionable for two Christians to be married and continue in a sexual relationship, then how much more so for the Christian and the non-believer. The concern now shifts to the issue of purity. If a Christian is married to a pagan and they share an intimate relationship how does that affect the Christian.

In verse 14 Paul uses two terms, to be sanctified (ἡγιάσται) when referring to the spouse and holy (ἅγια) when speaking about the children. In the Jewish understanding the unclean object contaminated the clean object. The clean or “holy” object had to be kept away from the unclean. Paul offers a counter argument coming from a completely different perspective. He states that the holy can make the unclean holy.

Paul is not saying that the wife’s or husband’s Christianity can automatically be transferred to their spouse. Rather he is affirming that the things of the world, the unclean, have no control over the clean. Therefore, a married Christian can have intimate contact with a non-believing spouse and still be in relationship with God:

The decisive idea lies not in an ontological definition of the state of the of the non-Christian members of the family, but in the assertion that no alien power plays any part in the Christian’s dealings with them.⁴²

⁴² Conzelmann, 122.

The holiness of the Christian spouse is greater than any “uncleanness” found in the world. That idea allows then for the children to also become “holy.”

In verse 15 Paul states that: “But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. It is to peace that God has called you.” It has been understood that this particular statement allows the Christian the freedom to remarry.

Paul now writes: “Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband, Husband for all you know, you might save your wife.” This statement may be viewed as an encouragement for Christians to remain married even though their partner may not be receptive to the Gospel message. There is a potential for salvation to be as long as the couple remains married.

In this section of Paul’s letter, there is nothing that would indicate that he opposes either marriage or women. Paul wrote this letter because the Corinthian community based their understanding of marriage on ascetic practices. They were looking for ways to divorce. His primary concern in this passage is to give guidance to the Christians at Corinth to remain as they are.

1 Corinthians 7:25-35

In the preceding verses, 17-24, Paul has addressed those who were uncircumcised, and circumcised and those who were slaves. He directs: "let each person remain in the condition in which you were called." Now he resumes his discussion with the following issues being addressed: virginity, marriage and serving the Lord, the proper conduct towards a virgin, and finally the remarriage of widows.

²⁵ Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. ²⁶ I think that, in view of the impending crisis, it is well for you to remain as you are. ²⁷ Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. ²⁸ But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a virgin marries, she does not sin. Yet those who marry will experience distress in this life, and I would spare you that. ²⁹ I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, ³⁰ and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, ³¹ and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away. ³² I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; ³³ but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, ³⁴ and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband. ³⁵ I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord. ³⁶ If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his fiancée, if his passions are strong, and so it has to be, let him marry as he wishes; it is no sin. Let them marry. ³⁷ But if someone stands firm in his resolve, being under no necessity but having his own desire under control, and has determined in his own mind to keep her as his fiancée, he will do well. ³⁸ So then, he who marries his fiancée does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better. ³⁹ A wife is bound as long as her husband lives. But if the husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, only in the Lord. ⁴⁰ But in my judgment she is more blessed if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God. (NRSV)

It is not very clear whom Paul is addressing when he begins by stating: "Now concerning the virgins."

The reference to the word virgin, παρθένων, can mean young unmarried woman but it can also be directed to young men who have not had sexual relationships with a woman.⁴³ C. K. Barret suggests in this passage addressed to the Corinthians the term virgin be understood in its usual sense of unmarried women. He further asserts this word also includes the idea of young men:

For the present it may be observed that there is nothing to suggest that the word has any other than its customary meaning, that is a woman (or man; used here in the genitive plural, τῶν παρθενων, there is nothing to indicate gender...) who has not had sexual experience.⁴⁴

Another scripture reference, Revelation 14:4, uses the word virgin specifically to refer to men.

In the Greco-Roman culture the women were the only ones expected to remain sexually pure until marriage. Contextually, throughout this chapter, Paul has been addressing men and women equally, and charging them with responsibility for their sexual behavior. It is feasible to suggest that the use of the word virgin could be seen as applying to both men and women.

There are three views which offer an explanation of who Paul was speaking to when he referred to the virgins:

The first view is the most traditional view. It suggests that Paul was speaking to the Corinthian fathers who wanted to know what to do with their virgin daughters. "It has been regarded simply as advice to fathers as to the marriage of their unmarried daughters."⁴⁵

⁴³ Bauer, Arndt, & Gingrich, 632.

⁴⁴ Barret, 173-74.

⁴⁵ William Barclay, *The Letter to the Corinthians*, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), 74. Barclay does not hold this view, he merely presents it.

The second view is that Paul is addressing several of the community in Corinth who had entered into a spiritual marriage. “The situation pictured here is apparently that of a man and a woman who have decided to live with each other without marrying and having sexual intercourse.”⁴⁶

The third view is that Paul is speaking to young women, and their fiancées, who are being advised by some in the Corinthian church to remain unmarried.

Since Paul is addressing both men and women, and since virgin can apply to both men and women, it seems to likely that Paul is speaking to both the unmarried women and their fiancées:

“I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy.” When Paul spoke of marriage in the previous verses he had scripture which he could turn to. As he spoke about divorce he could look to Jesus’ teaching as he spoke with the Pharisees. Paul carefully offers his own opinion for the following because he has neither Scripture nor Jesus’ teaching to draw from.

Paul is able to give his opinion because:

He knows that the Lord has given him apostolic authority to speak and to write for the benefit of the church. Yet he does not legislate in regard to the personal and sensitive subject of virginity. In this verse he says that he gives his opinion, and in the next verse he writes, “I think” (v.26 and v.40).⁴⁷

Now Paul states two reasons why he would expect the virgins to stay as they are. The reasons are because of “the impending crisis” and “the appointed time has grown short.” Paul does not state what this particular crisis is that is looming before the community.

⁴⁶ Thrall, 59.

⁴⁷ Kistemaker, 237.

The word for crisis, or translated in some versions as distress, ἀνάγκην, is an apocalyptic word. Some claim that “It refers to the whole state of things between the first and second comings of Christ.”⁴⁸

Others suggest that this word refers to a crisis within the church at Corinth, such as persecution. It has also been suggested that this word refers to a famine that was occurring at Corinth at the time of Paul’s writing.

Hans Conzelmann offers this insight into the impending crisis that this community thought it was about to face, and the feelings with which they anticipated this event:

This statement at last explicitly affords the long awaited eschatological grounding. The mode of expression makes known the basic mood of the eschatological outlook, which is fear.⁴⁹

Richard B. Hays offers an interesting insight into this particular passage. He contends that the NRSV has mistranslated the phrase, ἐνεστῶσαν ἀνάγκην, as impending crisis. He believes that the participle, ἐνεστῶσαν, actually refers to present events and not those of the future. He believes that this word should be translated according to its ordinary usage, which is necessity, not crisis. By translating this phrase as “present necessity,” Paul then would be advocating that sharing the gospel, and doing the work of the Lord in the short time that remains is the “present necessity” mentioned in verse 29, not an eschatological “impending crisis.”⁵⁰

There seems to be a stronger consensus among scholars that Paul is referring to an eschatological understanding of this word.

⁴⁸ Rogers & Rogers, 363.

⁴⁹ Conzelmann, 132.

⁵⁰ For a further discussion of this issue consult Hays, 129.

