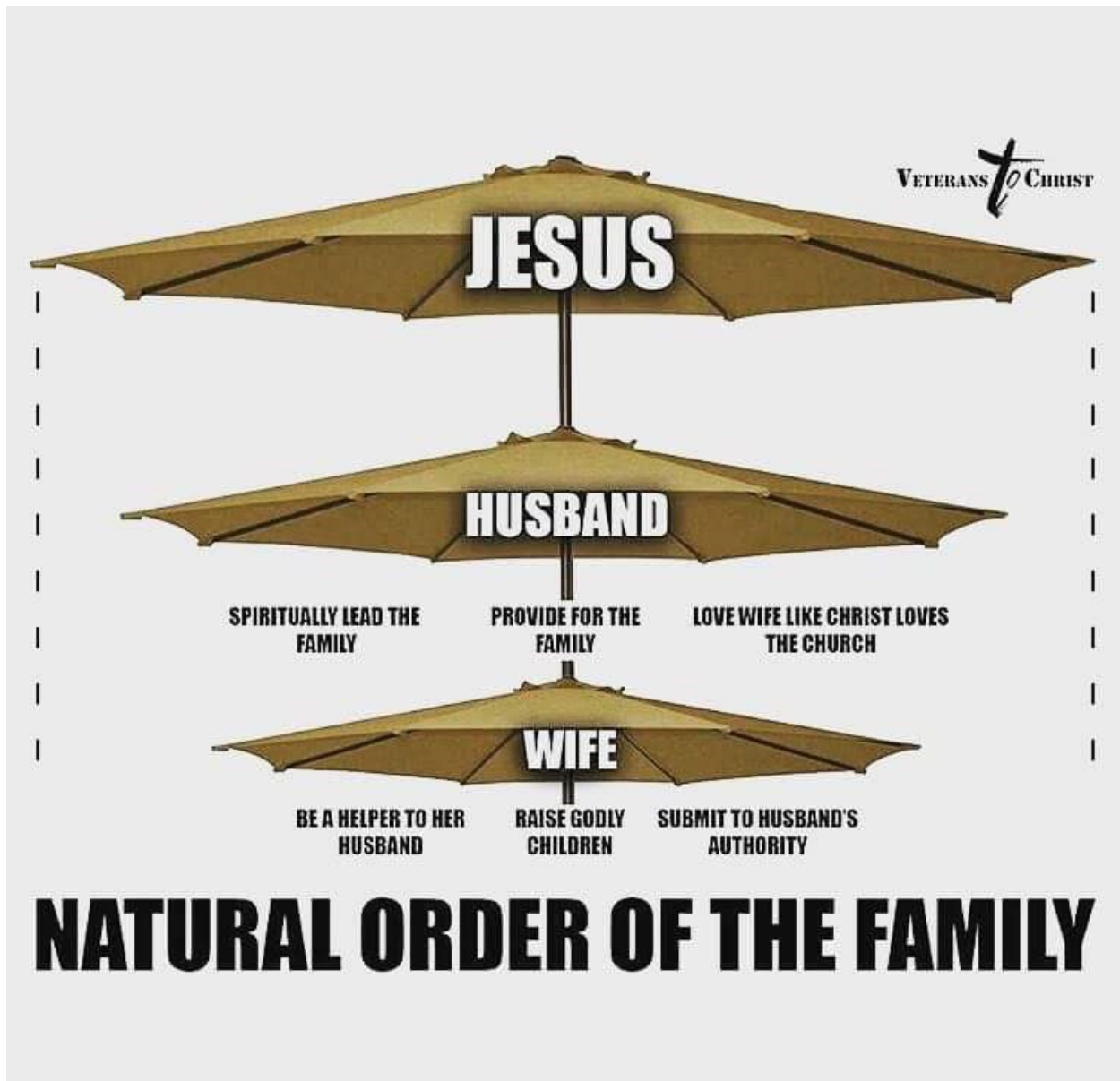


## Paul's View of Headship in Marriage: How 1 Corinthians Interprets Ephesians and Colossians

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Is the diagram above accurate? In a sense, it depends on what book you read first: Ephesians and Colossians, or 1 Corinthians.

Why? Is there a conflict between New Testament writings?

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:29, 'from now on those [husbands] who have wives should be as though they had none.' How can that be? Presumably, Paul also means those 'wives who have 'husbands' should be as though they had none, also (Greek, like Spanish, is a gendered language, so the male pronoun can often be understood to be the inclusive male pronoun which includes the female). Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 6 – 7 is rooted in the conviction that Jesus is the primary owner of our bodies, and we are but the secondary owners:

‘Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.’ (1 Corinthians 6:19 – 20)

Hence, Paul encourages people to avoid marriage if they can control their sexual urges (7:8, 25), and avoid self-indenture into ‘slavery’ (7:23; where ‘slavery’ needs to be understood in its historical context):

‘But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I... Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy. I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is.’ (7:8, 25)

‘You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.’ (7:23)

Why does he say that? Giving other people some level of authority over one’s own body can interfere with Jesus’ authority over our own bodies. Not only that. Paul also encourages indentured/enslaved people to leave slavery (7:21), and (in a move which suggests to me that the diagram above was drawn without much consideration of 1 Cor.6 – 7), he encourages married Christians to ‘be as though’ they were not.

‘But this I say, brethren, the time has been *compressed*, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none’ (7:29, the term ‘compressed’ is better than ‘shortened’ (NASB) because Paul’s intent is to say the actions we do now have more meaning than we might think it does, because it has an eternal significance; see 1 Cor.3:10 – 15 where Paul talks about our works now being tested with fire)

Now in context, I don’t think that means that husbands and wives were ‘free’ to be sexually involved with other people (made explicit in 6:12 – 20 and 7:1 – 5). But it is to say that ‘authority’ needs to be more carefully defined. ‘Authority’ does not simply cascade from Jesus ‘through’ the husband ‘to’ the wife, as the diagram suggests. In fact, Paul, in 1 Corinthians 6 – 7, indicates that Jesus interrupts and tempers (at the very least) any kind of human hierarchy in order to assert his lordship directly over people, in principle. He is the primary owner of each one of us, individually. He does not welcome interference in his lordship.

The reason I began by commenting on 1 Corinthians is to point out a long-standing puzzle. Paul sees the lordship of Christ over every person posing a challenge not only to slavery but to Christian marriage, in principle. Pragmatically, he *weakens* the obligations that husbands and wives have to each other by raising the importance of Christian mission. A certain kind of prayerfulness (1 Cor.7:1 – 5), mobility for mission (1 Cor.9:1 – 27), and developing and deploying spiritual giftedness (1 Cor.12:1 – 14:40) seem to take high priority in such a way that, in some sense, Christian spouses should ‘be as though they were not’ married.

Not only that, but Paul in 1 Corinthians extensively discusses the meaning of ‘headship,’ ‘head-body’ relations, how to understand Adam and Eve’s original relationship in creation, the nature of godly authority, and a woman’s ability to preach in the congregation, as well as the vexing issue of ‘slavery’ and what it means – far more so than in Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Peter. Notably, he affirms the categorical right and importance of women praying and prophesying in the congregation (11:2 – 16), including a wife bearing an authoritative word from God to the congregation while her husband sat in the audience.

Ultimately, this raises the question of how we arrange Ephesians and 1 Corinthians. What is their relation to one another? The diagram above seems to take Ephesians and Colossians (and 1 Peter, by implication) as ‘exegetically prior’ to 1 Corinthians. If we follow that road, it would be easy to see Jesus reinforcing human hierarchy in marriage, parenting, and slavery (Ephesians 5 – 6 and Colossians 3 – 4) and perhaps beyond. But then, what would we do with 1 Corinthians 7? There, we see Paul/Jesus disrupting and weakening human hierarchy of all kinds, including Christian marriage and, even more so, slavery. So we have to ask, ‘Is Paul strangely contradicting himself?’

Notice that we have to work out the relationship between texts all the time, like between Ephesians and Colossians, the ‘twin letters.’ Paul gives the ‘household code’ in Colossians in an abbreviated and even terse way. But in Ephesians, he gives the code much more depth, qualification, and colorful humane flavor. So anyone preaching

from Colossians must take Ephesians into account, if only because Paul is much more sympathetic in Ephesians than he is in Colossians. That's just one example of working out the relationship between texts.

