

REGENT UNIVERSITY

A STUDY OF
FEMALE HEADSHIP IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH
DURING THE FIRST AND SECOND CENTURY
AND HOW THIS APPLIES TO FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN
THE CHURCH TODAY

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INTRODCTION

The argument has grown tiresome, redundant, and frustrating: should women be allowed to hold leadership roles over men in the Christian Church? Many Christian leaders and biblical scholars have agreed to allow women in their pulpits, but many still cling to a view that makes the Apostle Paul look like a male chauvinist, who has given a universal principal that women are to be silent, and never hold a church office. Many from the latter group are known as complementarians. Well known complementarian frontrunners, John Piper and Wayne Grudem, reason that the Apostle Paul taught that the husband/father figure of each family is ordained by God to lead his household, wife, and children. She and their children are to submit to his every rule, whim, and decision; life as they know it is a male dominated monarchy. Boys are taught to be strong leaders and providers, while girls are taught to be good followers and dependents. This may sound ideal to some, but families are not “cookie-cut” images of one another, and they certainly don’t always reproduce strong-willed boys and passive girls. Further, not all families have a father or a male figure in the equation. Therefore, if females are taught to be passive and dependent human beings, they will be unable to survive and provide for their families. Worse, many families endure the pain of an abusive father or male-figure who uses his power for evil, traumatizing both boys and girls under his “God-given” authority. These are all everyday, realistic scenarios that do not fit into the “complementarian box.”

Piper and Grudem justify their argument by pointing to various scriptures that designate God as “Father” to the universal Christian church, which is considered a complete “family in Christ.” Therefore, Christian families should mimic this same model at home. Dad gets to play God and be the king of the house, while mom represents the “Bride of Christ.” While the “Bride of Christ” is a beautiful expression of Christ’s love for His beloved Church, which is represented

through His death, resurrection, and future return; it should not be forgotten that this heroic sacrifice was made for the sinful human-race, which desperately needed a Savior. Without it, all living beings are condemned to Hell. Jesus is coming back for His “Bride,” but do not be fooled into thinking gender will matter, because His “Bride,” which symbolizes the entire Christian church, is made up of broken *men and women* who were made pure and worthy by God’s grace, found in the atonement of Christ. In sum, Piper and Grudem challenge evangelical feminism with the notion that men and women are equal in value, but equipped by God to function in different roles. Male and female life-positioning represents an orderly and simple approach to submission; woman submits to man, man submits to Christ, and Christ submits to God.¹ While this argument may be appealing to some because it is clean-cut and logical to the human mind, there is an enormous amount of fault with this so called “biblical mandate;” mainly that God is not a man and men are not God!

While Jesus walked the earth as a male, He no longer has a gender. The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are all of one Spirit, representing both male and female attributes. *Genesis* 1:27 is clear that God created both man and woman in His image. God is just as much a Mother as He is a Father. Christ is not only a brother, but also the bridegroom of the Church. While this philosophy is less attractive and incomprehensive to the human mind, it is the truth of the Holy Bible. Complementarian point-of-view is clear-cut, but focuses only on select portions of Scripture. When studying the Bible as a whole, complementarian thought loses its validity and systematic attraction.

Since complementarians are responding to evangelical feminism, it is important to note what evangelical feminism is. Popular Christian feminist, Gail Ramshaw understands the

¹ John Piper, Grudem, Wayne. *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*. (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), 240-256.

dangers of the word “feminist” and defines healthy Christian feminism as “the wide range of theory and practice that affirms the full humanity of women.”² Understanding creation is crucial among Christian feminists. *Genesis* 1:26-27 represents no sort of subordination between male and female. Further, God states that He has created man in His own image. There is no indication that Adam had a specific gender before Eve entered the picture.³ Though the Bible and this thesis uses masculine language, like “He” to write about God, it is simply a matter of writing style. While God is spirit and has no sexual gender, one can find imagery throughout scripture, which authors have used in an attempt to describe the “I am.”⁴ While Piper and Grudem are correct that the Bible often calls God “Father,” one cannot ignore that God also sees Himself as a motherly figure as well. In *Numbers* 11:12, God is speaking of His chosen people, the Israelites, when He says:

Was it I who conceived all this people? Was it I who brought them forth, that you should say to me, carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries a nursing infant, to the land which you swore to their fathers (NASB)?

Piper and Grudem have attempted to write a logical book, telling the world of a gender system, which to them, seems biblically sound. However, God does not hold a gender and any sort of biblical analogy that suggests He does, is simply intended to provide pictures to help the human mind conceive the vastness of God. Mary Evans states,

More explicit feminine terminology is used elsewhere with God being described as midwife, seamstress, housekeeper, nurse and mother. The fact that such feminine imagery is found at all in relation to God, means that we cannot really use the preponderance of the masculine imagery as an argument for differentiating between male

² Gail Ramshaw, *God Beyond Gender: Feminist Christian God Language* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 3.