Working from that perspective, if the eschatological event was immanent, then it would seem irrelevant to be married. The normal pursuits of this life will no longer be in effect. To remain unmarried then is not a question of being spiritually superior by abstinence, but places being unmarried within an eschatological framework.

If the Corinthians understood that this is an eschatological issue and not a moral issue then it is easier to understand why Paul would advise his readers to remain as they are.

“But if you marry, you do not sin and if a virgin marries, she does not sin.” The readers may have perceived that choosing to marry was sin. For Paul the reason to remain unmarried was due to the uncertainty of the time. This was no veiled hint from Paul that marriage is somehow a second choice for Christians. Rather: “Paul recognizes that the question of marriage lies totally outside the category of sin, which is also why there is no “command” of the Lord on this matter (cf v.25).”⁵¹

Paul now moves onto the second reason that he maintains that is better to remain unmarried in verse 28b: “Yet, those who marry will experience distress in this life, and I would spare you that.” This statement could be understood in reference to the eschatological judgement that all will face. Paul alludes to that when he uses the phrase: “the appointed time has now grown short” in verse 29 and following through 31. This eschatological time was viewed as a time when men, women and children would face great upheaval and hardship. A person would not only suffer their own pain, but they would also suffer the pains of their spouses and children:

Many Jewish people expected a time of great suffering just before the end of the world; in that time, marriage and procreation would be of little value. In other

⁵¹ Fee, *First Epistle To The Corinthians*, 333.

periods of great suffering, one was liable to be bereaved of spouse and children.⁵²

Paul continues his line of reasoning against marriage by addressing the division of devotion of service to the Lord. He states that husbands will be concerned about pleasing their wives, v. 32, and he states the reciprocal idea that wives would focus on pleasing her husband, v. 34.

In spite of Paul's preference that all remain single his reasoning is not because there is anything morally wrong with marriage or with the person who chooses to be married, it is that the eschatological age is a time of distress and divided concerns.

Paul further adds in verse 35 the statement: "I say this for your own benefit, not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord. The word translated restraint (βρόχον) means, noose. This is the same word used for a noose to lasso a wild animal. This vivid illustration portrays the fact that Paul did not want his readers to be under compulsion to obey his orders, rather he wanted them to realize that he had their best interest at heart.

As Paul continues he says: "If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his fiancée, if his passions are strong, and so it has to be, let him marry as he wishes; it is no sin, let them marry."

Older translations interpret, παρθένον, virgin in this verse which makes the meaning ambiguous. The NRSV interprets the word fiancée with the understanding that the man and woman are an engaged couple and the church wants to know if they should go ahead and marry or stay single.

Verse 38 continues: "So then, he who marries his fiancée does well; but he who

⁵² Craig S. Keener, *The Bible Background Commentary*, 468. See comment on verse 26 and 29.

refrains from marriage will do better.” This is a much-debated verse among scholars. Paul has changed his terminology when he speaks of marriage. He now uses the word for marry that means “the one giving in marriage” (γαμιζων) rather than “the one marrying,” (γαμειτωσαν), found in verse 36.

Some suggest, as was stated earlier, that Paul is addressing couples who have entered into a spiritual betrothal, they are living together but have agreed to remain unmarried and are abstaining from sexual intercourse:

The motive behind this somewhat impracticable arrangement may perhaps have been an attempt to anticipate here on earth the future resurrection existence in which marriage as such would be no more (see Mark 12:25).⁵³

This form of piety was practiced in the later development of the church, but it does not appear to be the issue that Paul was addressing.

Since Paul changes the verb form of the word for marriage some scholars have maintained that Paul is addressing fathers in regards to the marriage of their virgin daughters. Fee maintains that there is sufficient evidence to show that these two words may be used interchangeably. He suggests that Paul used these two words “for the sake of variety.”⁵⁴ C. K. Barret also states that “the strict distinction between verse in εω and in ιζω was breaking down.”⁵⁵

Because of the awkwardness of this statement in which Paul both agrees and disagrees with Corinthians it has been conjectured that Paul is repeating back to the Corinthians what they have stated to him. He is able to state that those who marry do well, contrary to what the Corinthians believe. At the same time, he is able to agree

⁵³ Thrall, 59.

⁵⁴ Fee, *First Epistle To The Corinthians*, 354.

⁵⁵ Barret, 185.

with them that to remain unmarried is better but for completely different reasons than those they have suggested. The Corinthian community is concerned with ascetic reasons, and Paul is concerned with eschatological and pastoral reasons.

Whatever Paul intended in this passage the meaning is still consistent with what he has stated through the former verses. The best option is to avoid marriage, but if that option is not available then it is still good for couples to marry.

Paul concludes this passage by addressing the widows:

A wife is bound as long as her husband lives. But if the husband dies she is free to marry anyone who wishes, only in the Lord. But in my judgement she is more blessed if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God.

These verses are used by Paul to teach that a widow may remarry. He does set some perimeters around this marriage by stating that they can marry, “only in the Lord.”

This statement means that a widow should remarry a Christian. He also reaffirms that marriage is permitted, but not necessarily the best option.

There does not appear to be any hint that Paul is against marriage or women in this section of the letter. In this passage Paul, has addressed several issues which relate to marriage. He has presented his concern, which focuses on the impending crisis, and how that might effect those who are contemplating marriage. He also offers a realistic understanding of how marital obligations may detract from service to the Lord. He has presented his teaching on the idea of singleness. In conclusion, he addressed widows giving them the option to remarry.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

This passage includes a very problematic treatise. This has been one of the more difficult passages to interpret and seems to contradict Paul's other writings. The church has used this section of Paul's letter for many years to teach that women are to be in subordinate to their husbands.

² I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you. ³ But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ. ⁴ Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, ⁵ but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head—it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved. ⁶ For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear a veil. ⁷ For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. ⁸ Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. ⁹ Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. ¹⁰ For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. ¹¹ Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. ¹² For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God. ¹³ Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled? ¹⁴ Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, ¹⁵ but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. ¹⁶ But if anyone is disposed to be contentious—we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God. (NRSV)

Paul begins this section by stating: “I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just I handed them on to you.” The traditions, παραδόσεις, which Paul is referring to are the traditions of the Christian faith that have been handed down from oral tradition. Keener makes this observation, “‘Traditions’ (NASB, NRSV) were accounts or regulations passed on orally; for instance, Pharisees in Palestine transmitted their special traditions in this way.”⁵⁶ These traditions included matters of ethics and conduct as well as theological truths.

⁵⁶ Keener, Bible Background Commentary, 476.

Paul, after praising this community for following the traditions, now elaborates on an issue that is causing some concern in their public worship. The point of contention is head covering for women as they pray and prophesy.

Paul begins by addressing the issue of head covering:

But I want you to understand that Christ is the head 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.

The understanding of how Paul uses the word and what head means will color how this passage is understood. In this passage he uses the literal head of the wife, the figurative head of the wife, the true covering for the head, and an artificial covering for the head which is a play on words:

Before we can grasp Paul's first argument about head coverings, we must understand his play on the word "head." Although an argument based on a play on words may sound irrational to us today, to many ancient readers it would have made sense.⁵⁷

The word head (κεφαλή) in our culture usually means, to be the chief or the person in charge of something. Even though the word head has that implication in our culture that may not have been the understanding that Paul was bringing to the community he was addressing.

