

**THE TRAJECTORY OF AN EGALITARIAN ETHIC
IN THE LETTERS OF PAUL: THE CASE
FOR WOMEN'S ORDINATION**

LEO S. RANZOLIN, JR.
Pacific Union College
Angwin, California

Introduction

The apostle Paul believed that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus ushered in the new creation. Consequently, “if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. The old things have passed away; behold, new things have come into being” (2 Cor 5:17).¹ The new creation is characterized by an eschatological reality in which the power of God—manifested in the proclamation of the cross (1 Cor 1:17-18, 23-24; Rom 1:16) as well as the indwelling Spirit within the believing community—has begun a transformation not only of the church but also of creation in its entirety.²

The dawn of the new creation means that believers walk between the times, between the inauguration of the new age and its full realization at the second coming of Jesus, between “the already” and the “not yet.” Already the divine powers of the new age are at work, delivering believers from “the rulers of this age” (1 Cor 2:6) and placing them within the rule of Christ’s love; not yet have the evil powers of the old age been destroyed and believers liberated from its malevolent effects. Already the new age has broken in with a whole new order, beginning the process of replacing the old age—“for this world in its present form is passing away” (1 Cor 7:31)³; not yet has the old order been completely eradicated; that will occur at the parousia—“then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power” (1 Cor 15:24).⁴

The diverse teachings on the relation of men and women within the Pauline literature must be understood in light of the above dialectical eschatology (already/not yet).⁵ And this dialectical eschatology of Paul’s

¹Translation is my own.

²Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*. AB 32A (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 314, 332-333. Furnish believes Paul drew the motif of newness from apocalyptic Judaism (ibid., 314-316). Moreover, Furnish argues that “the more ‘objective’ side of this transformation is one’s being drawn under the rule of Christ’s love, which has been established through the cross (vv. 14-15) and is present in the powerful leading of the Spirit (Rom 5:5; Gal 5:13-26). The more ‘subjective’ side of it is the total reorienting of one’s values and priorities away from the world (self) and toward the cross (Christ, others), vv.15bc, 16” (ibid., 332).

³Unless otherwise noted, scriptural passages are from the TNIV.

⁴Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 333.

⁵Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to*

“is not just one motif among numerous others, but helps to provide the fundamental perspective within which everything else is viewed.”⁶ As Paul reflected on the eschatological life of the Christian community, aware that believers live in an aeon where two conflicting ages overlap, it is clear that he *struggled* to discern the will of God on how he might implement the oneness and equality of the new creation for the church. This struggle to articulate the new creation equality is reflected in his ethical teachings on gender roles. The apostle’s instructions in this area are characterized by diversity, complexity, and dissonance, making it quite difficult to find a unified and coherent moral vision.

Richard Hays believes coherence in Paul’s discourse on gender roles can be obtained by locating his teaching within a narrative framework, a foundational story that has three key images: community, cross, and new creation.⁷ Placing Paul’s teaching on gender roles within this narrative/theological framework, and striving to adequately account for the tension between the old and new orders, the foundational story provides a lens that brings into focus a coherent moral vision on male-female relationships.

Looking through the foundational story lens, one recognizes that the coherence of the moral vision on gender roles springs from an interaction between the new creation and the present fallen order. According to Hays, while Paul’s gospel affirms that men and women are equal in Christ, this equality does “not sweep away all the constraints and distinctions of the fallen order.”⁸ Christians who live at the turn of the ages must therefore “live sacrificially within the structures of marriage and community, recognizing the

New Testament Ethics (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 55.

⁶Victor Paul Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2009), 214. Similarly, Hays maintains that “Paul’s eschatology locates the Christian community within a cosmic, apocalyptic frame of reference. The church community is God’s eschatological beachhead, the place where the power of God has invaded the world. All Paul’s ethical judgments are worked out in this context. The dialectical character of Paul’s eschatological vision (already/not yet) provides a critical framework for moral discernment: he is sharply critical not only of the old age that is passing away but also of those who claim unqualified participation already in the new age. To live faithfully in the time between the times is to walk a tightrope of moral discernment, claiming neither too much nor too little for God’s transforming power within the community of faith” (*The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 27).

⁷Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 193-200. Hays believes the foundational story is as follows: “The God of Israel, the creator of the world, has acted (astoundingly) to rescue a lost and broken world through the death and resurrection of Jesus; the full scope of that rescue is not yet apparent, but God has created a community of witnesses to this good news, the church. While awaiting the grand conclusion of the story, the church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is called to reenact the loving obedience of Jesus Christ and thus to serve as a sign of God’s redemptive purposes for the world.”

⁸*Ibid.*, 55.

freedom of the Spirit to transform institutions and roles but waiting on the coming of the Lord to set all things right.”⁹

Does Hays’s proposal that a foundational story brings an intelligible unity to the dissonant teachings on gender roles within Paul’s letters adequately account for the *tension* between the new order and the old order?¹⁰ That is, does Hays’s proposal accurately sketch the *extent* to which Paul applied the vision of the new creation, perhaps best expressed in the baptismal formula of Gal 3:28 (“there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”) to Christian communities that lived in a culture that was comprehensively patriarchal and hierarchical? Put another way, to what *extent* was the vision of the new creation accommodated or perhaps compromised by the hierarchical culture of Paul’s Greco-Roman world?

Given the limitations of this paper, I will answer these questions by employing the first two tasks of Hays’s methodological proposal for ascertaining the NT’s moral vision: the descriptive and synthetic tasks.¹¹ The descriptive task will disclose the dissonance of Paul’s discourse on gender roles by an exegetical analysis of a number of passages (1 Cor 11:2-16; 14:33-36; Gal 3:26-29; Rom 16; Phil 4). The synthetic task, on the basis of the new creation focal image, will endeavor to articulate a coherent moral vision on gender roles among the discordant teachings found within the NT.

The Descriptive Task: Reading the Texts

SUITABLE ATTIRE AT PUBLIC WORSHIP (1 COR 11:2-16)

² I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions just as I passed them on to you.

³ But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. ⁴ Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. ⁵ But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. ⁶ For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head.

⁹Ibid., 55-56.

¹⁰Judith Gundry-Volf, “Putting the Moral Vision of the New Testament into Focus: A Review,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 9 (1999): 279-280.

¹¹Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 3-7. The descriptive task explicates the original intent of the biblical texts; the synthetic task articulates a unity and coherence of ethical perspective within the diverse teachings of the NT; the hermeneutical task relates the biblical text to our postmodern situation, striving to bridge the chasm of the culture/world of scripture to our contemporary situation; and the pragmatic task endeavors to live out the biblical texts, “embodying Scripture’s imperatives in the life of the Christian community.”