³ Mary J. Evans, *Women in the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 12.

⁴ *Exodus* 3:14.

and female in their relation to God, nor can we use it to support hierarchy in their relation to each other.⁵

While it is evident that men and women differ physically, emotionally, and intellectually, there is no data that supports men and women differing spiritually and in capability to lead. Regardless of gender, all individuals relate to God differently and encounter Him in unique ways.

Some Christian denominations refuse to ordain women based on certain Pauline passages in the New Testament, while other Christian denominations use Pauline passages to support the ordination of women in the Church. This is an obvious problem, not only in the Church, but also in the world, which often looks to the Church for life-answers. What kind of message is the Christian Church sending to the world in this ongoing and conflicting dilemma? While many Christ followers would argue that “women in leadership” is not a "salvation issue," therefore it is acceptable for Christians to "agree to disagree" on this subject, it could be argued that “women in Christian leadership” is very much a "salvation issue." Perhaps the belief, one way or another, does not affect an individual’s salvation, it does however, affect "the great commission" being spread throughout the earth. It is a Christian's duty to speak up for women who have felt a calling from God to be a leader within the Church over both men and women. This does not indicate that the Church should exalt female leadership over male leadership. Rather, it encourages women to do what God has called them to do. ***Within the first and second century, it is clear that females occupied every office of leadership within the Christian Church. Their ministry was vital in its foundations and remains strategically needed within the continuous growth of Christianity today.***

Historically, it is important to recognize that as Christianity gained popularity in the Greco-Roman world going into the third century, more men became Christianized and the

⁵Evans, 22.

attempt to downgrade female leadership began. However, there is a substantial amount of evidence, which strongly suggests that the establishment and growth of the Christian Church is much due to first and second century women who were quick to take headship roles, even in the face of ongoing persecution.

CHAPTER 1

WOMEN'S ROLES IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

(Women have occupied all Levels of Church Leadership since the First Century)

I. Female Leadership: A Salvation Issue

As noted, in the first century CE, women began to occupy every level of leadership within the fledgling church. Sociologists and historical analysis of scriptural texts provide support for this claim. Many church historians and sociologists have set out to prove, with great success, that if it were not for female leadership birthing and raising Christianity in its early stages, the Church may have not grown as quickly and vastly as it did. Further, it may have even faded away, as most religious fads do, once Christ left the scene. While the latter statement is extreme and hypothetical, its intention is to draw direct and greatly deserved attention to the enormous roles women played in planting churches within their homes, which are now known as “house churches.”

While house churches were considerably spread out and small, it is imperative to remember that Christians were unable to build church buildings or form open “assemblies,” as we call church today because their faith had to remain “underground” due to the ongoing persecution of Christianity in its formative years. In other words, house churches and perhaps some other secretive spots, such as catacombs,⁶ were the only places Christians could worship and fellowship together. The New Testament and historical data introduces modern scholars and historians to many brave women who opened their homes and led both men and women to a brand new faith that would go on to change the face of world history, religion, and genuine spirituality for the Christ-follower. Women were and still are crucial in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth, and their headship should be largely appreciated as a “salvation issue.” Their leadership, teaching, and preaching is just as effective as their male co-ministers in Christ. To silence their voices from the pulpit when there are men in the pews is not

⁶ James Spencer Northcote, *The Roman Catacombs; or Some Account of the Burial Places of the Early Christians in Rome* (London: Catholic Publishing and Bookselling Company, 1859).

only unjust towards female ministers, but a severe misfortune to those sitting in the congregation who may not yet know Christ as their Savior.

II. Women and the Rise of Early Christianity

Rodney Stark makes a fascinating case for female leadership being a key factor in the rapid rise of Christianity by examining historical and sociological data from 1 B.C.E. through the fourth century. He points out that Christianity was attractive to women because Christian females enjoyed greater respect and status than pagan women. Also, men significantly outnumbered women in the Greco-Roman world due to cultural acceptance of infanticide and abortion of female babies. Male babies were greatly desired and it was uncommon for a household to keep more than one female newborn. One can see this in a letter written by Hilarion in 1 B.C.E. to his wife, Alis, who was pregnant.