The meaning of head as, chief or person in charge, is a rare occurrence in Greek literature. In the Septuagint the translators were careful to translate head (κεφαλή) as *rosh* when the word referred to a physical head; they almost never translated κεφαλή, when they intended to mean someone who was in charge:

Whenever *rosh* meant "physical head," they translated it *kephale*; or whenever *rosh* referred to the first soldier leading others into battle with him, they also translated it *kephale*. But when *rosh* meant "chief or "ruler," they translated it

⁵⁷ Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson 1992), 32.

arche or some form of that word.⁵⁸

Another understanding of this word that the Corinthians would have knowledge of is “source” or “origin”.⁵⁹ The idea that the word for head means source or origin is still highly debated among scholars. Some contend that the metaphorical meaning for head was understood as authority in the Greek culture.⁶⁰

Some scholars contend, based on the sole interpretation of the word head meaning authority, that Paul is presenting a theological principle in which it is clearly stated that women are to be subordinate to men. “Paul argues that, on the contrary, women are by nature subordinate to men.”⁶¹ If source is the more common understanding for head in the Greek culture, this would place men and women in a relationship with one another and the focus is shifted away from a hierarchical authority.

A. C. Perriman makes a strong case after studying the word, κεφαλῇ, head. He observes that: ‘These analysis have demonstrated that neither ‘authority over’ nor the ‘source’ interperation of κεφαλῇ as well established as their proponents would like to think.’⁶² His studies lead him to conclude that ‘head’ means to occupy the position as top or front. The usage of this word head does not necessarily imply that there is an authority or submission to authority in the instances when it was used.

Fee also suggests that head does not mean authority over. He believes that when Paul makes this statement about head his intent is to make an incarnational reference

⁵⁸ John Temple Bristow, *What Paul Really Said About Women* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 37.

⁵⁹ Berkeley Mickelsen and Alvera Mickelsen, “The ‘Head’ of the Epistles” *Christianity Today* (Feb. 20, 1981) 264-267. This article goes into greater detail on the meaning of “head” in scripture. They contend “source” or “origin” are feasible meanings to the original readers.

⁶⁰ Keener offers insights into this debate in his book, *Paul, Women & Wives*, 34-35.

⁶¹ Thrall, 78.

⁶² A. C. Perriman, “The Head of a Woman: The meaning of ΚΕΦΑΛΗ in 1 Cor. 11:3” *Journal of Theological Studies* ns, 45 p#2 (Oct. 1994): 616.

to Christ as opposed to an ontological statement. Paul's issue in this passage is not headship of men or authority over women, rather:

Paul seems concerned to shift the problem from one of individual freedom to one of relational responsibility. The problem lay squarely on the woman's heads but it was affecting male/female relationships in the present age.⁶³

Even if κεφαλῇ, as Perriman has suggested, refers to one who occupies the top or front with no authority involved, the crux of the problem for Paul was one of relationships. Both the meaning, and the play on the word head, is to show that by not covering their heads the women in this worship setting are bringing dishonor upon their husbands.

If Paul established a relational understanding, he is then able to explain why it is improper for women to have their hair uncovered during public prayer. He continues by first addressing the men:

Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with something on 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. (NRSV)

Most scholars suggest that he is referring to hair and not an article of clothing.⁶⁴

It is not clear in this passage if the men have a problem with this type of behavior in covering their heads. It has been suggested that Paul begins this section by addressing a hypothetical situation. If the men were to cover their heads that would be construed as shameful behavior. The idea is that this would show how

⁶³ Fee, *First Epistle To The Corinthians*, 501-502.

⁶⁴ Much scholarly work has been done in this area of head covering see Fee, *Ibid.*, 505 – 512.

shameful the women's behavior was within the community.⁶⁵ This view holds that the primary concern was directed to the women, but since Paul does address the men that there may have been a problem on the part of men. Jerome Murphey-O'Conner feels that Paul is addressing a problem that both the men and women experienced with their hair in public worship:

Some men wore their hair long, a characteristic of homosexuals, while some women neglected their hair to the extent that they were so unfeminine that Paul ironically suggested that they should cut it off and be overtly lesbian.⁶⁶

Robin Dowling contends that the problem was on the part of the women, "Paul's real concern was certain women who were not covering their heads in worship."⁶⁷

Regardless of who is being confronted with the issue of proper dress, in making use of the two verbs, pray and prophesy, προσευχόμενος and προφητεύων, Paul is pointing to the fact that this dilemma is in direct reference to the public worship gathering. The shame of this behavior, whether to the women alone or including the men, is ultimately directed to God. In verses 4-6 the shame motif is used to require women to cover their heads. If women wear their hair in disarray or refused to cover their heads, then it brings shame to them.

As Paul continues in verses 7-12 there is a shift in focus. The point turns from shame to the idea of glory: "For a man ought not to not have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man." The English word *reflection* in the NRSV has been translated from the Greek word glory, δόξα.

⁶⁵ Fee, *First Epistle To The Corinthians*, 505.

⁶⁶ Jerome Murphey-O'Conner, "1 Corinthians 11:2-6 Once Again," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50 (1988): 264-65. He presents further understanding of this issue in this article, 266-267.

⁶⁷ Robin Dowling, "Headcoverings: An Exposition of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16," *Evangel*, 12 (summer 1994), 37.

Some believe that verse seven is a continuation of the theological thought that Paul began in verse three. By using the creation account some interpret this verse about creation to imply that Paul is saying that since a woman was taken from the rib of man, women are therefore in a subordinate position to men. “The relative inferiority of women is part of the created order of things.”⁶⁸

Anttoinette Clark Wire presents a different understanding of why Paul refers to the Genesis account of creation. She suggests that Paul is not trying to establish a creation or hierarchical order but that he is: “responding to a different interpretation of Genesis by the Corinthian women prophets.”⁶⁹ By referring to the Genesis account Paul may be trying to present a corrected understanding of image (εἰκὼν). Paul does say that man is the image of God. He does not say that woman is the image of God, but he is also careful not to say that woman is the image of man.

In studying Paul’s words further, and comparing them with the creation account Paul does make a significant addition to the creation story. M.D. Hooker suggests that when Paul uses this creation account: “In this contrast between men and women Paul is making a distinction which is not found in Gen.1:27, but which *is* found in Jewish interpretation of that passage.”⁷⁰ Creation order does not mean authority to Paul. Paul does not elaborate on the meaning of the image of man, rather he is using image to point towards the word glory (δόξα) when he states that woman is man’s glory. The

⁶⁸ Thrall, 79.

⁶⁹ Wire, 123. She explains this concept by the use of the baptismal formula. “Paul is possibly warding off the Corinthian view that the Believer already embodies God’s image in Christ,” 123-28.

⁷⁰ M.D. Hooker, “Authority on Her Head: An Examination of 1Cor.11.10” *New Testament Studies* 10 (1964): 411.

emphasis is shifted to this word as Paul interprets the Genesis passage, he: “is the image and glory of God, woman is the glory of man.” The word glory, not found in either creation story, becomes the focus. It is in this contrast of glory that Paul can require two different instructions concerning head coverings.