⁷ A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. ⁸ For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; ⁹ neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. ¹⁰ It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels. ¹¹ Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. ¹² For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.

¹³ Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴ Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, ¹⁵ but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. ¹⁶ If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.

The Corinthians wrote a letter to Paul seeking counsel on a number of issues related to the life of the church (1 Cor 7:1); they were particularly concerned with certain matters of the Christian assembly—the head-covering of women when they pray and prophesy (1 Cor 11:2-16); divisions occurring during the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:17-34); and the nature and exercise of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12-14). Two passages in 1 Corinthians engage male-female relationships (11:2-16; 14:34-36) and reveal Paul's struggle to articulate the ethical implications of the gospel for the community and how its members ought to concretely manifest this ethical vision within the social structures of the world. We begin with the passage on women's head-covering (11:2-16), one of the most extensive discussions on gender roles in the NT.¹²

Nature of the Problem

Determining the precise nature of the problem during the worship service and Paul's awkward response to the situation is a difficult task for interpreters,¹³ yet it is possible to sketch the overall contours of the problem and the apostle's response.¹⁴

¹²This passage has received a great deal of attention from scholars. See the extensive bibliography in Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 806-809.

¹³Robin Scroggs describes 11:2-16 as "an extremely difficult text, not only... because in the way it is usually read it seems to put women down, but also (and primarily) because the passage as a whole is opaque" ("Paul and the Eschatological Woman: Revisited," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 42 [1974]: 534.) A number of scholars have suggested the passage is a post-Pauline interpolation (see for example, William Walker, Jr., "1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and Paul's Views Regarding Women," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1975): 94-110.

¹⁴We must acknowledge however, that every significant exegetical issue is contested by scholars. For a description of the options, see Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 491-498; David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*. BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 505-511.

As Paul proclaimed the dawn of the new creation—framed, as we have seen, within his apocalyptic eschatology, coupled perhaps with the teaching of the new realities of baptism (Rom 6:1-4) and an egalitarian ethic where in Christ there is *no male and female* (Gal 3:27-28)—some believers, who conceived of themselves as spiritual (πνευματικός 1 Cor 2:15), embraced an over-realized eschatology.¹⁵

1 Cor 7 and 11 suggest that some women adopted this newfound freedom in Christ. Specifically, Christian women prophets began to exercise their freedom by praying and prophesying during worship services with their heads “uncovered.” This kind of behavior blurred gender distinctions—especially the established symbols of a woman’s identity and her subordination to men—threatening the well-being and unity of the church.¹⁶ This innovative activity represented “a challenge to conventional patterns of authority which assume a hierarchical and patriarchal order of ‘head.’”¹⁷ Moreover, within an honor-shame Mediterranean culture, the praying and prophesying by women without the appropriate headdress left the Christian assembly open to “incurring social shame through boundary transgressing hairstyle.”¹⁸ The Corinthian church was thus struggling to ascertain “the appropriate *embodiment* (both individual and social) of Christian identity (cf. 1 Cor 7)” within a pagan world.¹⁹

¹⁵Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 498; see also Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*. PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 503-504; Richard Hays, *First Corinthians*. IC (Louisville: John Knox, 1997), 182-183; Marion Soards, *1 Corinthians*. NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 224.

¹⁶Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 498.

¹⁷Stephen C. Barton, “1 Corinthians.” In *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, ed. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 1337. Barton argues that “In this case, the women’s sense of new identity expresses itself in innovation relating to the head: specifically, letting their hair down and/or removing the veils . . . and so ‘uncovering’ their heads (11:3-5). Because the head is a symbolic location of authority, and hairstyle is emblematic of status and group affiliation, such innovation seems to be causing contention in the church and perhaps also in the wider society.”

¹⁸Judith Gundry-Volf, “Gender and Creation in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16: A Study in Paul’s Theological Method,” in *Evangelium, Schriftauslegung, Kirche: Festschrift für Peter Stuhlmeier*, ed. Jostein Adna, Scott J. Hafemann, and Otfried Hofius (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 154-155. According to Gundry-Volf, “the Christian pneumatics praying and prophesying with unfeminine or unmasculine headdress takes place in a worship assembly where outsiders might be present and which was thus a situation of potential gain or loss of social acceptability. . . . The pneumatics head-covering practices ignored the social boundaries between male and female and thus brought shame upon themselves and upon their ‘heads.’”

¹⁹Barton, “1 Corinthians,” 1337.

Paul's Response

Paul initially responds to this situation by delineating a hierarchy of “heads,” involving God, Christ, man, and woman: “But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (11:3). The freedom believers enjoy is rooted in a “divine ordering of things” and “is not a license to behave willfully.”²⁰ This divine structure of things is hierarchical and is symbolically disclosed by the metaphor of “the head” (κεφαλή).²¹ Whether κεφαλή means “ruler” (one who exercises authority over another) or “source” (one through whom the other exists), or preeminent (one who is foremost or representative) is difficult to determine. Nevertheless, it is hard to escape the notion that κεφαλή conveys a sense of subordination.²² There is thus a hierarchy, disclosed in an ascending order: woman, man, Christ, God.

A man who prophesies with his head covered disgraces his head (i.e., Christ) and a woman who prophesies with her head uncovered disgraces her head (i.e., the man). Such shameful conduct threatens the divine ordering of things and fails “to maintain the distinctions—of status, gender, ethnicity—around which society organizes common life.”²³ Paul believes these distinctions remain important for the communal life of the church but in such a way that is transformed by the dawn of the new creation.²⁴

In order to reinforce the hierarchical divine ordering of things sketched in 11:3 and stress the point of how men and women ought to pray and prophesy during worship, Paul appeals to the creation accounts of Gen 1-2. Reinterpreting Gen 1:27—“so God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them”—Paul maintains that men should not cover their heads because they are the “image and glory of God” (εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα θεοῦ) while women are “the glory of man” (δόξα ἀνδρός).²⁵

²⁰Ibid, 1338.

²¹Ibid.

²²For the “ruler” interpretation, see: Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “Kephale in I Corinthians 11:3.” *Interpretation* 47 (1993): 52-59; Wayne Grudem, “Does KEFALH (Head) mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority over’ in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples.” *Trinity Journal* 6 (1985): 38-59. For the “source” interpretation, see: C. K. Barrett, *The Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 248-249; F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Corinthians*. NCB (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 103; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 501-505. For the “preeminent” interpretation, see: A. C. Perriman, “The Head of a Woman: The Meaning of κεφαλή in 1 Cor 11:3.” *Journal of Theological Studies* 45 (1994): 602-622; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 811-822.