What if we reverse the typical assumption made about the relationship between Ephesians and 1 Corinthians? There are solid reasons for doing this. First, in 55 AD, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians *from Ephesus* (1 Cor.16:8 – 9). It's reasonable to assume that the Ephesian believers in all likelihood retained a copy of 1 Corinthians, or at least an awareness of what Paul taught in it. Second, Paul had been in Corinth for eighteen months (Acts 18), and then went to Ephesus for three years (Acts 19 – 20), from which he wrote back to the Corinthians. It is fairly reasonable to think that Paul learned from his experience in Corinth something that he didn't want to repeat in Ephesus – namely, that the Ephesian believers were vulnerable to the same errors that the Corinthian believers were. So it is reasonable to think that Paul taught the Ephesians in person the topics he had to teach the Corinthians in his first letter. The fact that he stayed twice the amount of time in Ephesus as he did in Corinth gave him ample time to do so. Asia Minor was quickly surpassing Jerusalem as the missional and intellectual center of the broad Christian community, due in part to the personal investments poured there by Peter, Paul, and John. Paul wrote Ephesians and the Colossians from his imprisonment in Rome in 60 – 62 AD a full 5 – 7 years after writing 1 Corinthians. And third, Paul refers to congregational worship practices that are *common to every church*, by the design of the apostles (1 Cor.11:2, 16). Those practices involve men and women praying for and prophesying to the congregation, in a mode of authority which Paul refers to as a 'headship.' Paul says that this is standard Christian practice, including of course in Asia Minor. So, when Paul uses the 'head-body' language in Ephesians 5 for marriage, must we not first consider what he said about 'head-body' language in 1 Corinthians?

This important acknowledgement shows that the underlying definition of a word like 'head' can change when we place it in a different context. Biblical scholars of all types debate whether 'head' in Ephesians 5 means 'authority,' or 'source,' or something else, and in what sense.<sup>1</sup> Can we assume that Paul meant something by using the word 'head' that his contemporary, the Stoic philosopher Seneca, meant if he used it? Not necessarily. Their conceptual contexts might be quite different; I am just using Stoic thought as an example here, but Stoic and Christian terms, while shared, meant very different things.<sup>2</sup>

N.T. Wright once pointed this out in one of his books by offering this phrase: 'I'm mad about my flat.' All English speakers will recognize the words used. But what does that sentence *mean*? It depends on context. If we are in Britain, chances are it means, 'I'm happy about my apartment.' If we are in the United States, chances are it means, 'I'm angry about my car's flat tire.' Context matters. So when we read the word 'head' in the apostle Paul's usage, I am arguing that Jesus himself set up a normative corporate worship context and practice from which to understand that word, and what it means for men and women, and husbands and wives. That worship context and practice is referenced in 1 Corinthians 11:2 – 16.<sup>3</sup>

It begins here: 'Christ is the head of every 'aner' (meaning 'man,' which might be inclusive of women, or meaning 'husband,' depending on the context), and the 'aner' (husband?) is the head of a 'gyne' (woman or wife), and God is the head of Christ.' (1 Cor.11:3)

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, edited by I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), p.816 – 820: Brown-Driver-Briggs divide the uses of *kephale* in Greek literature into eight categories: (1) head of humans or of animals; (2) top (e.g. of rocks, towers, pillars, ladders); (3) chief as in chief man, city, nation, or priest, or head of family; (4) front place (e.g. taken by the leader but also used of priority in time); (5) best; (6) of an army company; (7) sum or total; (8) other residual nuances. Liddell-Scott-Jones, in studying classical Greek uses, adds that head can function as a synecdoche for the whole person. Judith Gundry-Volf, 'Gender and Creation in 1 Cor.11:2 – 16: A Study in Paul's Theological Method,' in J. Adna, S.J. Hafemann, and O. Hofius (editors), *Evangelium, Schriftauslegung, Kirche. Festschrift für Peter Stuhlmacher* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 1997), p.151 – 171, argues that neither hierarchical nor egalitarian interpretations adequately explain what Paul's concern was theologically. She argues that Paul was sensitive to cultural dynamics of honor and shame while operating within a dialectic between the creation order (with gender distinctions) and the redemptive order (with a new mutuality and reciprocity). Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, edited by Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), p.502 – 503, note 44, observes that the Septuagint translators used *kephale* when the physical head (*rosh*) was intended in Hebrew, but almost never when *ruler* was intended. The only 6 cases where *rosh* = *kephale* = leader/chief are Jdg.11:11; 2 Sam.22:44; Ps.18:43; Isa.7:8, 9; and Lam.1:5. Of those exceptions, Fee agrees with Murphy-O'Connor that the 'exception[s] (even Homer nods!) do not change the picture.'

<sup>2</sup> See especially the excellent work by C. Kavin Rowe, *One True Life: The Stoics and Early Christians as Rival Traditions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), ch.8 – 9 on how semantic similarities do not lead anywhere near conceptual agreement

<sup>3</sup> My fairly extensive treatment of 1 Corinthians 11:2 – 16 can be found here: [http://newhumanityinstitute.org/pdfs/paul\\_1corinthians.11.02-16.sg.pdf](http://newhumanityinstitute.org/pdfs/paul_1corinthians.11.02-16.sg.pdf)

What does the term ‘head’ mean here? The significance of the head seems to be as the organ of speech, as shown when God spoke to Moses who spoke to Aaron who spoke to the people: ‘Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and he will be as a mouth for you and you will be as God to him’ (Ex.4:16). In that sense, God was a ‘head’ (speaker of words) to Moses, and Moses was a ‘head’ (speaker of words) to Aaron. So of course in 1 Corinthians 11:3, God the Father is the ‘head’ of Christ, in the sense of being the invisible supplier of words to the visible Son. In Paul’s usage here, ‘head’ as an analogy drawn from the body is based on the pattern by which God spoke things into being (Gen.1), and worked by speaking through men and women who then became ‘prophets’ (Am.3:7). ‘Head’ in the sense of leadership is also drawn from God’s speech-acts through those people. For instance, the ‘heads’ (leaders) of Israel were to speak in various ways to the people: judge, instruct, and prophecy (Mic.3:9 – 11). Those leaders clearly include women like Miriam (Ex.15ff.), Deborah (Jdg.4 – 5), Isaiah’s prophetess wife (Isa.8:3), Huldah (2 Ki.24:14), and Noadiah (Neh.6:14), showing that men did not have a monopoly on leadership in Israel. Would they in the church?

In 1 Cor.11, Paul seems to acknowledge a wider semantic range of meaning for the word ‘head.’ In his usage, ‘head’ refers not only to ‘authority’ of some sort, but also ‘source’ in some way. Women have to listen to men because Eve listened to Adam when he passed on what he had been told to her: ‘For man does not originate from woman but woman from man’ (11:8). He reasons explicitly from the creation order in Genesis 2. But at the same time, men have to listen to women because every man was born from a mother and learned from her: ‘So also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God’ (11:12). That is Paul’s view of the creation order as it was designed to be. His view is affirmed by the equal responsibility to instruct that the book of Proverbs gives to fathers and mothers over their children, right at the start of the book: ‘Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and do not forsake your mother’s teaching’ (Prov.1:8). The book of Proverbs portrays its own content as coming equally from father and mother, carrying through all the way to the end, where we find ‘King Lemuel’s mother’ as the inspired author of the content of Scripture (Prov.31:1). In colloquial terms: You have to respect where you came from.

Paul draws this Hebraic framework around his argument for why both men and women have the authority to ‘pray’ (represent the community to God) and ‘prophecy’ (preach and teach the word of the Lord) in the congregation. In particular, Paul sees this as reason for men to listen to women as they ‘prophecy’ in the congregation (11:5). Speaking to God, and speaking the word of God (‘pray and prophecy’) is to give or offer life to another. It is to transmit life. This issue of giving life by speaking is connected to how God brought things into being ‘by’ His word (Gen.1:1 – 2:3). It is also connected theologically to the Father making all things ‘through’ His Word/Son. That is why Paul links speaking to origination or birth. You came ‘from’ and ‘through’ others.

‘Headship’ therefore indicates Christ sharing his authority to communicate God’s word with ‘man’ as male and female (‘aner’ as inclusive of women), a responsibility which God in creation shared with Adam first and Eve second, but with a view to developing their shared authority in marital oneness. For both had and shared ‘dominion’ from Genesis 1.