To define what glory means in reference to both men and women is very difficult. Gordon D. Fee offers this insight to what Paul possibly meant as he addressed his audience:

More likely, therefore, in light of his further reflection in vv.8-9, and in light of the usage in 10:32, Paul probably means that the existence of the one brings honor and praise to the other.⁷¹

Woman is the glory of man, man is the glory of God, because of created order. No hierarchical understanding is being implied or suggested. Rather a relationship is established between all men, women and God. God created woman because there was no suitable partner for man, man was incomplete. God made woman for man, she was taken from man to complete man, he becomes her head or source and she is his glory:

Paul appeals to creation to show their obligation to bring glory – each to the particular one whose glory they are by creation – which they do through distinctive masculine and feminine hairstyles.⁷²

Verses 8 –9 appear to be a reiteration of what Paul has already stated giving a more detailed understanding about male/female creation. He continues in verse 10: For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Once again we have the difficult task of trying to determine what

⁷¹ Fee, *First Epistle To The Corinthians*, 516.

⁷² Judith Gundry-Volf “Gender and Creation in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16: A Study in Paul’s Theological Method,” in “*Evangelium, Schriftauslegung, Kirche*, hrsg. Jostein Adna, Scott J. Hafemann, und Otfried Hofius (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997): 157.

this verse means. To compound the problem there have been words added to the text that are not in the original language. The wording in Greek is rather inelegant and lacks clarity, it reads: “a woman should have authority over/on her head.” The NRSV text says: “For this reason a woman ought to have *a symbol* of authority upon her head.” Ralph Earl explains why in some translations⁷³ there are words not found in the original text: “The bare statement seems to require something additional in order to make sense.”⁷⁴ Because of the vagueness of this passage interpreters have taken the liberty of adding words to interpret the phrase.

Further difficulty in interpreting this passage lies in the use of two words, authority (ἐξουσίαν) and over/on (ἐπὶ). In looking at this verse to determine the meaning two considerations must be given. First, what does authority mean, and second what word does over/on point to? To make this even more confusing the clause at the end of the verse, “because of the angels,” is difficult to understand.

Authority (ἐξουσίαν) in the traditional translation of this verse is understood and translated that someone else (or something) places over the woman authority with the implication that this authority comes from her husband. There does not seem to be any scriptural justification for allowing authority in this verse to be used in the passive sense as something done to the woman. Gordon D. Fee notes that, “It is not so once in its 103 occurrences in the NT, nor in the LXX, Philo, or Josephus.”⁷⁵

With the premise that authority is done to the woman then scholars have contended that Paul is using authority as an analogy for “veil” with the ἐπὶ as being

⁷³ RSV adds “veil,” NIV adds “sign of.”

⁷⁴ Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings in the New Testament* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill, 1979), 67.

⁷⁵ Fee, *First Epistle To The Corinthians*, 519.

“on” as opposed to another frequent meaning “over.” The question then must be put, why did Paul use an analogy for veil when he uses the common word in verse 15, covering or shawl περιβολαιου.⁷⁶ Hooker looks to the Jewish custom of marriage. She suggests that the interpretation of the head covering as a symbol of authority is being misused:

A bride went bareheaded until her marriage, as a symbol of her freedom; when married, she wore a veil as a sign that she was under the authority of her husband. Once more, however, ἐξουσια is being given a strange meaning, since the headcovering is not bring understood as a symbol of authority but quite the reverse, as a symbol of subjection.⁷⁷

Another traditional understanding of authority is the idea that women exercise power by being allowed to pray and prophesy along with men, but they are still required to wear a veil or covering as they pray. Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich offer this suggestion:

Many now understand it as a ‘means of exercising power, (cf: δύναμις), that is to say, the veil by which women at prayer (when they draw near to the heavenly realm) protect themselves fr. the amorous glances of certain angels.⁷⁸

This definition replaces the word authority with a different word, which contains a different meaning. The common understanding of authority, ἐξουσίαν, is to have freedom; it should be used in the active voice with the understanding that the woman has freedom to do something, just as it is understood in the Greco-Roman culture. Elisabeth Fiorenza comments: “The Greek word ἐξουσια in v. 11 can only be read in the active sense as power over their head.”⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, define this word as covering, wrap cloak, of an article of clothing. Page 652.

⁷⁷ Hooker, 413.

⁷⁸ Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, 278.

⁷⁹ Fiorenza, 228.

Taken in that context then the word “over” (ἐπὶ) would be more appropriate than “on” and should be read as Gundry-Volf suggests, “to have control over their heads.”⁸⁰ Not that women put a veil on their heads as a symbol of someone else’s authority over them but that women have freedom (authority) over their own heads to do as they wish.

Paul now adds the vague justification, because of the angels (διὰ τοὺς ἀγγέλους). There have been several interpretations proposed as to what this phrase means. The most common understanding refers back to the Genesis 6:1-3 account in which the heavenly beings, the Sons of God, lusted after the daughters of men. Fee rules out this more traditional interpretation as unlikely for a first century understanding of veiling.⁸¹

Another interpretation presented by Elisabeth Fiorenza is that Paul and the Corinthian community believed that there are angels who actually participate in the worship service. If unloosed hair were culturally unclean then it would be viewed as offensive to the angels. Women should not worship as culturally unclean. Since it offends the angels who participate in worship women should keep their hair pinned up as a sign of their spiritual power and control over their heads.⁸²

Wire proposes that Paul is referring back to the idea of glory. She suggests that Paul is concerned that the angels had mistakenly worshiped man in the past because man reflects the glory of God. Women reflect men’s glory and if the head is

⁸⁰ Gundry-Volf, 160.

⁸¹ Fee, *First Epistle To The Corinthians*, 521. He explains in greater detail why he calls this in question.

⁸² Fiorenza, 228.

uncovered the angels might incorrectly worship women. “Paul is concerned with the unthinkable thought of mutiny in God’s heavenly host.”⁸³

We really cannot glean from the text if Paul and the Corinthians would see this as offensive to the angels, if angels would lust after the women, or as Wire suggests, it refers to an apprehension of misplaced worship by the angels. We can offer ideas: “But finally again, we must admit that we can not be sure.”⁸⁴

As Paul begins this section notice once again the use of the man/woman pattern that he established earlier in his letters: “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.”

There is a slight modification in this pattern that suggests that Paul is pointing to women and qualifying how they use their authority. He is not directing that that authority come from men.

Paul carefully qualifies the relationship between men and women by describing it as: “in the Lord and all things come from God.” Fiorenza argues that the word used for “without” or “independent” (χωρὶς) in this verse is mistranslated. Her studies have led her to conclude that this verse would more correctly be translated as: “In the Lord woman is not different from man nor man from woman.”⁸⁵ The phrases Paul used suggest that both men and women come from God. One was made from dust; one from man and now all humanity comes from woman.

Paul now concludes this section with an argument from propriety. He deals with

⁸³ Wire, 128. She offers this explanation based on Jewish stories in which angel’s worshiped Adam.

⁸⁴ Fee, *First Epistle To The Corinthians*, 522.

⁸⁵ Fiorenza, p. 229.

the stoic understanding of the teaching of nature and on the customs of the other churches:

Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her hair 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 to her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering.

Paul begins with a set of rhetorical questions in which he hopes that they will come to the same set of conclusions that he does. The focus switches from a theological perspective and is now placed into the social and cultural setting of this community. There are two ways that we can understand the use of these questions. One is that Paul is really pointing back to the issue of hair, and hair all along has been the point under discussion. He is using this as an analogy that women should not have their hair uncovered as they pray and prophesy.