²³Barton, “1 Corinthians,” 1338.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ciampa and Rosner argue that 11:7 must be interpreted in light of 1 Cor 15:49, where Paul “understands all humanity to share (even if imperfectly) in the image of God as it has been passed down to us through Adam, and that part of our redemption

The logic of Paul's argument appears to be that "the uncovered head of the man will reflect the glory of God (cf. 2 Cor 3:18) and that, since the uncovered head of the woman reflects the glory of *man*, and thus will deflect attention from the glory of *God*, the woman should go with her head covered (11:7)."²⁶ The apostle finds further justification for the priority of man over woman by noting that in Gen 2:18-23, Eve was created from and for the sake of Adam (11:8). For this reason, "a woman ought to have authority on the head because of the angels" (ὀφείλει ἡ γυνὴ ἔξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς διὰ τοὺς ἀγγέλους 11:10). The "authority on the head" of the woman appears to refer to the head covering, but it is difficult to ascertain whether it speaks of her authority to pray and prophesy or of her subordination to male authority.²⁷ In any case, by covering her head, the woman allows a sense of propriety and orderliness during the worship service and thus honors "the divine presence represented by the angels worshipping with them and (perhaps) inspiring their prayer and prophecy."²⁸

But now Paul's argument moves in an entirely different direction, from a rather subordinationist ethic (11:7-9) to a more egalitarian one: "Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God" (11:11-12). Paul qualifies his previous sketch of male-female relationships, drawn from the creation accounts, by distinguishing between the origin of men and women over against the origin of Adam and Eve. There is a marked interdependence between man and woman in the cycle of life because woman came from man and man is born

in Christ entails the restoration of God's perfect image in Christ" (*The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 524). Thus, if we interpret 11:7 in light of 15:49, it appears that Paul understood Adam to be "created directly in the image of God and that the rest of us (from Eve on) are made in God's image as we inherit it from Adam and our parents (cf. Gen. 5:3; 9:6)." Similarly, Soards asserts that "God brought forth man who now as the creature is explicit evidence of God's glory. Yet, woman was brought forth by God from man, so that if she is displayed explicitly, glory will go to man rather than to God. The point is that the creatures (man and woman) bring glory to the one from whom they come—man to God and woman to man" (*1 Corinthians*, 225).

²⁶Barton, "1 Corinthians," 1338.

²⁷See Ciampa and Rosner for the options (*The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 531-533). They argue that "the woman's head is not one over which others have authority. God has granted her authority to pray and prophesy. She exercises that authority in a dignified way by respecting both herself and the rest of the congregation through the avoidance of provocative attire or any dress or behavior which would bring shame on herself, others, or God, in a context where all eyes and every heart should be focused on God's glory in the midst of his holy people."

²⁸Barton, "1 Corinthians," 1338; see also Hays, "First Corinthians," 187-188. For the possible ways of construing the phrase "because of the angels," see Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 838-841; Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 529-533.

of woman. Thus, “the community’s application of the principle drawn from the narration of the creation of the first human couple is *tempered* by the way God has determined to bring every other human being into his creation.”²⁹

Moreover, and importantly, *in the Lord*, gender relationships are transformed. That is, the dawn of the new creation ushers in new realities for how men and women are related to one another: “Whereas the creation order entails a differentiation that may also embody a hint of priority, at least in terms of the Genesis narrative, Paul adds that in the gospel differentiation is determined more explicitly by a principle of mutuality and reciprocity.”³⁰ The egalitarian thrust of 11:11-12 stands in tension with the subordinationist sketch of 11:3, 7-9 and suggests that Paul is moving in a direction of actually inverting the hierarchical and patriarchal ways of understanding male-female relationships: “the assertion, ‘just as the woman is from the man, so also the man is through the woman,’ thus abolishes man’s exclusive priority in the creation and gives women equal status. Both are origins of the other, though in different ways, which respects their creational difference.”³¹ The phrase, “but everything comes from God” (11:12c) reminds the Corinthians that God is the source of everything, particularly the existence of men and women; such an assertion relativizes “the significance of other factors in the creation of men and women and clearly [emphasizes] that it is his glory and honor that must govern all that is done.”³²

Paul concludes his argument by appealing to common sense (11:13), nature (11:14-15), and custom (11:16). Surely the Corinthians will exercise good judgment and recognize the importance of cultural standards that emphasize the unsuitability of women praying “to God with her head uncovered” (11:13).³³ Nature itself, that is, “the natural world as God made it

²⁹Italics mine. Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 535. Similarly, Alan Johnson states that “the original historical creation of man and woman (woman from man) is compared with the creation order of how human life is produced: ‘man is born . . . of woman.’ This comparison qualifies what Paul has previously stated. That woman has priority over man in the created order must at least balance the previous male priority argument (vv. 7-9) and may stand in tension with it” (*1 Corinthians*. IVPNTC [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004]), 198.

³⁰Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 842. Hays argues that 11:11-12 depict a functional equality: “The result is that Paul supports a *functional* equality of men and women in the church. Women are free to pray and prophesy and exercise leadership of all sorts through the guidance of the Spirit, so long as they maintain the external markers of gender difference, particularly with regard to head coverings” (*First Corinthians*, 189).

³¹Judith Gundry-Volf, “Gender and Creation in 1 Cor 11:2-16,” 163.

³²Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 537. Gundry-Volf maintains that the phrase, “everything comes from God” denies the exclusiveness of man’s privileged status on the basis of creation (“Gender and Creation in 1 Cor 11:2-16,” 163.)

³³Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 538-539.

... has made men and women different from each other, and has provided a visible indication of the difference between them in the quantity of hair he has assigned to each."³⁴ Thus, long hair upon a man is a *dishonor* (ἀτιμία), but upon a woman, it is her *glory* (δόξα 11:14-15). Finally, Paul appeals to the Corinthians by asking them to adhere to the traditions, customs, and practices of “the churches of God” regarding the manner men and women ought to attire themselves during worship (11:16).³⁵

Paul’s overarching concern in this extended discussion of suitable head-covering for men and women in the Christian assembly is clear: he wishes to bring peace and order to a potentially volatile situation where Christian women prophets are seeking to eliminate the customary dress codes or social standards of the day by inappropriately using newfound Spirit-inspired liberty in a self-aggrandizing display of personal freedom.³⁶

Women: Order & Propriety in Worship (1 Cor 14:33-36³⁷)

³³For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people. ³⁴Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. ³⁵If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. ³⁶Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?