The translational ambiguity of ‘aner’ and ‘gyne’ in 1 Corinthians 11 now works in favor of women in church leadership. Paul is surely saying in 11:3b that ‘the husband (aner) is the head of a wife (gyne).’ Note the singular article and pronoun, by which husband-wife is indicated, as it is unwarranted to say that a single unmarried man is the head of ‘a woman’ in 11:3b. A single unmarried man is a head of no one, in principle. Then, it is also very significant that he puts no further qualifications on women praying and prophesying. He simply encourages it.

According to Roman law, a dishonored woman like an ex-prostitute had to wear her hair uncovered and bound by the *mitrae*, a broad band of cloth woven with different colors, which held the hair in place. Juvenal, *Satires*, book 3, satire 6 writes that prostitutes exclusively wore the *mitrae*. She could not wear the *palla*, the long shawl which honorable Roman women wore over their heads in religious ceremonies. Additionally, she could not wear the *stola*, the typical long robe that honorable Roman women wore. She had to wear a male *toga* instead. In other words, a dishonored woman had to look something like a man, by *Roman law*.

Now imagine that an ex-prostitute in Corinth comes to faith in Jesus Christ. After becoming part of the Christian community, she and others discover that among her spiritual gifts are those that make her an effective worship leader and proclaimer of the word of God. When she stands before other Christians in that kind of role, how should she dress? Questions of gender and, just as importantly, honor, come up. The Sinai covenant required men to dress

as men and women to dress as women (Dt.22:5), presumably because much mischief could be sown into a community when people misrepresent themselves or disguise themselves. Perhaps some well-meaning brothers and sisters believe that she should break Roman law and dress as an honorable woman befitting her spiritual status as an adopted daughter of God. Others, perhaps more skeptical and wary of breaking Roman law, want her to simply not serve in those roles, and remain seated and largely silent. This was probably the immediate issue which prompted Paul to write 1 Corinthians 11:2 – 16.

Remarkably, Paul says that hair is sufficient for a woman's 'covering' (11:15), and does not comment directly on clothing at all. We must perceive the chiasmic arrangement of Paul's argument. We as western readers tend to read in a linear fashion. We tend to look for the meaning in a sequential fashion, as if the beginning determines the meaning for the rest. But the chiasmic structure means that the center determines the meaning, and then develops the points in the second half of the chiasm. When we follow the chiasmic structure, we find that the points leading up to the center are developed and amplified on the other side of the center. And if you find yourself puzzled by Paul or upset with Paul in the first half of the chiasm, make sure you read the second half of the chiasm, and ask yourself how the second half develops ideas found in the first half.

<sup>11:2</sup> Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.

church practice

<sup>3</sup> But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.

<sup>4</sup> Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head.

men: covered disgraces

<sup>5</sup> But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved.

women: uncovered disgraces

women: shaved head is disgraceful

<sup>6</sup> For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head.

<sup>7</sup> For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.

men: head not covered

<sup>8</sup> For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man;

origin: man not from woman  
woman from man

<sup>9</sup> for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake.

creation  
dependence

<sup>10</sup> Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.

authority of women

<sup>11</sup> However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.

new creation in the Lord  
dependence

<sup>12</sup> For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God.

origin: woman from man  
man birthed from woman

<sup>13</sup> Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?

women: head covered

<sup>14</sup> Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him,

<sup>15</sup> but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her?

men: long hair is dishonor,

women: long hair is glory

women: hair is a covering

For her hair is given to her for a covering.

<sup>16</sup> But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.

church practice

Leading New Testament scholar Gordon Fee, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, suggests that the use of 'head covering' in the beginning and 'hair' at the end of the chiasm makes Paul's original meaning confusing beyond our ability to recover. However, he does not account for the chiastic structure of the section, where the latter points seem to amplify, clarify, or build upon the former points. So 'hair is given to her for a covering' means that it suffices in place of a head-covering like the Roman *palla*. The ex-prostitute does not have to dress like the honorable women in order to appear as a woman. A once dishonored woman can pray and preach before other men and women who, according to their culture, had much more honor than her.

Paul anchors this conviction with the broadest possible language about gender, so it strongly suggests that he intends to be understood broadly. Hence, can a wife exercise speaking and preaching authority when her husband is sitting in the congregation? Yes. Can a daughter do so with her father? Yes. And that is a *very* underappreciated point, for any culture, especially traditional ones. There is no conflict of authority or conflict of interest for a woman to speak the word of God authoritatively. There is no violation of some supposed hierarchy of power, or even cultural decorum. In fact, Paul says, when I listen to any woman praying or preaching (prophesying) in front of the congregation, I am to think of *my mother*, even if this particular woman *is not my mother*, because I came from a *female* (11:11 – 12). That mental discipline surely helps me stop undressing any woman lustfully in my mind!

And it is not a violation of the creation order of Genesis. Rather, this mutuality flows *from* Genesis, in Paul's referencing of Genesis in 1 Cor.11:8 – 9 and 11 – 12. It is suggestive of what human community would have been like in God's presence if the fall had never happened. Paul's creation theology and his reading of Genesis are different than the standard complementarian, hierarchical position. When he uses the term 'head,' Paul has in mind a sequence of communication, which must be respected in a confessional sense. After all, God gave a word to Adam to share with Eve. But this sequence of communication does not take the form of an ongoing hierarchy of power. Rather, it leads to shared authority. For God has authority in His word, and shares it. The human 'head' *per se* does not have authority over all things, like whether to eat this tomato or that pomegranate (in the Garden), or where to buy groceries (today), but in the specific stewarding of God's word – its faithful transmission and reproduction. There was a specific *content* in the word God gave to human beings. And there was a chronological sequence of communication which we confess as a matter of salvation history, to be sure, but that is different from a present hierarchy of power.

This corroborates Paul's usage of 'head-body' language in Ephesians. In Ephesians 1:22 – 23, Paul says that God made Christ the head over *all things in creation so as to share his positional authority with the church*: 'And He put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all.' In the immediate context, that would include especially the rulers and authorities (Eph.1:21) both in heaven (Eph.3:10; 6:10 – 20) and probably also on earth, as he refers to earthly rulers elsewhere using the same term, 'rulers' of this age (1 Cor.2:6 – 8). The relationship of head and body for Christ and the church is repeated in Col.1:18. Christ as head over all rule and authority is also repeated in Col.2:10, but once again the relationship of head-to-body is not developed in regards to the rulers and authorities. But it is interesting that the use of 'head' here in Ephesians 1:22 – 23 is used for authority, but Jesus' authority is, in this passage, being shared *with* the church, his body.

In Ephesians 4:15 – 16, Paul uses the head-body analogy in a slightly different way: '...but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the *head*, even Christ, from whom the whole *body*, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.' It must be noted that the sense of 'head' as 'source' is present in Colossians 2:19, where Paul says, '...the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.' But whereas in Colossians, the body clearly grows *from* the head ('from whom the entire body'), in Ephesians, the body grows *up into* the head. The emphasis here falls on the idea of Christ sharing himself in such a way that believers are 'filling' his body in the sense of the realm in which he is and of which he characterizes.

In Ephesians 5:22 – 33, Paul uses the head-body analogy to pattern the husband-wife relationship to the Christ-church relationship. What matters in how we read the 'head-body' language is not all the possible meanings we could pack into it, but the *specific* meaning and application that Paul draws out of it. Remember: 'I'm mad about my flat.'

The ideas suggested in the diagram, that a husband's role is to financially 'provide for his family,' while the wife's role is to 'raise godly children,' comes from western culture after the Industrial Revolution. In most other cultures, including the cultures spanning the writing of the Scriptures, husbands and wives both worked in the fields together. That's why Ruth and Boaz met in the field, working. That's why the celebrated woman of Proverbs 31 is a savvy businesswoman who is able to handle all the economic and logistical affairs of the house and the field. And in many other cultures, raising children is also shared. Paul told Ephesian 'fathers' about parenting and personally instructing children in godliness (Eph.6:1 – 4). I take Paul's Greek to be the inclusive male pronoun, and thus 'mothers' are included in 'fathers.' But Paul certainly does not tell Ephesian 'fathers' to delegate their instructional

role of parenting to ‘mothers.’ Nor does Paul single out ‘mothers’ as being responsible for instructing children. That kind of division of labor is a cultural product of western industrialism, and may have been characteristic of suburban America in the 1950’s, the time when Billy Graham founded *Christianity Today*, before the ‘radical’ 1960’s which many white evangelicals deplore. But it did not exist in the minds of the biblical writers.