The point of contention is the significance of the preposition ἀντὶ in verse 15. The meanings for ἀντὶ can be understood as either a replacement, one thing instead of another, or that one thing is equivalent to another thing. If ἀντὶ means a replacement, then the issue does become the hair as a covering. This presents several other problems with the reading of the text. Paul could have chosen other words that carefully stated that hair was the issue. If women had already been given long hair as a covering why would they instead need another covering? The second problem deals with the idea that if nature gives women long hair, with the whole idea that she put it up, why does she need to instead have to wrap, or place a covering over her hair.

If ἀντὶ means that one thing is equal or equivalent to something, then it would be understandable to ask whether nature teaches that a woman has long hair for a

covering. This then points to the need to have their head covered as they pray and prophesy.⁸⁶

“But if anyone is disposed to be contentious—we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.” The use of these words suggests that some were continuing the practice of uncovering their hair while they prayed and prophesied. With his concluding remark Paul now deals with the church custom of continuing with the headcovering. Richard Hays states:

Presumably he is referring here not only to his own mission churches but also to other early Christian communities as well, including the Jewish-Christian communities that looked to Jerusalem as their spiritual leader.⁸⁷

The custom in the churches of God (ἐκκλησίαι τοῦ θεοῦ) is for women to keep their head covered. Paul is not specifically giving this as a command for everyone to follow. He is speaking about a custom that had been established in the early churches.

In this section Paul has presented his argument about prayer and worship for both men and women in the community at Corinth, this passage does not teach that women should be subordinate. Paul recognizes that women participate in public worship. His only concern is that women cover their heads as they pray.

The only word that suggests the subordination of women is “head.” Because of the variety of meanings that are associated with this word, we must be cautious in implying that Paul is teaching submission as the proper role for women.

Craig Keener makes this insightful observation about this passage:

As many scholars have been pointing out in the past few years, if we want this passage to teach subordination, we have to read subordination into the passage.

⁸⁶ Fee, 529, suggests that this argument might not be as “tight for the modern reader but is in fact perfectly understandable.”

⁸⁷Hays, 190.

The only clear affirmations here, besides that men and women are different and should not conceal the fact, is the equality and mutual dependence of men and women.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*. 47.

1 Corinthians 14:33-36

This is last section of teaching with specific references made to women in the community at Corinth. These verses which deal with the silence of women in the church are found within the larger context of orderliness in the worship service.

³³ for God is a God not of disorder but of peace. (As in all the churches of the saints, ³⁴ women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached?) (NRSV)

Two exegetical and two hermenutical issues are faced in interpreting this passage. The exegetical issues focus on the division of verses 33 and 34 and the location of these verses within the manuscripts. In recent years because of the exegetical difficulties hermenutical problems have surfaced. The focus lies in the authenticity and authority of these verses; some question that these are Paul's words.

In regards to the division of 33 and 34 most scholars now treat the first part of verse 33 as a complete sentence. The second half of this verse is then understood to be the introduction to verses 34 and 35. The second exegetical concern is more complicated. These verses are found in all the known manuscripts but a number of those manuscripts include verses 34 and 35 after 14:40. The witnesses that place the verses after 14:40 are known as the Western manuscripts. They are not as impressive as those locating these particular verses after 33. David W. Bryce states that: "The chief characteristic of Western readings is their fondness for paraphrase. Words, clauses, and even whole sentences are freely changed, omitted or inserted."⁸⁹

⁸⁹David W. Bryce, "As in All the Churches of the Saints: A text-Critical Study of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 31 (May 1997), 32.

Based on his study of the various manuscripts, Bryce maintains that: “Text—critically, the evidence that 14:34, 35 is original and should be placed in its traditional location and not after 14:40 is substantial.”⁹⁰

The exegetical question of location then becomes a hermenutical concern. Why were these verses relocated in other manuscripts if in fact Paul wrote them and placed them in this location? One option that is offered as a way of explaining the difference of location of Paul’s words are that those scribes who copied this letter felt that verse 33 would be better understood if it were attached to verse 36. The scribes transposed their position. Godet offers this solution:

And it is this very thing, probably, which has led several Latin copyists to transpose vers. 34 and 35, putting them after ver. 40, in order thus to connect more directly to the last words of ver. 33 with ver. 36.⁹¹

Not all scholars have accepted this as a viable option.

The question of location has continued to facilitate many debates in recent years. Some scholars accept the authenticity of these verses, rather than viewing them as a scribe who changed their location in the manuscripts.

Many, including such notable scholars as Gordon D. Fee and Hans Conzelmann maintain that these are not Paul’s words. They believe that these verses are a gloss, added by an early Christian scribe.⁹²

Frank and Evelyn Stagg suggest that these verses could have been a scribal gloss,

⁹⁰ Bryce, 31.

⁹¹ F.L. Godet, *The First Epistle To the Corinthians*, vol 2 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1971): 309.

⁹² Fee, *First Epistle To The Corinthians*, 705. Conzelmann, 246.

written in the margin of an early a manuscript. Subsequently in the transmission of the text, scribes added the gloss into the manuscript, but different in its location.

Since there are no manuscript that survives without the gloss this would have to have happened at a very early date:

There is nothing which a priori rules out vs. 34-35 as a non-Pauline gloss. There are thousands of variants in Biblical manuscripts, so there are textual disturbances. Most of these are quite early. The internal evidence is the strongest possible for questioning this passage as coming from Paul.⁹³

C. K. Barret maintains in his work that verses 33 and 36 are original to Paul. His preference is to understand verses 34 and 35 as a scribal gloss, written in the margin and added into the text at an early date.⁹⁴

If the position is held that these are words that have been added by some other hand, then that would explain several discrepancies with Paul's words earlier in this letter.

First, the words found in these verses contradict those in 11:2-16. Paul allows women to pray and prophesy; there is no command for absolute silence as is stated in this passage. Second, his letter has been addressed to a specific church, yet these verses address many churches.⁹⁵ Third, there is also the question of the use of the Law. That is not a phrase one would expect from Paul as he deals with issues of behavior.

In Paul's own life it seems very contradictory to suggest that women are to maintain silence in the church if he also recognizes them as leaders within the

⁹³ Stagg and Stagg, 179.

⁹⁴ C.K. Barrett, 333. He states on page 332 that "the textual evidence is not quite strong enough to make it compelling."

⁹⁵ See Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, for a full discussion of textual issues dealing with interpolations, 699 – 708.

Christian community. Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2), Prisca (Romans 12:3-4), Junia (Romans 16:7), and Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4:2-3), to cite just a few examples are mentioned as leaders within the early church. Those who do regard these verses as Paul's own words must offer arguments which explain the apparent contradictions with 11:2–16⁹⁶ and why Paul allows women in leadership elsewhere in the Christian community.

Craig Keener, another noted scholar, maintains that these are Paul's authentic words. He feels that the scholars who believe that this is an interpolation do not offer textual evidence for such a belief but rather offer a contextual argument. He contends that there is nothing found in the text itself to suggest that these are not Paul's own words:

The main evidence adduced to prove that this is a later addition is not so much textual as contextual – the awkward way it fits its context. ...To regard this as an addition on such slender evidence would lead us back to the scissors-and-paste approach so common in source criticism early in this century.⁹⁷

He views these verses as a digression that Paul makes in the letter; which is not an uncommon literary technique employed by ancient writers.