How is one to understand Paul’s prohibition that “women should remain silent in the churches” and that “it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church” (14:34a, 35b) in light of his more favorable statements of women in ministry that one finds in other portions of the Pauline literature? A number of proposals have been offered to resolve this tension:

A post-Pauline interpolation. The harsh rule for women in 1 Cor 14:34-35 appears to contradict a number of assertions by Paul in which he speaks of the appropriateness of women praying and prophesying during public

³⁴Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 256.

³⁵Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 540-541; see also Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 258; Hays, *First Corinthians*, 189-190; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 847.

³⁶Soards, *1 Corinthians*, 221, 224. Barton once again rightly captures Paul’s intention: “For Paul, the matter does not have to do with the equality of the sexes or ‘women’s rights’ but with how believers (men and women) are to embody their eschatological identity in everyday life in ways which are historically responsible and socially constructive. In relation to the Christian gathering, this means a practice of worship which respects the differences between the sexes (and other differences as well) and allows such differences to be incorporated into a more profound unity” (“1 Corinthians,” 1338).

³⁷The TNIV correctly places the phrase—as in all the churches of the saints (14:33b) with the general principle of, for God is not a God of disorder but of peace (14:33a); see Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 717-718.

worship (11:2-16); of a baptismal identity of equality that women and men enjoy in Christ (Gal 3:27-28); and of a charismatic church where women and men are in practical partnership to accomplish the apostolic mission (Rom 16).³⁸ These positive renderings of women's involvement in the life of the church, along with the evidence that some manuscripts place 14:34-35 after 14:40, lead a number of scholars to argue that 14:34-35 is an interpolation made by a conservative and patriarchally oriented believer who sought to counteract the charismatic authority of Christian women.³⁹

A Corinthian slogan. The discordant note of 14:34-35 is a Corinthian assertion, a position of Paul's opponents, which the apostle cites in order to refute with an indignant reply—"Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?" (v. 36).⁴⁰ 1 Cor 14:34-35 is not an expression of Paul's antifeminism but of his opposition to the men at Corinth who desire to control and subordinate women; this passage thus resonates with 11:5, where women pray and prophesy, and the egalitarian ethic of Gal 3:28.⁴¹

Paul's inspired silencing. Paul's earlier comments about women praying and prophesying during worship (11:2-16) did not truly disclose his understanding of women participating in the Christian assembly. The apostle now makes clear his true position: women are not permitted to speak in church; they must be silent (14:34-36).⁴²

Disruptive speech. The verb *to be silent* (σιγάω) occurs three times within the section in which Paul strives to bring order and peace to the assembly (14:26-40): as a command to those who wish to speak in tongues to "remain silent" when no interpreter is present (v. 28); as another command to a prophet who must "remain silent" if someone present receives a revelation (14:30); and finally, as a command for women to "remain silent" (14:34). These directives of silence suggest Paul is correcting certain abuses that are taking place during worship.⁴³

³⁸Barton, "1 Corinthians," 1345.

³⁹Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 699-705; see also Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 246; Gundry-Volf, "Putting the Moral Vision of the New Testament into Focus," 278; Hays, *First Corinthians*, 245-249; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Interpolations in 1 Corinthians." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48 (1986): 90-92.

⁴⁰Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 91-95; see also Neal M. Flanagan and Edwina H. Snyder, "Did Paul Put Down Women in 1 Cor 14:34-36?" *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 11 (1981): 10-12; David W. Odell-Scott, "In Defense of an Egalitarian Interpretation of 1 Cor 14:34-36: A Reply to Murphy-O'Connor's Critique." *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 17 (1987): 100-103.

⁴¹Flanagan and Snyder, "Did Paul Put Down Women in 1 Cor 14:34-36?" 12.

⁴²Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 149-158.

⁴³Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 720f. Richard E. Oster

The disruptive behavior on the part of the women appears to involve asking questions in an inappropriate manner; such conduct is shameful and unsettles the worship gathering, creating a situation where learning and encouragement of believers (14:31) are made more difficult.⁴⁴ It is possible that Paul's admonition for the women to "ask their own husbands at home" (14:35) indicates that the primary cause of the disruptive questions was the lack of education on the part of the women.⁴⁵ Understanding the dilemma in terms of propriety and order of the Christian assembly rather than family order addresses more cogently the logic of Paul's instructions.⁴⁶ Thus, the apostle's patriarchally oriented comments in 14:34-35 disclose his wrestling with the tensions between household patterns and ecclesial patterns that inevitably arose among believers, since they were "at home" and "at church" in the same locale: "It is precisely because the 'coming together' takes place in a household setting (cf. 16:19) that misunderstandings and strife over meal practices (11:17-34) and gender roles (11:2-16; 14:34-35) are easy to envisage. . . . Paul's reassertion of a modified patriarchal authority—both in 11:2-16 and 14:34-35—may be understood as part of a pragmatic attempt to establish and maintain a framework of social order within which a Spirit-inspired common life can be built up."⁴⁷

maintains that "one ought to remember that all three imperatives for 'silence' were in the setting of a correction of aberrant behavior, and therefore the silence desired was only in relationship to the point of abuse. . . . In the same manner, the conditions of 'silence' and 'not allowed to speak' can only contextually and consistently mean that the ban against the speech of these women (γυναικὲς *gynaikeis*) is in for only so long as they are in violation of the principles and regulations of 1 Cor 14:34-35. The principle that these particular women were violating is that of submission" (*1 Corinthians* [Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995], 355-356); see also Ben Witherington, *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Social-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 276.

⁴⁴Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 728-730.

⁴⁵Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 81-85. Keener quotes Plutarch to note how, typically, women/wives were less educated than men/husbands: "And for your wife you must collect from every source what is useful, as do the bees, and carrying it within your own self impart it to her, and then discuss it with her and make the best of these doctrines her favourite and familiar themes" (Plutarch *Bride* 48; *Moralia* 145B, LCL; cited by Keener, 85).

⁴⁶*Contra* Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza who argues that Paul's prohibition of 14:34-35 applies only to wives, because the apostle did not want active pneumatic participation of wives during worship (*In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* [New York: Crossroad, 1983], 230-233).

⁴⁷Barton, "1 Corinthians," 1346; see also Barton's article, "Paul's Sense of Place: An Anthropological Approach to Community Formation in Corinth," *New Testament Studies* 32 (1986): 229-234.

New Relationships in Christ (Gal 3:26-29)

²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

In Gal 3:15-29 Paul appeals to the story of Abraham and states that God gave the covenant-promise to Abraham and to his offspring, Christ (3:16-18). With the arrival of the era of faith (3:23a), God occasions the “faithful fulfillment of the promise to Abraham and Abraham’s seed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (see 1:1-2; 2:20; 4:4-5).”⁴⁸ The implication of the revelation of the “coming faith” (3:23) is that all those who are in Christ Jesus become members of Abraham’s family—“children of God/Abraham’s seed, heirs according to the promise” (3:26, 29).