In fact, in his context, Paul is *limiting* the scope of the husband’s ‘headship’ from household to wife, in addition to redefining ‘head’ altogether. The U.S. federal tax form asks us to fill out who is the ‘head of the household,’ expecting two-parent households to mark the father. But as a husband, I am the head in a head-body union with my wife. I do not share a ‘head-body’ relation with my children. The U.S. tax form has redefined the word ‘head’ to mean something different than what it means in biblical usage. It is actually reaching back to the pagan Roman usage, something Paul rejected. For in pagan Roman culture, the Roman father ruled his entire household: wife, children, and servants. If he had wanted to be culturally agreeable, Paul might have deployed the word ‘head’ for the father over everyone else in his household in a pagan sense. But Paul does not do that at all. He does not accept the Roman legal concept of ‘*patria potestas*,’ the absolute authority of the father.

Rather, Paul positions Christ differently in each of the three relationships in Ephesians 5:22 – 6:9. The head-body analogy is notably absent from the parent-child relationship (Eph.6:1 – 4), because there comes a time for children to *honor* their parents but *obey* the Lord, and see themselves as too fundamentally distinct from their parents. Parents also need to parent with that end game in mind. The head-body analogy is also absent from the master-slave relationship (Eph.6:5 – 9). For a master to unilaterally ‘do the same’ things that Paul had instructed servants to do to masters, and additionally to ‘give up threatening’ (6:9) means that Paul is dismantling the dynamic of power because Christ is above both parties. So Christ is *within* marriage. Christ is the *end goal* of parenting. And Christ is *above* all other relationships. Thus, the husband-wife relationship is set apart from other types of relationships because of the way Paul is using the ‘head-body’ image.

So, I would argue that American culture, to the extent that it is reflected in the U.S. tax code, misinterprets Paul’s use of the ‘head-body’ language. To Paul, there is no such thing as a ‘head of household’ in that sense. And the diagram posted above reflects that misinterpretation. It actually reflects first century pagan Roman culture – a view that Paul rejected.

So what does Paul mean by applying the head-body language to husband-wife? As in 1 Corinthians 11:2 – 16, which has the most extensive discussion of ‘headship,’ the primary emphasis falls on speech and shared authority. The three relationships described in Ephesians 5:22 – 6:9 involve relations of power where the person in power is limited precisely in his ability to abuse his speech. (1) The husband (5:25 – 33) is not to accuse his wife, thereby separating himself emotionally from her in violation of the head-body unity of marriage; but he is reminded that Jesus washes his bride with his word. That is, Jesus speaks to the church not to condemn her, but to express his unity with her in love and build her up. (2) The father (6:4) is not to exasperate, anger, or embitter his children but to teach them patiently. (3) The master (6:9) is to ‘do the same’ as the slave in what the slave was commanded (!), i.e. respect, fear, serve with sincerity, and additionally, ‘to give up threatening.’ One can imagine that any power relationship, not just these three, would follow this pattern. In my case, I am not only a husband and father, but also a landlord, a supervisor, and one day I will be a caretaker of elderly parents. This Ephesians passage is helpful because it assumes that power is a fundamental reality in human relations. Yet in every case, power is subverted for a distinctly Christian purpose, especially but not exclusively regarding how we speak. This is what leads the Christian community into being a community where songs of praise and a symphony of thanksgiving break forth from everyone, the vision of the church that Paul gives in Eph.5:18 – 20 right before talking about these three relationships where power is involved. The church is to be a singing symphony where we all have a part. To be ‘filled by the Spirit’ as Paul says is to be a community where all speak, not just the powerful.

A woman’s responsibility as wife is phrased as follows: ‘But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything’ (Eph.5:24). This comparison is often understood in an ‘idealist’ sense, as if Paul should be understood as saying, ‘As the church is ideally subject to Christ, regardless of whether the church is in actuality, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands.’ But the only way to reconcile and integrate this thought with the rest of Ephesians as well as 1 Corinthians 6 – 7 is to interpret it in an ‘actualist’ sense. Paul should be understood as saying, ‘As the church there is *actually* subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands.’ That is, to the extent that husbands actually follow Christ, so wives ought to follow their husbands. Only the actualist interpretation would provide a woman no conflict of authorities to submit to Jesus’ lordship as a



wife to her husband. A husband needs to actually be committed to evangelistic mission, hospitality, giving, reconciliation, discipling others, etc. for a wife to not experience a conflict of authorities.

The argument from the whole text of Ephesians supports my view. Paul's previous material in Eph.4:1 – 5:21 strongly suggests that believers need to follow that material first. It concerns Christians developing and using spiritual gifts (4:1 – 16), developing relationship and reconciliation especially between Jew and Gentile (4:17 – 5:6), being available for mission and mobility (5:7 – 14) and being available to disciple and mentor others (4:11, 14 – 16; 5:15 – 21) – all this before we consider Eph.5:22 – 6:9. And that is highly relevant. Those global responsibilities, given by Christ to each of his people, limit and constrain what husbands, fathers, and masters can ask of their wives, children, and servants. Those in power cannot interfere with the responsibilities that are common to all, in Christ. It's all about how we sequence responsibilities.

Practically speaking, if my wife and I disagree about where to buy our groceries and what to eat, and there are no moral issues in play (financial stewardship, etc.), then our text in Ephesians 5 does not necessarily give us an answer about what to do. If anything, given Paul's command to husbands to sacrifice personally, probably I have more responsibility to yield to my wife and encourage her in what brings her joy.

As in 1 Corinthians 7, Christ's lordship over each person comes first, in principle. And that is why, in 1 Corinthians, slavery and even Christian marriage are placed in check. Paul said this in a context where Roman law gave stiff tax penalties to those couples who did not have three or more children, because imperial policy aimed to keep up the stream of Roman boys to keep the Roman army strong. It is notable that Paul does not encourage Christian couples to have children in 1 Corinthians 7. He does not explicitly discourage them either, although when he says that he 'wants to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord' (7:35) by calling Christian married people to give more energy to ministry outside their marriages, he can be reasonably interpreted to mean that. In any case, Paul is able to uphold the sanctity of marriage and married sex without reference to children. This again challenges the diagram above.

A wife is still called to obey Jesus even when her husband does not. And thinking through the negative reverse case helps us understand the positive case. Paul considers spouses with different faith commitments in 1 Corinthians 7.10 – 16. For example, if a Christian wife wants to disciple her children to know Jesus while her husband does not – if he is an unbeliever or a 'pseudo-Christian' – then she is instructed by Paul to do so anyway: She is to sanctify them (1 Cor.7:14). For Jesus commanded us to cherish and teach children (Mt.18:1 – 18), even if, in that passage, he was speaking of children as a figure of speech for new Christians. His assumption is that parents cherish and teach their biological children. If the Sinai covenant called for instructing Israelite children (Dt.4:11; 31:11), how much more so the new covenant? A woman's duty as a Christian parent is to raise her children to know Jesus, regardless of whether her husband agrees. And if he chooses to leave, she is to let him (1 Cor.7:15).

Here is another example of different faith commitments: If a husband physically abuses his wife, the wife is to immediately report him to the church authorities. She is to start the intervention process of Matthew 18:15 – 20, because he is in sin, and if the church leaders fail to intervene on her behalf and for her safety, then they are also in sin and not actually being subject to Christ. For in the Sinai covenant, bodily harm, especially towards a vulnerable party, was a serious offense (Exodus 21:15 – 27). The case law includes the following: If a presumably grown child inflicted any kind of bodily harm at all upon his parents (regardless of whether the harm was permanent or not), then he was to be punished by death (Exodus 21:15). If a male neighbor accidentally – in a brawl with a neighbor – struck his neighbor's pregnant wife in such a way that there was no injury, the husband could still request his neighbor to pay a fine, presumably for mental and emotional hardship; and if there was injury, the husband could request payment up to the limit of proportionality (Exodus 21:22 – 26). If a master inflicted any kind of permanent bodily harm upon a slave/indentured servant, then that servant went free (Exodus 21:26). If this is the kind of stance the Sinai covenant took towards bodily harm, how much more must we in the new covenant take it seriously and protect a vulnerable wife? If a servant could go totally free if his master inflicted any minor but permanent bodily harm, it is likely that physical abuse gains the wife the right to divorce. I for one believe it does. Certainly if church leaders intervene according to Matthew 18:15 – 20 and the husband is still unable to stop his abusive behavior, those church leaders ought to be consider him to be a functional unbeliever.