There is no strong textual evidence to support the idea of an interpolation.⁹⁸ Fee, as stated earlier, maintains the position that these are in fact not Paul's words but those written by an unknown hand. In his commentary, he presents a strong case for believing that this is in fact an interpolation. His conclusion is that he finds no satisfactory reason to explain why the location of these verses changes in the

⁹⁶ Hays, 247-248 offers brief synopsis of four such positions.

⁹⁷ Keener, *Paul Women & Wives*, 74–75.

⁹⁸ Curt Niccum, "The Voice of the Manuscripts on the Silence of Women," *New Testament Studies* 43, (Apr 1997) offers rebuttal on Fee's understanding that this is an interpolation.

manuscripts. He states that no other verse in the New Testament has been subjected to this type of displacement.⁹⁹

I would conclude with Fee, that verses 34–35 should be understood as the teaching that was found in the early church and not Paul’s instructions. If they are understood to be a scribal gloss that would explain why the differing locations of the verses, the apparent contradictions of Paul’s previous words, and the recognition of women as early leaders in the Christian community. This study will assume that these are not Paul’s words, but are the teachings of the early church.

These verses deal with the issue that woman are to remain silent (σιγάτωσαν). This silence is further defined with the statement that “woman are not permitted to speak.” The verb to speak (λαλεῖν) can mean in classical Greek thought, to chatter. Throughout the New Testament and specifically in Paul’s writings this verb does not normally carry this meaning; it is usually understood as inspired speech. So the writer of this verse was calling for total silence from women, including inspired speech, not a lack of chatter.

The women are “not permitted to speak” they are to be “in submission” with the underlying argument being just “as the law says.” It is not clear what “law” this refers to. When Paul makes reference to the law he cites the law he is speaking about (see 9:8: 14:21). Some contend that this is a reference to Genesis 3:16. If in fact it is Genesis 3:16 it does not fit the context of the passage and it fails to take into account the new creation found in Christ. Others, who assert that Paul is the author of these verses, suggest that: “Here Paul uses the general term as a general expression without

⁹⁹ Fee, *First Epistle To The Corinthians*, 700. He gives strong evidence for his conclusion that no where else does displacement occur in the NT.

any reference to a particular Scripture passage.”¹⁰⁰ If Paul were the author of this verse, he would have stated which law he referred to as he had previously stated earlier in his letter. The writer of this verse makes a statement without offering a reference to the Law.

Fee postulates that the use of phrase, “according to the law,” is that this gloss comes from a Jewish Christian writer.

In verse 34, the author’s intent is focused on keeping women from any form of public speaking or action. Though, in verse 35, the writer is encouraging women to learn by asking questions. “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.” This verse suggests that the authors view is that the women will not understand what is being said within the worship service. It implies that the writer wants women to learn. They are to learn by asking questions of their husbands in the privacy of their home.

The ending of this verse once again prohibits woman from speaking in the church because it is a shameful thing. This is another indication that the prohibition against speaking is against all speaking and not just certain types of speech.

Looking at these verses it is hard to affirm that Paul wrote these contradictory words especially in light of 11:5.¹⁰¹ As questions are asked of the text, the answers seem to point away from Paul’s authorship of these words. The writer of these words did want women to learn, but not to speak in the public service.

¹⁰⁰ Kistemaker, 512.

¹⁰¹ Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives*, 70-100. He offers insights for those who believe that Paul wrote this passage and presents a strong defense for Paul.

In light of the exegetical and hermenutical difficulties, this passage should be used with caution when making a general statement or ruling about the role of women in the church.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Bryce, 39. The Lutheran Church of Australia excludes women from leadership roles within their denomination based on their understanding of this verse.

Sociological Study

In this section of the paper the focus shifts from an exegetical study to a sociological study. The ideas and teachings of the scripture are conveyed by words. The meaning of any given word is established by the culture that it comes from. Robert B. Chisholm offers this important insight: “The meaning of a word is established by usage among a community of speakers in a given time period.”¹⁰³ In studying any New Testament text, these words have attached to them meanings and nuances from a world that we are far removed from both in culture and experiences. The words contain a worldview which those living in the 21st century do not have. That worldview comes from a social world in which people lived.

Paul did not write outside his culture nor were his words received from a people divorced from their culture. Paul wrote to a social community who had their own understandings, values, and traditions.

What was stated had meaning for a particular culture in a particular time. The task of the New Testament scholar is to extrapolate from the text what had meaning for the particular culture to which it was addressed. Then lift that truth out and present what is intended for all to follow regardless of time, place and culture.

As the text is studied understanding then comes from the following two areas. First, from the text itself. This includes a thorough understanding of the grammatical structure of textual and linguistic factors. Second, understanding comes from an investigation of culture to which the text was addressed.

¹⁰³ Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *From Exegesis to Exposition* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1998), 32.

As Paul and the early writers of the New Testament wrote they had a completely different understanding of women and what was expected of them in their culture.

Mary K. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant offer insight into this perception of woman in the Roman times through their translations of secular text. One such text gives an example of punishment by husbands of wives in this society:

Egnatius Metellus.. took a cudgel and beat his wife to death because she had drunk some wine. Not only did no one charge him with a crime, but no one even blamed him. Everyone considered this an excellent example of one who had justly paid the penalty for violating the laws of sobriety. Indeed, any woman who immoderately seeks the use of wine closes the door on all virtues and opens it to vices.¹⁰⁴

It was this cultural understanding of women that provides the context for the theological and ethical teaching found throughout the New Testament. To understand those theological thoughts and ethical implications we must study those cultural differences. Susan R. Garret states in her article that:

Those who engage in such study contend that the “meaning” of theological (and nontheological) statements in the NT can only be recovered when they are seen to function within specific cultural and linguistic contexts.¹⁰⁵

By understanding the culture from which the text comes helps to determine, especially in the controversial area of women in leadership within the Christian community, what eternal truth Paul is trying to convey. The ever present challenge is to determine what was meant for the culture from which it came and what is meant and applicable for our culture today.

Scholars have used social science models in recent years to gain greater understanding into the social and cultural world of the New Testament. Gerd

¹⁰⁴ Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life In Greece and Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 176.

¹⁰⁵ Susan K. Garret, “Sociology of Early Christianity,” in *Anchor Bible Commentary* vol 6, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 99.

Theissen, in an early sociological investigation, looked to the social setting of the city at Corinth and noted several significant social factors that were specific to this city.

One of the factors he observed is:

It is especially important for the founding of the congregation that this city had no continuity in its tradition. Nothing in Corinth was more than a century old, whether the constitution, buildings, families, or cults.¹⁰⁶

One of the struggles that the city of Corinth faced, as well as the Christian Community, was to establish their own cultural and social identity. Included in that struggle, the community of faith had to determine what their religious traditions were going to be. They came from a socially larger context within a fairly newly created community with no long standing traditions, either religious or social. That struggle was further heightened by the fact that this was a Greek city, with a Greek culture having imposed on it a Roman citizenship with Roman cultural influences.

Within the larger social community in Corinth there are at the very least two cultures being merged with two different languages. Within these cultures there are also different economic and social backgrounds of individuals. It is from this social milieu that Paul drew people into the community of faith.

The challenge of the Christian community was to define the parameters in which it could operate which would include many from different social backgrounds. This community also had to be accepted by the community in which it tried to have an evangelistic dialogue.