The children of God are initiated into the family of Abraham by being baptized into Christ and then “clothed with Christ.”⁴⁹ The clothing metaphor may allude to the practice of the baptismal candidates removing their clothing prior to baptism and then given a new garment (see Rom 13:14; Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10).⁵⁰ By being clothed with Christ believers are united with him and undergo a transformation of identity, embracing the qualities and character of Christ.⁵¹

Baptism symbolizes the realization of new relationships among believers: *There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (3:28). The marked divisions among humanity that lay at the center of culture and society—ethnic (Jew and Greek), economic (slave and free), and gender (male and female) are radically transfigured in Christ. The dawn of the new creation transforms the distinctions characteristic of the old age and achieves, “in Christ,” a profound new unity and equality among believers.

⁴⁸Beverly R. Gaventa, “Galatians.” In *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, ed. James D. G. Dunn and John Rogerson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 1380.

⁴⁹Paul probably cites an early baptismal liturgy in 3:27-28. See Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches of Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 181-201; Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*. WBC 41 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 154-158; Gaventa, “Galatians,” 1380; G. Walter Hansen, *Galatians*. IVPNTC (Downers Grove, IL; InterVarsity, 1994), 110-114; Richard B. Hays, “The Letter to the Galatians.” In *The New Interpreter's Bible*. Vol. XI (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 271-273; J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*. AB 33A (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 373-383.

⁵⁰Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1983), 151.

⁵¹Hays, “The Letter to the Galatians,” 272. Hays argues that “Paul’s language of ‘putting on Christ’ is another figurative way of describing the mysterious personal union with Christ to which he referred to in 2:20. In such a union, those who are ‘in Christ’ share in his divine sonship and take on his character. The baptismal liturgy here, then, points to the transformation of identity that the Galatians have undergone.”

What exactly does the new creation achieve in terms of male-female relationships? The new creation does *not* accomplish a unified, genderless, androgynous humanity where believers, when they “put on” Christ—the genderless image of God—are remade into new, sexually undifferentiated persons, fostering a situation where women are able to cancel the privileges of men and experience significant social gains.⁵² *Nor* does the new creation achieve a universal humanity where believers, when they “put on” Christ in baptism are incorporated into the risen Christ—the Christ according to the Spirit—and are remade into “an ideal of a universal human essence, beyond difference and hierarchy.”⁵³

On the contrary, the new creation renders sexual differences insignificant, “where being male or female is no advantage or disadvantage in relation to God and others and where men and women are reconciled and united as equals. Christ is not portrayed as amalgamizing Christians into a new ‘one’ above fleshly distinctions by virtue of being himself genderless or androgynous. . . . Within this new community of equals created in Christ the creaturely differences remain and play a role in the formation of Christians’ new identity and interrelations.”⁵⁴

⁵²Contra Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*, 126. Wire argues that “the new creation in Christ, God’s image, is *not* like the old creation [which granted a privileged position to men]. . . . If God created the male first and then the female for the man, now in Christ, God creates an identity not male and female. The language is drawn from the creation story, but the meaning is not a new understanding of God’s first act. Rather it is an announcement of God’s new act to create in Christ, God’s image, a new reality lacking the privilege of male over female.”

⁵³Contra Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Cultural Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 7.

⁵⁴Judith Gundry-Volf, “Christ and Gender: A Study of Difference and Equality in Gal 3,28.” In *Jesus Christus als die Mitte der Schrift. Studien zur Hermeneutik des Evangeliums*, 439-477, ed. Christof Landmesser, Hans-Joachim Eckstein and Hermann Lichtenberger. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche 86 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 439-440.

*Women's Involvement in Paul's
Apostolic Ministry (Rom 16; Phil 4)*

Paul lists a considerable number of women who are involved in his apostolic ministry at the conclusion of the letter to the Romans (Rom 16). Phoebe is described as a minister/servant (διάκονος) of the church at Cenchreae (16:1) and a benefactor/patron (προστάτις) of many, including Paul himself (16:2). These two terms—διάκονος and πρόστατις—indicate that Phoebe played an influential and leading role in the Cenchreae church.⁵⁵ Priscilla and her husband Aquila, who had a house church in Ephesus (1 Cor 16:19), were co-workers with Paul and “risked their lives” for him (16:3).⁵⁶ Priscilla performed the role of a *teacher*, instructing Apollos in “the way of God more adequately” (Acts 18:26). Junia, along with her husband Andronicus, are called *prominent among the apostles* (16:7).⁵⁷ Paul mentions other women by name who “worked hard in the Lord”: Mary, Trypheona, Tryphosa, and Persis (16:6, 12).

At the church of Philippi there were two women leaders, Euodia and Syntyche, whom Paul says “have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers” (Phil 4:3). Paul encourages these influential women to settle their differences and “be of the same mind in the Lord” (Phil 4:2). And, as we have seen, at the church of Corinth, women took up the role of *prophet*, regularly praying and prophesying during communal worship (1 Cor 11:5, 13).

The powerful outpouring of the Spirit upon *all* flesh (Acts 2:17), the changes in socioeconomic factors, and the willingness of women to work hard, all doubtless contributed to women taking up prominent roles in the life of the early church within a culture that was unreservedly patriarchal and hierarchical.⁵⁸

⁵⁵Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*. Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 944-948. Jewett argues that Phoebe, who probably carried Paul’s letter to Rome, was a woman of high social standing with considerable material resources, having a residence large enough for the community to gather for worship (*ibid.*, 947). Similarly, Joseph Fitzmyer believes the term patron connotes “a person of prominence in the ancient Greco-Roman world.” Phoebe was thus “a superior or at least a leader of the Christian community at Cenchreae. . . . She probably owned a house there and, as a wealthy, influential person involved in commerce, was in a position to assist missionaries and other Christians who traveled to and from Corinth” (*Romans*. AB 33 [New York: Doubleday, 1993], 731).

⁵⁶The fact that Priscilla’s “name is mentioned first indicates her higher social status in the Roman context” (Jewett, *Romans*, 955).

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 961-964. Eldon Jay Epp makes a cogent case for Junia being a woman apostle (*Junia: The First Woman Apostle* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005]).