Hence, no diagram should depict a woman's vocation, if she is a wife, as completely subsumed under her husband, even in a good, healthy marriage, and especially not in a bad one. Her full vocation as a daughter of God, gifted by

the Spirit to be part of the church and Christian mission, is not to be subsumed into her role as a wife. To the extent that we can draw diagrams (which I'm not convinced of), we should probably draw the Jesus umbrella up on top, then draw the man's umbrella and the woman's umbrella on equal levels next to each other, with partial overlap reflecting their shared married life together. The partial overlap of marriage can be described by a 'head-body' relationship to the extent that the husband in actuality lives faithfully as Christ does.

*Sequencing* these letters of Paul is important, because it yields different exegetical results than if we consider Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Peter alone, independently, or 'prior' to 1 Corinthians. The Christians of Asia Minor (Ephesus, Colosse, and the recipients of 1 Peter) had an awareness of Christian teaching prior to receiving those letters. What was that awareness? Can we consider 1 Corinthians to be that content of their awareness? There is good reason to do so. If Paul trusted that the Ephesians and Colossians had prior knowledge of teaching on what the 'head' signified – where that teaching was more or less the content of 1 Corinthians 11:2 – 16 – then we should allow Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 11:2 – 16 to set the context for what 'headship' means when we read Ephesians and Colossians today. And Paul says that men and women prophesying in an embodied 'headship' in front of the congregation was standard Christian practice in worship settings, throughout the early church: 'Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you... But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.' (1 Cor.11:2, 16) So this practice came from Jesus and the apostles. 'Headship' referred to the one who spoke God's word with God's authority, in such a way which embraced and included the receiving listener, empowering the listener to speak that very same content with that very same authority, even to the one who shared it. That is the *presumption* Paul makes when he writes Ephesians and Colossians.

Methodologically, we have to do an exegesis of Paul *as a person* while we simultaneously do exegesis on his writings. Paul even told the Colossians to expect his letter to the Ephesians in Col.4:16 (although there he identifies it as coming from the Laodiceans, since what we call 'Ephesians' was probably an open letter meant to circulate widely, as 'Ephesians' had no addressee in its oldest manuscripts and did not refer to any specific local church problems). So: Just as we have to treat Ephesians and Colossians simultaneously (at least), and perhaps Ephesians as exegetically 'prior' to Colossians in the 'household code' section, so also we have to treat 1 Corinthians simultaneously (at least), certainly chronologically prior, and even exegetically prior.

Stephen B. Clark in *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Servant Books, 1980) gives an interesting discussion of the matter. After examining various views he concludes, 'The husband-wife relationship in marriage is the paradigm for the man-woman relationship. Hence the central focus of the passage is husbands and wives. Yet other women and other men follow the same patterns because their identity as women and men is more fundamental than their unmarried state. A man is the image and glory of God and has Christ as his head even if he is unmarried. Since God created him as a male, he must assume a role that expresses this fact. This role finds its fullest expression in marriage, but is also expressed if he is unmarried through his responsibility in the community. The same is true of a woman. She assumes a role as a woman that finds its fullest expression in marriage, but it is also expressed if she is unmarried through her relationships and responsibilities in the community.' Another view is that 'the references to 'the man' refer to whichever man was responsible for the woman. This answer is based upon the social structure of the time, in which there seem to have been no unattached women. All women were under a man's authority: their husbands', or their fathers', or that of the next responsible male family member. Celibate women and widows were either still part of their families (and hence under their fathers or the next responsible male family members) or possibly under the bishop or other representative of the community. The early church, according to patristic evidence, had an order of widows and an order of virgins but no corresponding order of widowers or of male celibates. This unique approach to female celibates occurred in part because the family's authority over the woman had to be replaced by a formal transfer to the community's authority. In addition, unmarried women and widows wore veils among the Jews, even though the veil had some marital significance.'<sup>4</sup>

My disagreement with Clark is that he reverses Paul's pastoral priorities in 1 Corinthians. Paul stresses and encourages *singleness*, not marriage (1 Cor.7). So how can the husband-wife relationship serve as the central focus? Clark is simply wrong here. By comparison, I believe the central focus is the context of worship. Marriage then takes its meaning, including its limits, from the worship service. The terms 'aner' and 'gyne,' therefore, are meant

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Marlowe, 'The Woman's Headcovering'; <http://www.bible-researcher.com/headcoverings.html>, note 4

to be read in exactly the opposite sense from Clark. ‘Aner’ when occurring alone is the inclusive male pronoun, denoting men and women being in the image of God. ‘Aner’ and ‘gyne’ when occurring together refers to ‘husband and wife’ in particular.

According to Paul in 1 Corinthians 11, v.2 and v.16, there was a certain kind of liturgical practice *in every church* where men and women were authorized to ‘pray and prophesy.’ I can only assume, if this happened *in every church*, that *Jesus himself* established this practice and so mandated the apostles. This fits with much of the Hebrew Scriptures, especially Joel 2:28 – 29 about the eschatological Spirit anointing men and women to prophesy, and Simon Peter’s quotation of Joel at Pentecost (Acts 2).

More interestingly, Jesus appears to have established this worship practice which served as a hermeneutical control on the meaning of the word ‘head.’ So Paul’s usage of the word ‘head’ in 1 Corinthians 11:2 – 16 carries the meaning of both ‘authority’ and ‘source’ but *in a particular way with regards to both meanings*. Note that the deployment of a physical body part (‘head’) as a touchpoint from which to understand a concept (‘head’ in terms of praying and prophesying) is a more Hebraic way of reasoning. It is not, to my knowledge, a Platonic or Stoic way of anchoring a concept or disseminating information. This again attests to its origin with Jesus as a Jewish theologian. So if your church community does not have women ‘praying and prophesying,’ i.e. helping to lead worship and preaching, it is in danger of presenting a false view of authority, and a false view of marriage as well. It is in danger of giving the impression that divine authority inheres in one’s gender. Rather, my argument says that divine authority inheres in its own content as the word of God, and as it is suffused by the Spirit.

Was this interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:2 – 16 ever practiced? Or was it merely a clever textual interpretation that is grammatically possible, perhaps, but was never understood this way? Here is the evidence from church history that women preaching was accepted, sometimes specifically referencing 1 Corinthians:

1. 1<sup>st</sup> century, Rome: T.F. Torrance wrote an article in 1992 called ‘The Ministry of Women’ in which he highlights an amazing mural drawn in one of the earliest Roman catacombs in the Capella Greca, within a century after the death and resurrection of Jesus. In the mural, seven elders are seated around a table breaking bread and celebrating communion. This is called ‘The Catacomb of Priscilla’ because Priscilla is one of the seven elders seated next to the presiding elder, presumably her husband Aquila. The institution of the seven Christian elders is copied from the institution of seven Jewish elders that led smaller Jewish synagogue communities throughout the Jewish Diaspora, including in the city of Rome. This is impressive for various reasons, but it strongly suggests that Priscilla was an elder in the Christian community at Rome, who presided at the Lord’s Supper and taught the congregation as an elder.<sup>5</sup>
2. 2<sup>nd</sup> century: Irenaeus (130 – 202 AD), a disciple of Polycarp of Smyrna, and the second bishop of Lyons from 177 – 202 AD, writes in a fragment that Eve was *stronger* than Adam. This is suggestive that the early Christians read Genesis without a preconception of Eve’s inferiority or subordination to Adam, and effective silence before him. It is also important to note that Irenaeus was a strong biblical theologian, and made a strong effort to stay close to the Judaic roots of Christian faith in the practice of observing Easter according to the Jewish calendar and not the Roman:

‘Why also did it not prefer to make its attack upon the man instead of the woman? And if thou sayest that it attacked her as being the weaker of the two, [I reply that], on the contrary, she was the stronger, since she appears to have been the helper of the man in the transgression of the commandment. For she did by herself alone resist the serpent, and it was after holding out for a while and making opposition that she ate of the tree, being circumvented by craft; whereas Adam, making no fight whatever, nor refusal, partook of the fruit handed to him by the woman, which is an indication of the utmost imbecility and effeminacy of mind. And the woman indeed, having been vanquished in the contest by a demon, is deserving of pardon; but Adam shall deserve none, for he was worsted by a woman,--he who, in his own person, had received the command from God. But the woman, having heard of the command from Adam, treated it with contempt, either because she deemed it unworthy of God to speak by means of it, or because she had her doubts, perhaps even held the opinion that the command was given to her by Adam of his own accord. The serpent found her working alone, so that he was enabled to confer with her apart. Observing her then either eating