In studying the words of Paul the task is to decide what tradition is being established for the Corinthian community. Then we can determine what eternal truth

¹⁰⁶ Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*, with forward and translation by John L. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 102.

is applicable to our society. That teaching can then be placed into our culture without imposing their ancient cultural understandings on our cultural setting.

Bruce Malina offers anthropological models for understanding the text of the New Testament specifically within the Christian community at Corinth. The models he offers are not meant to replace historical, literary critical or theological studies of the New Testament. The goal is to bring new perspectives and balance to our understanding of the text that the other above-mentioned methods of textual analysis do not have. By bringing this understanding into the text, especially into the problematic areas of Paul's writings, one can gain greater insight into what the text meant for their particular culture and what it means for us today within the confines of our culture.

Malina has offered several models that pertain to the New Testament cultural understanding. These models cover the following cultural understandings that he feels pertain to the specific worldview of the New Testament era. These models include, honor and shame; the individual and the group; the perception of limited goods; kinship and marriage; and clean and unclean (rules of purity).

In offering these models, Bruce Malina, has received criticism. The critics contend his cultural models are too narrow and he does not allow for the many divergent social and cultural worlds that were represented in the ancient Mediterranean world.¹⁰⁷ He is also commended for this work though because he does use anthropology constructively to offer insights into this social world in which the text was first written and communicated.

¹⁰⁷ For further discussion see Howard Clark Kee, *Knowing the Truth* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 113, n. 54.

In the following study we will be looking specifically to the model of shame and honor that Bruce Malina sets forth. In applying Malina's model of Shame and Honor we gain insight into the cultural values of the first century Christian. We do not share these values. I will briefly explain this model, then apply it to 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.

The city of Corinth, as stated earlier, is a newly re-established city, trying to establish its own culture and identity. The Christian community is also trying to establish its traditions and identity within that larger cultural framework. The idea of Honor and Shame is what Malina refers to as a pivotal value in the first century. Honor describes how a person is defined and how they may act in society. Honor has three categories: which include power, sexual status, and religion.

Power describes the control that a person can exert over the behaviour of others. Sexual status is related to what a person of each gender ought to do and what others ought to do for them. The third aspect, religion, describes attitude and behavior that one is to express to the gods (or God) who are in ultimate control over one's existence.

As honor comes together and connects in these three areas social identity is gained. Honor is the value of the person as they are viewed by others, and that value includes what society says about them. The group that people socially belong to and interact with places honor on them. Malina states that:

The shameless person is one with a dishonorable reputation beyond all social doubt, one outside the boundaries of acceptable moral life, hence one must be denied the normal social courtesies. To show courtesy to a shameless person makes one a fool, since it is foolish to show respect for boundaries when a person acknowledges no boundaries, just as it would be foolish to continue to speak English to a person who does not know the language at all.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Malina, 45.

Honor and shame can be viewed as pertaining to both male and female, but only as they are understood as a single social unit. Male and female are united together as they reflect a common unity. They would also share in the collective honor of the community.

Certain aspects of shame and honor though do relate to a specific gender and on the person's sexual status. Honor is ascribed to males with male qualities. These qualities would include the ethical understanding of courage, of being in the public, defending family honor, and gaining prestige.

The other side of honor would be feminine shame. This is ethically symbolized by the female characteristics of shyness, timidity, and sexual exclusiveness. This idea of shame is understood as positive shame because it keeps the female honorable and protected within the larger social community.

The male was to defend family honor and embedded in that honor was female shame, which was understood in the context of the corporate honor which both shared. The understanding of honor (male) is maintained by the positive (female) shame. Shame is not necessarily just a painful feeling that a person has when they do something bad. Positive shame keeps people sensitive to what is expected of them by both individuals and groups to which they belong.

The male and female work within this circle of corporate or shared honor and positive shame. This helps maintain the status quo and the cultural understanding of who people are and what type of behavior is expected from them.

Application of Sociological Model

Malina has offered a way to test the hypothesis that the honor-shame model is a valid interpretation that can be useful in understanding the social world of the New Testament. This section of the paper will test Malina's hypothesis to determine if this is a valid model. If honor-shame were a cultural understanding in the world of the Ancient Near East, then this type of language would be understood within the culture to set boundaries and limits around what would be deemed acceptable behavior. This cultural understanding would influence the New Testament writers as well as hearers.

Malina first suggests that the model of honor and shame should be traced throughout the New Testament by the use of specific vocabulary. Malina offers this vocabulary which includes the following words:

- 1) honor: equivalents include glory, blamelessness, repute, fame (and verbs like to honor, glorify, spread the fame, etc.)
- 2) shame: disgrace, dishonor and the verbs to shame, be ashamed, feel ashamed)
- 3) dishonor: scorn, despise, revile, reproach, rebuke, insult, blasphemy, deride, mock (and action like striking the head, spitting upon, etc.)
- 4) intention to challenge: test, entrap, entangle (and questions indirectly addressed to Jesus by being addressed to his disciples; questions that are obviously mocking, normally those of the Sadducees in the Gospels)
- 5) perceptions of being challenged or shamed: vengeance, wrath, anger, the vocabulary of sin (transgression, offense, sin, wrong) with a person as object.¹⁰⁹

By looking generally to the language of the New Testament we see a pattern of honor and shame within this culture. After asserting a general view of this language Malina recommends that a specific writing be studied. The honor-shame model will be applied to the entire book of 1 Corinthians, and then narrowed down to 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.

Craig S. Keener makes this general observation about letters that were written during this time frame, "Letters were often written to 'praise' or 'blame' the recipients."¹¹⁰ In the honor shame model *praise* could be understood as honor and *blame* could be seen as the shame side of the model.

Following the above procedure the words of this text need to be studied in the light of the words that have been proposed as part of the honor-shame vocabulary. There is a reoccurrence of these words found in 1 Corinthians, which fall under the category of the honor - shame model. This vocabulary includes:

1. honor-glory, to boast, boasting
2. shame-ashamed, put to shame, base thing
3. dishonor
4. offense-offend
5. foolish-fool, to make foolish, talking foolish things
6. wrong

These words occur 46 times throughout this text. The honor-shame model, based on the vocabulary found within the text of 1 Corinthians appears to offer an important insight into the cultural values of the people to which this letter has been addressed.

In general, the verses in which these words occur are used to define behavior. Paul relates the vocabulary of honor-shame to the conduct that is expected of those who are in the faith community. These words are also used to guide behavior and show how individual behavior affects God and others within their social group. 1 Cor. 15:34, "Come to a sober and right mind and sin no more, for some people have no knowledge of God. I say this to your *shame*." 1 Cor. 15:34, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the *glory* of God." 1 Cor. 12:26, "If one member suffers all suffer together with it; if one member is *honored*, all rejoice

¹⁰⁹ Malina, 49.

together with it.” Honor and shame are reflected in these verses in the conduct that is expected from the people in the Corinth community and how that affects those with whom they are in community.

The next step then is to consider a specific passage and determine what implications that this would have in a culture that has honor-shame as a basic understanding of socially acceptable behavior. The passage under consideration is 1 Corinthians 11: 2-16:

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 the 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 *glory* of God; but woman is the *glory* of man. Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was the man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. For this reason a woman ought to have 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 contentious – we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God. (NRSV)

The honor-shame vocabulary has been employed seven times in this passage.

1. disgrace is used three times,
2. glory is used three times,
3. and degrading is used once.