⁵⁸Judith Gundry-Volf, “Gender Distinctives, Discrimination, and the Gospel.” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 21 (1997): 45. Gundry-Volf aptly describes the contribution of women to the early church: “There were quite a few women in the early church who took up the same roles as men: they prophesied, taught other Christians, including men, performed the tasks of apostles by going on missions that involved preaching

Summary

The foregoing exegetical analyses of certain Pauline passages that engage the male-female relationship reveal unmistakably the dissonance and intracanonically tensions which are characteristic of Paul's discourse on gender roles.

On the one hand, there are several passages that appear to restrict women's service in the church, espousing a subordinationist ethic:⁵⁹

The man is the head of the woman (11:3). Whether the term head (κεφαλη) means ruler, source, or preeminent, the term has hierarchical connotations and does convey a degree of subordination of the woman toward man.

Creation accounts support gender difference and hierarchy (11:7-9). Paul appeals to the creation accounts to make the point that in the Christian assembly man's purpose is to bring glory to God and woman's purpose is to bring glory to man. Moreover, man has priority over woman because she was created from man and for the sake of man.

Women ought to be silent in the churches, remain in a state of submission, because it is disgraceful for them to speak in the Christian assembly (1 Cor 14:34-36). Even if one interprets this passage as a problem of disruptive speech on the part of some women who are improperly using their Spirit-inspired freedom during worship, the passage asserts a patriarchal authority, entreating the women to be silent during worship and, if they have a question about a particular issue, to ask their husbands at home.

On the other hand, there are a number of passages that speak positively of women's ministry in the church, with some texts articulating an egalitarian ethic:⁶⁰

and teaching, worked hard as ministers of the gospel, were entrusted with important responsibilities such as bearing apostolic letters to churches, and shouldered financial responsibility for missionaries and churches. They came into these roles through being empowered by the Holy Spirit, enabled through their personal circumstances based on socio-economic factors, and by their own choice and determination. And so these women made a very valuable contribution to the growth and vitality of the early church. The fact that their names and activities are recorded in the New Testament is a witness to the importance of their contribution and others' appreciation of it."

⁵⁹There are other texts from the Pauline corpus that also suggest subordination and patriarchy: 1. Wives are called to submit and respect their husbands because the husband is the head of the wife (Eph 5:22-24, 33; see also Col 3:18-19). 2. The suitable manner in which women should learn is in "quietness and full submission." Moreover, women are not allowed "to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet." The reason women ought to act in such a fashion is because "Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner" (1 Tim 2:11-14). For a well-crafted analysis of this passage, which advocates a "situational" approach, see Samantha Angeles, "Shall Women Be Silent?" *Spectrum* 40 (2012): 28-33.

⁶⁰Other passages in the Pauline literature also suggest egalitarianism: 1. In the sexual relationship, men and women are equal, with both exercising "authority" over

Creation accounts support gender difference and equality (11:11-12). Paul once again appeals to the creation accounts to make the point that, “in the Lord,” there is an interdependence of men and women; and this interdependence is grounded from the perspective of creation in which both man and woman are the source of each other’s existence. Thus, men and women are different sexually but equal in Christ. And, ultimately, both men and women owe their existence to God the Creator.

Early Christian baptismal liturgy proclaims a profound equality of men and women before God (Gal 3:26-29). Through baptism the bodily inscribed creational differences are not erased. Rather, “through baptism the differences which served the basis for privilege and disadvantage are nullified, and those who were once excluded are included.”⁶¹ Gal 3:28 thus functions as the theological basis for an egalitarian practice within the church.⁶²

Women’s involvement in Paul’s missionary endeavors and the life of the church (Rom 16; Phil 4; 1 Cor 11:5). As we have seen, there were quite a few women who participated in Paul’s apostolic ministry, performing the roles of prophets, ministers, teachers, and apostles. The women’s exercise of these spiritual gifts underscores the Spirit’s freedom to allot “to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses” (1 Cor 12:11, NRSV).

*The Synthetic Task: Gender Roles in
Light of the New Creation*

There have been a number of proposals that have sought to account for the intra-canonical tensions on Paul’s ethical teachings of male-female relationships in the Christian community.⁶³

Different social settings. The discordant features on gender roles in Paul’s letters can be understood as pastoral responses to specific social/historical settings. Paul responded in different ways because he encountered diverse settings which warranted unique and particular responses: “When Paul fought those who defended the old—as in Galatia—his bold vision of the new expressed itself most strongly, as in Galatians 3:28. When he discerned the overstatement of the new he spoke up for the old, as in Corinthians.”⁶⁴

However, in regards to the worship setting of the Corinthian church (e.g., 1 Cor 11:2-16), Paul’s diverse pastoral responses on gender roles to different Christian communities “does not explain the presence *side-by-side* of

each other’s bodies (1 Cor 7:3-4). 2. Both wives and husbands are called to mutual submission to one another “out of reverence for Christ” (Eph 5:21).

⁶¹Gundry-Volf, “Gender Distinctives, Discrimination, and the Gospel,” 45-46.

⁶²Ibid., 46.

⁶³The following analysis is very much informed by Gundry-Volf’s article, “Gender and Creation in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16: A Study in Paul’s Theological Method,” 167-171.

⁶⁴Krister Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women: A Case Study in Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 37.

egalitarian and hierarchical perspectives as double poles of reflection in Paul's response to a *single* community.⁶⁵

Varied social contexts, different maps. Jerome Neyrey argues that in Gal 3:28 Paul fashions a new map of persons—no Jew or Gentile, no slave or free, no male or female—that describes the liminal state of believers as they enter into the church, where, being “in Christ,” there is no distinction.⁶⁶ However, once believers return to the social structures of the world, these new maps may be adjusted as Paul finds himself compelled to utilize the “old maps.”⁶⁷ Depending on the situation, Paul will employ “traditional orderly maps of persons” or reverse those maps or present new maps.⁶⁸ Thus, again with respect to Corinth, “Paul can adopt both a patriarchal and an egalitarian framework for gender roles [1 Cor 11:2-16] because he has two, contrasting social contexts in mind: the Corinthians’ wider social context and the cultic setting of Corinthian worship.”⁶⁹

Wearing two hats at once. Gundry-Volf nuances Neyrey’s proposal. She argues that at Corinth (e.g., 1 Cor 11:2-16), Paul had to merge two diverse social settings into *one*:

The Corinthians’ wider social context in which shame and honor depended on the preservation of distinct gender identities and roles, and the cultic context of Corinthian worship in which gender boundaries were crossed and hierarchy transcended. It is while assuming identical functions in the assembly that the Corinthian women and men are to have different headdress symbolizing the gender difference which formed the basis for a hierarchical relationship between the sexes, and thereby avoid shame. In other words, the Corinthian pneumatics had to wear two “hats at once. . . . The women and men wore the “hat” of the pneumatic which was “neither male nor female” and symbolized their equality in the Lord, and at the same time, they wore the “hat” of the first century Mediterranean man or woman which was either masculine or feminine and carried the connotations of traditional gender roles in a patriarchal society.⁷⁰

It was the dawn of the new creation, concretely experienced as men and women prayed and prophesied in the worship life of the Corinthian church, which led Paul to a new understanding of the creation accounts that stressed the interdependence and equality of men and women (1 Cor 11:11-12).⁷¹ And, at the same time, it was the recognition that the believing community lived within the Mediterranean honor-shame culture that led Paul to utilize

⁶⁵Gundry-Volf, “Gender and Creation in 1 Cor 11:2-16,” 167.