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<sup>5</sup> T.F. Torrance, ‘The Ministry of Women,’ *Touchstone*, Fall 1992, p.5

or not eating from the trees, he put before her the fruit of the [forbidden] tree. And if he saw her eating, it is manifest that she was partaker of a body subject to corruption.’<sup>6</sup>

Out of all the patristic theologians, Irenaeus had the highest view of women as women in terms of being made in the image of God. In the *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, dated circa 195 AD, meant to summarize Christian teaching for new converts, Irenaeus writes:

‘But man He formed with His own hands [i.e. the Word and the Spirit as the ‘hands of God’], taking from the earth that which was purest and finest, and mingling in measure His own power with the earth. For He traced His own form on the formation, that that which should be seen should be of divine form: for (as) the image of God was man formed and set on the earth. And that he might become living, He breathed on his face the breath of life; that both for the breath and for the formation man should be like unto God. Moreover he was free and self-controlled, being made by God for this end, that he might rule all those things that were upon the earth. And this great created world, prepared by God before the formation of man, was given to man as his place, containing all things within itself.’<sup>7</sup>

Irenaeus does not elevate the interiority of human rationality to be ‘the image of God’ as would Augustine and others. Those later theologians compared the individual’s psychological thought process (mind, knowledge, and will) to the Trinity in what is now known as the ‘psychological model’ of the Trinity. Instead, Irenaeus celebrates the physical form of humanity as somehow mirroring the divine form, although he does not explain this. In fact, I rather suspect that Irenaeus was thinking of the Hebraic, physical understanding of the oneness of male and female in marriage as being in the image of God, since it is that oneness which is life-bearing and life-giving, as reflected in the grammar of Genesis 1:27 and also the literary concern of Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 where God makes all living beings to be life-bearing ‘after its kind.’ Irenaeus seems to be thinking this way, because he happily commingles phrases from Genesis 2 (‘from the earth’; ‘breathed on his face’) and Genesis 1 (‘image of God’; ‘be like unto God’; ‘rule all those things that were upon the earth’) in his explanation of human creation in the *Demonstration*. Hence, I think Irenaeus had a relational (in fact, marital) and physical understanding for what it meant for human beings to be in ‘the image of God.’ To the extent that he set about to answer the question of how an individual human being – and not just a married couple – was in ‘the image of God,’ Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* appealed to the relational identity of the Word-Son as the image of God. Each human being was meant to be in relation to God by the Spirit, in some sense mirroring an internal relation of the Son to the Father in the Spirit. Irenaeus’ theological anthropology was relational to its core.<sup>8</sup> For Irenaeus, there was no individualistic notion of human personhood. This sets Irenaeus up to explain the fall in terms of damaged relationship, and the atonement in terms of restored relationship.

Irenaeus criticized the Gnostic heretic Valentinus, for apparently using the word *kalumma* (veil) in 1 Corinthians 11:10, instead of *exousian* (power), to veil women in the worship service.<sup>9</sup> Irenaeus is to be esteemed as an earlier witness to a reading of Paul consistent with Jesus, as Jesus, in the presence of other men, received the provocative and typically bedroom gesture of women who let down their hair for him (Lk.7:36 – 50; Jn.12:1 – 8), and made lust entirely a problem in the eye of the (typically male) beholder, not the body of the beheld (Mt.5:27 – 30). Irenaeus would have anchored the Christian church more firmly upon its Hebraic roots, when Christian mission to the Gentiles encountered other patriarchal cultures, and also cultures where people went without much clothing.

3. 2<sup>nd</sup> century: Another popular document called *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* is significant for our purposes here. In this story, Thecla was a Christian woman who was gifted in teaching and purportedly accompanied Paul in some of his travels. In the story, Paul tells Thecla:

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<sup>6</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, *Fragment 14*

<sup>7</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching 11*

<sup>8</sup> For an excellent discussion of Irenaeus’ theological anthropology, see Matthew Craig Steenberg, *Of God and Man: Theology as Anthropology from Irenaeus to Athanasius* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2009), ch.1.

<sup>9</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies 1.8.2*

‘Go and teach the word of the Lord... [so] she went to Seleucia and enlightened many in the knowledge of Christ...certain gentlewomen heard of the virgin Thecla and went to her to be instructed in the oracles of God.’<sup>10</sup>

The book was widely circulated before 190 AD and read in an approved manner in the first few centuries. Moreover, around 200 AD, in his treatise on baptism, Tertullian of Carthage says that ‘the example of Thecla’ is used by those who ‘defend the liberty of women to teach and to baptize.’<sup>11</sup> He opposed women baptizing. Moreover, notably, he also wanted to *change* church practice in the more ‘conservative’ direction to institute veils for *all* post-pubescent women in the worship service.<sup>12</sup> Tertullian is valuable here as a hostile witness to women in positions of formal leadership, although, intriguingly, he wanted to modify the practice of women prophesying in the worship service in Carthage (all women veiled)! While we can be relatively certain that some of the content of *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* has been exaggerated, for our purposes here, what matters is that the early Christians cherished a document that featured a woman teaching prominently.

4. Late 2<sup>nd</sup> century: The Montanist ‘New Prophecy’ movement, which started in the mid 2<sup>nd</sup> century, was led by three individuals who practiced ecstatic and prophetic inspiration from the Holy Spirit: Montanus (male), Prisca/Priscilla (female), and Maximilla (female). It started in Phrygia, in Asia Minor, but spread throughout the church in the Mediterranean world. Even today we are not sure exactly what they believed. According to Epiphanius of Salamis (c.320 – 403 AD), *Against Heresies* 49.2.5, they ordained female bishops and presbyters. The Montanist movement provides us with evidence that early Christians accepted female prophets and leaders because of how long it took non-Montanist Christians to label Montanism a heresy, and the uneven reaction to it.<sup>13</sup> *If having female leaders was so obviously against church practice and teaching, would the Montanists not have been counteracted immediately on that basis?* Modern Anglican theologian Sarah Coakley also argues that Montanism is what caused a church-wide movement to gradually displace women from positions of leadership and authority.
5. 3<sup>rd</sup> century: Opponents of Christianity said the Christians were ‘led by women.’<sup>14</sup>
6. 4<sup>th</sup> century: Gregory of Nyssa writes a biography, *Life of Macrina*, about his sister, Macrina the Younger, who was his mentor, a theologian, and founder and co-leader (with a man) of a monastic community where slaves and free people were equals. Gregory also wrote *On the Soul and Resurrection* as a series of dialogues with his sister as she taught him Christian doctrine. Macrina the Younger was the granddaughter of another famous Christian woman, the philosopher Macrina the Elder.
7. 4<sup>th</sup> century: Melania the Elder (325 – 410 AD), a wealthy widow, leaves her young son in Rome with family members to start a dual (male and female) monastic community on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem in 375 AD. She is honored for it in Christian literature (!). She is called a ‘Desert Mother,’ and became friends and colleagues with Jerome, Augustine, Paulinus of Nola, and Evagrius of Pontus.
8. 4<sup>th</sup> century: The Council of Laodicea, a group of about 30 bishops, gathers in Asia Minor. They meet sometime between 360 and 364 AD, perhaps on multiple occasions. Among the matters they discuss is the role of women in church leadership. They agree to prohibit women to be ordained, or to approach the altar during the Eucharist celebration. While they might have heretical movements in mind, they seem to be seeking to adjust longstanding community practices to the organizational hierarchy that the church has developed.
  - a. The final version of Canon 11 states that ‘those who are called presbyteresses or presidentesses should not be ordained in the church.’ The older version of Canon 11 states, ‘Widows called presidentesses shall not be appointed in the churches.’ At the very least, this attests to the church community practice of having some designation to women with leadership roles – perhaps older women who mentored younger women – which was to continue, but without the official designation of being ‘ordained’ as the priests and bishops were, who were by then, male.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 10; for more information on the popularity of Thecla, see Stephen J. Davis, *The Cult of Saint Thecla: A Tradition of Women’s Piety in Late Antiquity* (2001)

<sup>11</sup> Tertullian of Carthage, *On Baptism* 17

<sup>12</sup> Tertullian, *On the Veiling of Virgins*

<sup>13</sup> See William Tabbernee, *Montanist Inscriptions and Testimonia: Epigraphic Sources Illustrating the History of Montanism*, Patristic Monograph Series (16) (Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2009); much cited by Wikipedia, ‘Montanism’: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montanism>