In this passage, by using the words disgrace and degrading, Paul uses the honor-shame vocabulary to set gender boundaries of behavior around men and women.

¹¹⁰ Craig Keener, *The Bible Background Commentary*, 475.

This language defines how they are to appear in a public setting as they pray within the larger context of community worship. To maintain honor in the group which includes differences between male and female, boundaries are set to help maintain the cultural understanding of who they are. This then would give guidance to the type of behavior that would be expected because of those gender differences. This would be considered a positive shame that would keep both men and women sensitive to what is culturally expected of them.

By making use of the word glory, in the honor-shame vocabulary, the relationship between members of the group is defined within a common social identity. The collective honor of women and men are reflected in a common unity. The collective honor is protected as long as both male and female act honorably within the community.

Shame would be brought on the entire community if one gender group or the other did not follow what was perceived as the normal social custom. The actions of one will reflect on all the others that are within the social group to which they belong.

As was stated earlier in this paper honor is the value of the person in their own eyes, yet that value also includes what society says about them. The group that one socially belongs to places honor on the individual. With that identity also comes expectations of what their behavior is to be. If those expectations, which are integral to what society perceives them to be, are met, then the person is considered honorable as well as the group they belong to. If the social expectations are not met, then the person, as well as the group, would be considered dishonorable.

Paul is primarily addressing the women at this point. When viewed from the cultural understanding of the honor-shame model, female honor is embedded in male honor, therefore the concern appears to be that female social boundaries are being ignored thus causing a rippling effect that touches the male honor.

The women have a culturally defined gender appropriate way of praying established for them by the community. This definition could have come from their larger social context or it could be from within their smaller community of faith. Either way, some of the women are choosing not to honor that gender-defined boundary. By choosing that option they are bringing collective shame to the Christian community at Cornith.

Paul's intent is to try and convince the women, by reminding them with positive shame, that they are acting dishonorably. He is further reminding them that their actions not only bring dishonor on them, as individuals, but they are bringing shame upon the social community to which they belong. This shame will ultimately reflect upon the men that are a part of this community.

In this model there is a certain attitude and behavior that a person is expected to express towards the deity of their choice, in this case God. That attitude comes from the knowledge that God is in ultimate control over the person's existence. They are not only stepping out of the social boundaries of their community and thereby bringing shame upon the collective group, they are also bring shame upon God with whom who they have chosen to become affiliated. They are fostering a dishonorable reputation among their own community, which reflects a negative image upon all members of this social group, including God.

As the dishonorable reputation continues and spreads throughout the community then, as Malina suggests, the normal social courtesies should be denied to the ones who act outside of the acceptable moral boundaries. If this specific behavior continued, which ignored creation gender roles, this could create a deep division within the community of faith.

In the honor-shame culture it is foolish to show respect to a person who continues to act outside of the normally accepted social boundaries. To continue to be in contact with one who is considered shameful makes the person who extends those courtesies a fool. Not only does the honor-shame culture create social boundaries of acceptable behavior it also creates boundaries by which a person can respond to those who are perceived as being shameful within the community. Honor-shame not only affects how the community is viewed; it also prescribes how people are to deal with those who are shameful or honorable. There is a delicate balance that has to be maintained between those who are shameful and those who want to remain honorable.

Within this honor-shame culture Paul has carefully chosen his words to bring honor back into the community. He did not command, nor order the women to stop their perceived shameful behavior. He did not address the husbands or men in the community and tell them to make the woman wear a head covering while they prayed. In the honor-shame based culture Paul is using his power to correct and give guidance to this community that is facing a division within its social structure. This power is not to be viewed as being physically stronger than someone or in having authority over him or her to make them do something by force. This power has to do with the ability that one person can control another person's behavior.

Paul, in his approach, is challenging the women with his words. They are to consider what he says and then determine to what extent that that will affect them. It could either bring honor or dishonor on each individual as well as the entire community of which they are a part.

In addressing the whole community Paul makes this public so that the recipients, the women in this case, are forced to react to the words in some way. Not only are the women expected to react to what was said, the whole community is brought into the process to evaluate the reaction of those who are challenged.

Paul, by using his power is issuing this challenge to their honor and uses positive shame to force the woman to react. His desire is that through this process, which includes both individual and collective responses, that the women will see the shamefulness of this type of behavior. Then the reaction, in light of communities' evaluation, would be to discontinue the behavior that brings dishonorableness to the entire community. The community is not just affected by the dishonor of those ignoring the socially prescribed ways of prayer; they are also affected by how individual members of the community respond to those who are acting dishonorably.

By issuing this challenge, Paul is trying to persuade the woman to do the socially accepted thing. In choosing to do the socially correct thing they can restore honor to the individuals, to the community, and to God. This would also allow those who had been prohibited to extend social courtesies to those who exhibited shameful behavior to once again be in contact with them. If Paul could use his power to persuade the woman to change their course of action, then his honor will also be upheld. He would be perceived as being in control of the behavior of others.

By applying the model of honor-shame to this problematic teaching of Paul, it is found that the issue was not to offer a teaching on submission to women. His objective was to help define a cultural role within the Christian community at Corinth. The primary importance of this text was a social behavior that was deemed unacceptable by members of the community, behavior that some of the women participated in. This shameful behavior was a reflection on the entire community.

Paul's intent, within his social understanding and context, was to present an argument that would challenge women to change their behavior. In changing that behavior they could be socially acceptable, thus restoring honor to the community to which they belonged. When honor was restored, then those who had been unable to extend social courtesies to the shameless could once again interact with the women. The intent was to avert a deep split within the community.

In applying Bruce Malina's social model of honor-shame insight is gained into the cultural mindset of the Greco-Roman world. This mindset included an understanding, which focused on how people worked within a community or collective group.

Conclusion

By studying the problematic passages found in First Corinthians with both an exegetical and sociological model new perspectives and insights were presented. These insights help develop a greater understanding of what Paul had originally intended to convey to a specific community.

Throughout this exegetical study, Paul's concern has been focused on relationships pertaining to marriage and propriety in worship. In 1 Corinthians chapter seven Paul offered an understanding of marriage in light of a community that favored asceticism. They were also under the impression that the end of the world was near. With that underlying premise, the believers expected a time of great distress to come upon the earth. There is no hint in the text that Paul thinks marriage is sinful.

In 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Paul's concern was focused on the issue of worship. There was no intent to establish a hierarchy of order that would teach that women were created in a lower position to men.

The writer of 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 contended that women had no role in the public worship. Women could learn in the privacy of their homes. This is a disputed passage, so it should be used with caution when addressing the role of women in leadership.

In the sociological study of the passage in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 using the honor-shame model, Paul's concern centered on the proper cultural way in which women were to pray in the public worship service. Social boundaries were being ignored, bringing shame to the entire community. Paul is endeavoring to re-establish honor within the community.

To the claims that Paul taught that women were not to be in leadership positions it can be stated that he had no intention as he addressed the Corinthian Community to suggest or imply that teaching. Through years of misinterpretation, combined with social and cultural differences, these passages have been misunderstood and incorrectly taught to present a teaching that Paul never intended.

The difficult task before us, as we carefully re-examine the text, is to view these verses with a different understanding than has previously been held. With this understanding of Paul's words then we can apply them to our own setting to include women in all area's of ministry within the Christian community. As that is done we can affirm with Paul in 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." (NRSV)

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