⁶⁶Jerome Neyrey, *Paul, in Other Words: A Cultural Reading of His Letters* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox), 67.

⁶⁷Ibid., 68.

⁶⁸Ibid., 71.

⁶⁹Gundry-Volf, “Gender and Creation in 1 Cor 11:2-16,” 168.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Gundry Volf, “Putting the Moral Vision of the New Testament into Focus: A Review,” 283-284.

aspects of the creation accounts that underscored hierarchy and patriarchy (1 Cor 11:7-9), so that the church might obtain social acceptability toward the outside world as it discharged its mission (e.g., 1 Cor 9:22; 10:32; 14:23; 1 Thess 4:12).⁷² Paul essentially “lets social roles ‘in the world’ and social roles ‘in the Lord’ clash right in the setting of worship.”⁷³

Concluding Reflections

Our analysis of Paul’s discourse on gender roles has demonstrated that the apostle truly *struggled* to discern the will of God for male-female relationships within the Christian assembly. As he traveled throughout the Roman Empire, founding Christian communities, it seems Paul frequently asked himself, “How might I achieve the new creation equality for believers who live in a sin-dominated world?”⁷⁴

It is clear that “the deepest logic of [Paul’s] gospel declares that men and women are one in Christ and ought to live in relations of loving mutuality.”⁷⁵ At the same time, it is also clear that Paul’s gospel, particularly its new creation dimension, faced the very real “constraints and distinctions of the fallen order.”⁷⁶

Consequently, Paul found himself at times needing to accommodate the vision of the new creation to the cultural sentiments of the first century A.D. One gains the sense he wanted to carry out more fully the realities of the new creation but the recalcitrance of the old order held him back. Accommodations and compromises were necessary because Paul’s missionary endeavors compelled him “to preserve the attractiveness of the gospel for outsiders.”⁷⁷ And these compromises with the old order, which were grounded in the creation accounts (e.g., 1 Cor 11:7-9; 1 Tim 2:11-15), reinforced patriarchal and hierarchical gender distinctions.

Nonetheless, these patriarchal renderings of gender roles are not normative for the church but “culturally-conditioned, unredeemed interpretations of the differences” between

⁷²Ibid., 284-286.

⁷³Gundry-Volf, “Gender and Creation in 1 Cor 11:2-16,” 169.

⁷⁴Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 56.

⁷⁵Ibid., 55.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Eckhard J. Schnabel, “How Paul Developed His Ethics,” in *Understanding Paul’s Ethics: Twentieth Century Approaches*, ed. Brian Rosner (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 288. Paul’s concern for the church’s witness to outsiders can be seen in his encouragement to the Thessalonians, “But we urge you, beloved, to do so more and more, to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we directed you, so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and be dependent on no one” (1 Thess 4:10-12, NRSV). It can also be seen in his exhortation to the Corinthians, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved” (1 Cor 10:31-33; cf., 1 Cor 14:23; 1 Tim 2:2).

*men and women.*⁷⁸ The *cultural* dimension of Paul's ethical teachings on gender can be seen in (1) the degree to which his discourse was influenced by his missional apologetics, that is, his deep concern that unseemly conduct and disunity within the church not adversely affect its witness to outsiders who lived in a pagan culture; and (2) in his adaptation to the cultural conventions of the time for how men and women ought to attire themselves in public; depending on the setting, the apostle can ground theologically *hierarchical* as well as *egalitarian* readings of male-female relationships from the *creation accounts*.

Therefore, one cannot claim that the created order supports women's subordination to male authority nor can one claim, on the basis of the created order, that men and women are equal ontologically but unequal in their functional roles within the church. The apostle's utilization of the creation accounts for hierarchical *and* egalitarian readings negates the possibility of giving priority, on the basis of the created order, to either reading.

If Paul's vision of the new creation was moving in the direction of the *first creation* sketched in Gen 1-2—where men and women were equal and there was no hint of dominance or subordination between the sexes⁷⁹—yet had to be accommodated to the cultural inclinations of the first century A.D. Roman world, might it be possible for the believing community of the twenty-first century living in the Western world, to extend the newness and equality of the new creation *further* than Paul was able to do so, given our contemporary culture's wholehearted embrace of equality between men and women? Yes, I believe so. The trajectory of an egalitarian ethic in certain Pauline passages,⁸⁰ albeit framed within the context of a comprehensively hierarchical culture, encourages us, perhaps even compels us, to embrace

⁷⁸Gundry-Volf, "Putting the Moral of the NT into Focus," 282.

⁷⁹See Richard Davidson's cogent analysis of "equality of the sexes without hierarchy" in his book, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 22-35. After weighing the pertinent arguments on the male-female relationship of Gen 1-2, Davidson concludes, "Gen 2, like Gen 1, contains no statement of dominance, subordination, or leadership/submission in the relationship of the sexes. The man and the woman before the fall are presented as fully equal in rank, with no hint of an ontological or functional hierarchy, no leadership/submission relationship between husband and wife" (ibid., 34-35).

⁸⁰Briefly again, here are the pertinent passages: 1. In the sexual relationship there is equality of the wife and husband, for "the wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife (1 Cor 7:4). 2. In the Lord, men and women are interdependent because in creation they have equivalent roles. The creation of Eve from Adam parallels the procreation of man through woman (1 Cor 11:11-12). 3. Wives and husbands are called to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph 5:21). 4. In public worship, men and women had identical roles; both "prayed and prophesied" (1 Cor 11:4-5, 13). 5. The baptismal formula of Gal 3:28 relativizes and redeems the ethnic, economic, and gender relationships of believers, articulating a profound equality.

this ethic of equality more fully in our Western culture, with its postmodern sentiments and outlook.

If Paul were alive today, engaged in missionary activities in the Western world of Europe and North America, would he not *insist* that the church reflect critically on its cultural context, and make the necessary adaptations and accommodations so that it might proclaim the gospel more effectively and provide a gracious and loving witness to outsiders? Would he not entreat the church to utilize his missionary approach to soul-winning in order to bring people into the life-transforming community of believers?