<sup>14</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Contra Celsum* 3.55; cf. Margaret Y. MacDonald, ‘Was Celsus Right? The Role of Women in Early Christianity’, edited by David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek, *Early Christian Families in Context*, p.157 – 158

<sup>15</sup> The editors of the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ‘Notes on Canon 11 of the Council of Laodicea,’ in NPNF II, 14:130, argue for a more restrictive meaning: Women had never been allowed to serve the eucharist at the altar, but were only deaconesses appointed for certain tasks; and even then, ‘superior deaconesses who were the overseers (προκαθήμεναι) of the other deaconesses; and the further words of the text may then

- b. Canon 45 ruled ‘women should not approach the altar.’
9. 4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> century: John Chrysostom (c.349 – 407 AD), priest in Antioch from 386 – 397 and archbishop of Constantinople from 397 – 407, named one of the three holy hierarchs of the Eastern church, believed that there used to be women prophets. It is true that Chrysostom believed that leadership of congregations were to be entrusted to the best of men, while women could do various functions under that structure of authority.<sup>16</sup> However, note that John Chrysostom’s exegetical position on Genesis and 1 Corinthians 11 is challenging for complementarians who want to read ‘authority’ into Adam’s relationship with Eve prior to the fall:

‘Their women used both to pray and prophesy unveiled and with their head bare, *for then women also used to prophesy*, but the men went so far as to wear long hair as having spent their time in philosophy... You see that some obeyed, whom he praises; and others disobeyed, whom he corrects by what comes afterwards (11.2.2).’ [Then he adds some very intriguing commentary on the Genesis narrative, which he does not attempt to completely reconcile with his observation that women used to prophesy:] ‘For with us indeed the woman is reasonably subjected to the man: since equality of honor causes contention. And not for this cause only, but by reason also of the deceit which happened in the beginning. Wherefore you see, she was *not* subjected as soon as she was made; nor, when He brought her to the man, *did either she hear any such thing from God, nor did the man say any such word to her*: he said indeed that she was bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh: [Genesis 2:23] but of rule or subjection he nowhere made mention unto her. But when she made an ill use of her privilege and she who had been made a helper was found to be an ensnarer and ruined all, then she is justly told for the future, your turning shall be to your husband. [Genesis 3:16].’<sup>17</sup>

This would make Chrysostom’s argument for male leadership in the church reflective of a final leadership, but not an exclusive leadership. It also shows that Chrysostom cannot bring all his exegetical observations into a consistent framework. He believes that women prophesied in the earliest, apostolic church, yet has no explanation for why that practice appears to have stopped. He believes that the order of creation in Genesis does not support the principle of male authority simply because Adam was created first, yet seems to rely on the fall as his explanation for why male authority exists, without explaining simultaneously why Christ would maintain a social order that comes from the fall.

10. But in his commentary on First Corinthians, Origen of Alexandria (185 – 254 AD) argues that various women who are said to have prophesied in Scripture did it in other than a public Christian worship assembly, perhaps afterwards, or outside of one:

‘If the daughters of Philip prophesied, at least they did not speak in the assemblies; for we do not find this fact in evidence in the Acts of the Apostles. Much less in the Old Testament. It is said that Deborah was a prophetess ... There is no evidence that Deborah delivered speeches to the people, as did Jeremiah and Isaiah. Huldah, who was a prophetess, did not speak to the people, but only to a man, who consulted her at home. The gospel itself mentions a prophetess Anna ... but she did not speak publicly. Even if it is granted to a woman to show the sign of prophecy, she is nevertheless not permitted to speak in an assembly. When Miriam the prophetess spoke, she was leading a choir of women ... For [as Paul declares] ‘I do not permit a woman to teach,’ and even less ‘to tell a man what to do.’’<sup>18</sup>

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probably mean that in future no more such superior deaconesses or eldresses were to be appointed, probably because they had often outstepped their authority.’ Their opinion is difficult to justify, however, rooted as it is in one citation of Epiphanius of Salamis, who exhibits his own guess about the difference in meaning between ‘presbytides’ and ‘presbyteresses.’ Epiphanius, speaking against the Collyridians (Against Heresies, lxxix. 4) says that “women had never been allowed to offer sacrifice, as the Collyridians presumed to do, but were only allowed to minister. Therefore there were only deaconesses in the Church, and even if the oldest among them were called ‘presbytides,’ this term must be clearly distinguished from presbyteresses. The latter would mean priestesses (ἐπίσσως), but ‘presbytides’ only designated their age, as seniors.” It should be evident that Epiphanius speaks as one who is trying to interpret words in such a way as to fit those words into a framework of meaning he approves of, but he is not a witness to historical practices. That by itself is telling. How the editors of NPNF go further to find indication that ‘no more superior deaconesses should be appointed’ is based on even more speculative logic.

<sup>16</sup> John Chrysostom, *Treatise Concerning the Christian Priesthood*, book 2, chapter 2

<sup>17</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, Homily 26 on 11:2 – 16 here admits, intriguingly, that women did prophesy at one time but does not offer an explanation as to why that practice changed.

<sup>18</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Fragmenta ex commentariis in epistulam i ad Corinthios (in catenis)*, Greek text published in Claude Jenkins, ‘Documents: Origen on I Corinthians. IV,’ *Journal of Theological Studies* 10 (1909), p. 41. English translation from Roger Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1976), p.28

Origen's interpretation has some fatal flaws: (1) worship 'assemblies' were the context Paul was talking about in 1 Cor.11:2 – 14:40; (2) the use of Miriam as an example from Exodus 15 actually serves to illustrate women speaking in a worship assembly; (3) the fact that Deborah's song is now memorialized in Judges 5 means that the author encouraged it to be recited in worship assemblies, recalling Deborah's voice; (4) Huldah was identified as a 'prophetess' in Scripture and known as such before she was consulted (2 Kings 22:14 – 20); Origen misreports that she spoke to 'a man' (there were actually five men), and disguises their official roles in leadership as representatives of King Josiah, who was no ordinary man; Origen supposes that they spoke 'at home' even though that detail is not provided by 2 Kings, as it is more likely they asked Huldah to appear in some official space; Origen conveniently neglects to mention that the substance of their conversation was how to interpret Scripture ('the book of the law'), and probably the status of the covenant itself; Origen also neglects to mention that King Josiah accepted Huldah's interpretation and leads the nation in repentance; (5) Origen simply quotes 1 Timothy 2 without exploring textual difficulties and contextual questions, then conditions all else around it.

11. How would I explain the difference in opinion between Origen and John Chrysostom?

- a. Origen preceded John Chrysostom by ~150 years. One would expect the earlier source, Origen, to be more accurate than the later one, John Chrysostom. However, location matters. Antioch and Constantinople had stronger Christian traditions of historical-grammatical exegesis as opposed to the Alexandrian tradition in Egypt of allegorical interpretation, although these were tendencies and not mutually exclusive emphases.
- b. Both Alexandria and the Asia Minor region had large Jewish communities. But the Alexandrian community showed marked tendencies that they were influenced by the Greek Neo-Platonic philosophy of the day. Two examples:
  - i. The Septuagint (LXX): There was a tendency of the Jewish scholars who translated the Hebrew Bible into the Greek Septuagint translation to feel discomfort with anything which can be considered divine 'emotions' because of the Platonic/Stoic presumption that a change of emotional state meant imperfection.<sup>19</sup> The Torah section of the Septuagint translation, which has many of these anthropomorphic emotion passages attributed to God, dates back to the early third century BCE.
  - ii. Philo Judaeus of Alexandria: This writer produced commentaries on the Hebrew Scriptures using Neo-Platonic philosophy as an interpretive tool. Philo lived c.25 BC – c.50 AD. Origen of Alexandria was very influenced by Philo and this strain of Neo-Platonic thought.
- c. By contrast, in Asia Minor throughout this time, there is evidence of a very strong Jewish community which maintained greater distance from Greek philosophy and Greco-Roman culture than the cosmopolitan intellectualism of Alexandria.
  - i. The following segment (including footnotes) comes from Mitchell Stephen, 'Jews in Asia Minor (Antiquity),' *Encyclopaedia of the Hellenic World, Asia Minor*, 2002; also found here: <http://asiaminor.ewh.gr/Forms/fLemmaBodyExtended.aspx?lemmaID=4150>

'At Apamea the importance of the Jewish community is illustrated by coins of the city, struck between AD 200 and 250, which depicted the story of Noah's ark and the flood.<sup>20</sup> A local Jewish gravestone indicates that the man buried there had adhered to the Law of Moses.<sup>21</sup> Inscriptions from the neighbouring city of Eumeneia refer to the worship of angels, a characteristic of Asia Minor Judaism,<sup>22</sup> and also show close links between the local Christian and Jewish communities during the third century AD. In the mid 4th century a church council held at Laodicea anathematized heretical Christians who followed Jewish ways.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand in Smyrna in AD 250 the Jews of the city at the festival of Purim joined with pagans worshipping Dionysus in attacking and reviling the Christian bishop Pionius, as he

<sup>19</sup> Paul Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.37 – 46

<sup>20</sup> E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175BC – AD 135)*, English edition revised and edited by G. Vermes, F. Millar and M. Goodman vol. III.1 (Edinburgh 1986), p.28 – 30.