Would he not encourage us to embrace his remarkable statement of missional sensitivity? Where he became “a slave to everyone” so that he might “win as many as possible,” where “to the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings” (1 Cor 9:19-23). Absolutely.

*Nonetheless, it must be underscored, that Paul’s adaptable missionary strategy “is not a license for unlimited flexibility.”*⁸¹ The apostle “does not think that fundamental and distinctive demands are negotiable, depending on the circumstances. . . . He did not tone down his assault on idolatry to avoid offending idolaters or to curry favor with them. His accommodation has nothing to do with watering down the gospel message, soft-pedaling its ethical demands, or compromising its absolute monotheism. Paul never modified the message of Christ crucified to make it less of a scandal to Jews or less foolish to Greeks.”⁸²

Paul would never say, “To the adulterer, I became as an adulterer, to win adulterers. To the drunks, I became as a drunk, in order to win drunks. To the robbers, I became as a robber, to win robbers” (cf. 1 Cor 6:9-10). While there

⁸¹D. A. Carson, “Pauline Inconsistency: Reflections on I Corinthians 9:19-23 and Galatians 2:11-14,” *Churchman* 100 (1986): 33.

⁸²Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 435. Similarly, Marcus Dods states, “While accommodating himself to the practice of those around him in all matters of mere outward observance, and which did not touch the essentials of morality and faith, he at the same time held very definite opinions on the chief articles of the Christian creed” (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. 4th ed. [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1893]), 207. Additionally, Michael Barram maintains Paul’s flexible behavior is modeled for the believing community upon Christ’s selfless redemptive example toward all persons: “Mission involves behavioral flexibility and adaptability as the Christian community purposively and intentionally embodies Christ’s salvific example for the sake of all people, Christian and non-Christian alike” (“Pauline Mission as Salvific Intentionality: Fostering a Missional Consciousness in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 and 10:21-11:1,” in *Paul as Missionary: Identity, Activity, Theology, and Practice*, ed. Trevor Burke and Brian Rosner (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 241.

are occasions where Paul can be an accommodating apologist, there are also abundant examples where he can be a resolute defender of orthodoxy.⁸³ *Thus, exegetical discernment is extraordinarily important when seeking to ascertain whether Paul is in the mode of accommodating apologist or defender of orthodoxy. And this important exegetical enterprise ought to take place within the context of the interpretive community of believers, the Church, which “derives its authority from Christ, who is the incarnate Word, and from the Scriptures, which are the written Word.”*⁸⁴

If Paul could go to the Genesis creation accounts in order to formulate hierarchal and egalitarian readings that were suitable for his first century A.D. Christian assemblies, would he not also utilize the creation accounts in a manner that is suitable for a contemporary, egalitarian culture, if he was engaged in missionary activity in the West? And would he not primarily appropriate the egalitarian elements of the creation accounts and apply them to our present-day Western culture? Indeed.

Paul’s flexible missionary strategy (1 Cor 9:19-23) would certainly take into consideration the social settings of particular cultures and would doubtless look dissimilar in the different parts of our world. To paraphrase the apostle, he surely would say today, “To the European, I became as a European, in order to win Europeans. To the Africans, I became as an African, in order to win Africans. To the Asians, I became as an Asian, in order to win the Asians. . . . I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some” (cf. 1 Cor 9:19-23).

For believers who live in the Western culture of the early twenty-first century, Paul’s struggle to implement the realities of the new creation within

⁸³Paul’s flexibility and adaptability are particularly seen in Luke’s portrayal of the apostle’s missionary activity in Acts of the Apostles: “The Book of Acts pictures Paul in a way which adds significance to the dictum of 1 Corinthians 9. . . . In three fundamental ways Acts corroborates the implications of 1 Corinthians 9. First, Paul speaks regularly in the synagogues. He travels to Jerusalem to celebrate Jewish Pentecost (Acts 20.16) and he circumcises Timothy. Second, he converses in the *agora*. He gives a speech where pagan poets are cited, thus aligning himself with persuasive Greek style. Third, Acts witnesses to the difficulties inherent in living according to the dictum. Paul constantly ran into difficulties with the synagogues; he is ridiculed at Athens. His performance there even earned him accusations of being an idolater” (Karl Olav Sandnes, “A Missionary Strategy in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23?” in *Paul as Missionary: Identity, Activity, Theology, and Practice*, ed. Trevor Burke and Brian Rosner (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 141. At the same time, Paul, in the role of defender of orthodoxy, is exemplified in his condemnation of the Judaizers’ theology in Galatians, his opposition to the heretical philosophy/theology in Colossians, his disapproval of those who would deny the bodily resurrection (1 Cor 15), his prohibition of Christian participation in pagan festivals (1 Cor 10:14-22), his command for the Corinthians to expel the sexually immoral believer from the community (1 Cor 5), his sketch of sinful conduct in vice lists delineating those who will not enter the kingdom of God (1 Cor 5:9-13; 6:9-11; Rom 1:29-32; 13:11-14; 2 Cor 12:19-21; Gal 5:16-26; Eph 4:17-32; 5:3-14; Col 3:5-11; 1 Tim 1:9-11; 6:4-5; 2 Tim 3:2-4; Titus 3:3), etc.

⁸⁴*Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 2005), 163.

the church can be *exemplary* for us because we also need to perceive God's will for the church as we seek to embody the faithfulness of Jesus in a deeply egalitarian social context.⁸⁵

The foundational story of the New Testament—of God redeeming the world through the death and resurrection of Jesus and empowering the church, through the Holy Spirit, to live out the loving obedience of Jesus—provides the overarching framework from which to understand Paul's discourse of gender roles. Examined from within this narrative/theological framework and viewed through the focal lens of the new creation, Paul's moral vision on gender roles is coherent and has an egalitarian trajectory, which can be seen in specific ethical teachings in the letters as well as the conspicuous contributions that both men and women made to his apostolic ministry.

Since believers who live in the Western world are by and large no longer constrained by the hierarchical and patriarchal dimensions of the present order, but instead live in a culture that profoundly values gender equality, the time has arrived for us to treat men and women as equals in the fullest sense, both ontologically and functionally, within the life of the church. The time has arrived to embrace more fully the trajectory of Paul's egalitarian ethic and ordain women to the gospel ministry. For it is clear that the Spirit's freedom is giving to women the gift of pastoral ministry, allotting “to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses” (1 Cor 12:11, NRSV).

⁸⁵Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 56.