<sup>21</sup> Akmonia MAMA VI, 231; Sardis, P.R. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (Cambridge 1991), p.44.

<sup>22</sup> L. Robert, *Hellenica* 11/12 (Paris 1960), p.429 – 435; A.R.R. Sheppard, 'Pagan cults of angels in Roman Asia Minor', *Talanta* 12/13 (1980-81), p.77 – 100; S. Mitchell, 'The cult of theos hypsistos between pagans, Jews, and Christians', in P. Athanassiadi and M. Frede (eds.), *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford 1999), p.102 - 104.

<sup>23</sup> S. Mitchell, *Anatolia. Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor II* (Oxford 1993), p.35 n. 201.

was arrested and put to death by the Roman proconsul.<sup>24</sup> Thus the relationships between Jewish, Christian and pagan groups in the period before the 4th century were fluid, and depended on local circumstances.

‘Some of the most important evidence for Jews in Asia Minor dates to the 4th and 5th centuries AD. Excavations at Sardis have shown that one wing of the city gymnasium was converted into a basilica for Jewish worship, thus creating one of the largest synagogues known from antiquity, capable of holding up to a thousand persons. The interior building was elaborately decorated with marble paneling and mosaic floors, which had been paid for by individual worshippers. These include both Jews and God-Fearers (theosebeis). The latter were sympathetic non-Jews who attended worship in the synagogues. There is evidence for several building phases at the Sardis synagogue, which were originally dated by the excavators between the late second and the fourth centuries AD.<sup>25</sup> More recent studies indicate that the wing of the gymnasium was not converted for use as a synagogue before the fourth century.<sup>26</sup>

‘The most important Jewish inscription yet found in Asia Minor comes from Aphrodisias in Caria.<sup>27</sup> Two related texts have been carved on a tall marble slab, which served as the door-jamb at the entrance to a building. The inscription is hard to interpret but the earlier inscription appears to be the dedication of a memorial building by ‘the members of the dekany of the students of the law, also known as those who continually praise God’, a select group of members of the community who sang the praises of the dead. The longer second text simply consists of a list of names, possibly those who contributed to the cost of the building. The most striking thing about both lists is that they contained both Jews (Ioudaioi), and God-Fearers (theosebeis), the same categories as are found at the Sardis synagogue, and clearly distinguished between the two groups. God-Fearers are also associated with Jews in Syria, Asia Minor, the Black Sea and the Aegean regions as early as the first century AD. We thus see that the Jews attracted many non-Jewish worshippers to their synagogues and there was a significant common ground between Jewish and gentile religious beliefs. The Aphrodisias inscription provides a total of ninety Jews and sixty-five God-Fearers, listing their names and often their professions. It is thus by far the most explicit documentary source for the social composition of a Jewish community in Asia Minor. The date of the texts are controversial, but strong arguments favour a date in the 4th or 5th rather than the 2nd or 3rd centuries.’<sup>28</sup>

- ii. Another paper is very informative and helpful: Pieter Williem van der Horst, ‘Jews and Christians in Aphrodisias in the Light of their Relations in Other Cities of Asia Minor’ ([https://www.academia.edu/1606535/Jews\\_and\\_Christians\\_in\\_Aphrodisias\\_in\\_the\\_Light\\_of\\_Their\\_Relations\\_in\\_Other\\_Cities\\_of\\_Asia\\_Minor](https://www.academia.edu/1606535/Jews_and_Christians_in_Aphrodisias_in_the_Light_of_Their_Relations_in_Other_Cities_of_Asia_Minor))
- iii. Many scholars now recognize that John Chrysostom’s preaching in Constantinople implied and required a strong Jewish community also present. Given that Constantinople was the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, it should not be surprising to find a strong Jewish community there.
- iv. The messianic movement led by Moses of nearby Crete, who persuaded many Jews of Crete that he would lead an overthrow of the Roman Empire, arose in 440 – 470 AD. This was remarkable given the massive defeat of the Jewish Bar-Kochba revolt by the Romans at Masada in 135 AD. It is suggestive of the vitality of the Jewish community just off the coast of Asia Minor.
- v. The Dura-Europos synagogue in Syria, on the banks of the Euphrates River, was dated to 244 AD by an Aramaic inscription. Although it was on the frontier of the Eastern Roman Empire

<sup>24</sup> *Life of Pionius* 3.6 (ed. H. Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*). See R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (London 1985).

<sup>25</sup> G.M.A. Hanfmann, *Sardis from Prehistoric to Roman Times* (Harvard 1983); P. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (Cambridge 1991), p.40 – 54.

<sup>26</sup> H. Botermann, *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 81 (1990), p.103 - 121.

<sup>27</sup> J. Reynolds and R. Tannenbaum, *Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias* (Cambridge Philological Society, Suppl. Vol. 12, 1987).

<sup>28</sup> See M. Williams, ‘The Jews and God-Fearers inscription from Aphrodisias – a case of patriarchal interference in early 3rd century Caria?’, *Historia* 41 (1992), p.297 – 310.



and the Persian Empire, and not in Asia Minor proper, it is important to consider what the significance is of a vibrant Jewish community in a less politically stable, border area. If this Jewish community could thrive near the border of the Roman and Persian Empires, it would confirm that there were even stronger Jewish communities in stable areas.

12. 5<sup>th</sup> century: Brigit of Ireland (born around 453 AD, died between 524 and 528 AD) is abbess of an abbey for both monks and nuns. Many semi-legendary tales are told about her in surviving literature, making it difficult to completely sort out fact from fiction. But she was clearly important and held in high esteem. This is the account of her ordination to the office of bishop:

‘Brigit went, with some other young women, to Bishop Mél, in Telcha Mide, to take the veil [i.e. to become a religious sister]. The Bishop was happy to oblige and Brigit stayed behind out of humility, so that she might be the last to whom the veil should be given. A beam of fire rose from her head to the ridgepole of the church’s ceiling. Bishop Mél asked: “Who is that woman?” MacCaille answered: “She is Brigit.” “Come, O holy Brigit,” said Bishop Mél, “that the veil may be imposed on your head before the other women.” Then it happened, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, that the prayer that was read over Brigit was the form of ordination for a bishop. MacCaille said: “The order of a bishop should not be [conferred] on a woman.” But Bishop Mél declared: “This lies outside my power because it was through God’s doing that this honour that transcends every woman was given her.” That is why the men of Ireland give the honour of bishop to Brigit’s successor.’<sup>29</sup>

From that point in the story, Brigit appoints her own bishops in Kildare, in northern Ireland, and in the area roundabout. Kildare Town is considered to be one of the three most important centers of Irish Christianity.

13. 9<sup>th</sup> century: Torrance continues in the same article referenced above, ‘In a mosaic still extant in the Church of Santa Praseda in Rome, built by Pascal I toward the end of the ninth century in honor of four holy women, one of whom was his mother Theodora, we can still read around her head THEODORA EPISCOPA! And so we have papal authority for a woman bishop and an acknowledgement by the pope that he himself was the son of a woman bishop! The word episcopa was evidently used at times to refer to the wife of a bishop, as presbytera was sometimes used (and still is in Greece) to refer to the wife of a presbyter, but that does not seem to have been the case in this instance.’<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Leabhar Breac – On the Life of Brigit*, translated from the Gaelic by Whitley Stokes, in *Lives of the Saints; From the Book of Lismore* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1890), p.188; <http://www.ministryforwomen.org/latin/brigit.asp> (accessed July 19, 2013).

<sup>30</sup> T.F. Torrance, ‘The Ministry of Women,’ *Touchstone*, Fall 1992, p.7