Know that I am still in Alexandria. And do not worry if they all come back and I remain in Alexandria. I ask and beg you to take good care of our baby son, and as soon as I receive payment I shall send it up to you. If you are delivered of a child [before I come home], *if it is a boy keep it, if a girl discard it*. You have sent me word, "Don't forget me." How can I forget you. I beg you not to worry.⁷

Though this letter was written before the first century, the practice of legal infanticide remained common and morally acceptable among pagans far into the Christian era. Hilarion's casual tone regarding the disposal of a possible baby girl informs historians that infanticide was not controversial and that it was commonly practiced. Hilarion was obviously more concerned for his pregnant wife's feelings than he was about murdering an infant. Not only were female babies discarded and aborted, women often died from ancient abortion procedures, which severely lacked medical knowledge and experience as practiced today.

⁷ [Quoted in Lewis 1985:54], quoted in Rodney Stark, *The Rise Of Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 97-98.

Separate from pagan culture, Christian sub-culture was quickly emerging and women were discouraged away from infanticide and abortion because they were thought to be immoral. Therefore, the average of female newborns matched that of male newborns. In addition, women were not dying from “abortions gone wrong” within the Christian communities because abortion was highly frowned upon, so therefore, rarely happening. Countless women were being drawn to this new religion, which offered female protection, respect, and equality. Further, Christian women were making moral decisions to avoid female infanticide and abortion, and the statistics of females dying from abortion procedures no longer an issue. With these factors, it’s no wonder women began to outnumbering men in the distinct Christian sub-culture of the Greco-Roman world.⁸ Stark’s notions not only argue for female leadership being acceptable in the Church, but also conclude that the female leaders were an absolute necessity to the construction and growth of early Christianity.

It is important to note that it is commonly accepted among early Christian scholars and historians that many of the women who were flocking to Christianity were considered high-status and wealthy.⁹ While these women did not enjoy the same privileges as men, they were living in a time (particularly Roman women over Greek women) when they were given more respect and duty than in the past. Bruce Winter claims that Roman women who lived in the first century experienced significant changes in their “new roles,” which allowed them to better spread Christianity. He states,

There were pivotal legal and social changes that made way for this participation, including a measure of financial independence that facilitated these new roles. There is evidence that women could occupy civic posts and have the titles of civic magistrates,

⁸ Rodney Stark, *The Rise Of Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1977), 98-99.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 107.

and those with wealth (and what was deemed to be rank and status) influenced commercial, civic and provincial affairs.¹⁰

Winter reasons that New Testament female leaders such as Lydia, Euodia, Syntyche of Phillipi, Phoebe in Corinth, Junia in Rome, and Priscilla (along with her husband) who was in Corinth, Ephesus, and in Rome two separate times, were all wealthy women who played key roles in spreading Christianity beyond Palestine limits.¹¹

If Winter and Stark are correct, it seems women would be more compelled to Christianity than men, at least in its beginnings. If it were primarily women sharing the “salvation message” in the first century, it seems natural that other women would be more prone to listen. If a woman were to start a Bible study in her home in the current year, one can be sure the group would attract mostly females and perhaps a few brave men. While this analysis is on women and ancient house churches in the first century, human nature has stayed the same. At this point, it seems natural to wonder how men ever came to accept Christianity and leave their pagan roots behind. Stark again points out another intriguing probability, in which he entitles "secondary conversions." At this stage, it is important to be aware that Stark has not completely abandoned his ideas of women involved in first century Christianity, but is also including the second-fourth centuries to better explain his hypothesis.

While it is obvious through various Bible scriptures that Christian men and women were encouraged to stay with their pagan spouses in hopes of leading them to Christ (1 Peter 3:1-2, 1 Cor. 7:13-14), Stark suggests that there was a much greater acceptance of female Christians

¹⁰ Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women in Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

marrying pagan men than has been acknowledged.¹² He states this for several reasons. As previously noted, there were very few Christian men in the beginnings of the Church and the ones who were attracted to the new faith were often slaves, poor, or of low-status. In the Greco-Roman world women were not permitted to administer their own property without some sort of male authority (ex://husband, brother, or uncle) under the Roman law entitled *tutela*. Therefore, when a woman was married, her dowry was directly passed to her bridegroom to govern.¹³ With that being the situation, high-status women (Christian or not) would find it foolish to marry a male slave or even a male with poor-status and wealth. Further, it seems the Apostles Peter and Paul had little to no concern of female Christians falling back into paganism if they married a pagan man. If anything, they expected the opposite, hoping for Christian women to lead their pagan husbands to Christ.¹⁴ Stark states, "The high levels of commitment that the early church generated among its members should have made it safe for them to enter exogamous marriages."¹⁵ Stark also draws upon writings of early church father, Tertullian (second-third CE), who openly condemns Christian women who have and who are marrying pagan men, as direct evidence of "secondary conversion."¹⁶ Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch support Stark's hypothesis by stating,

The presence of wives and unbelieving husbands in the community in *1 Corinthians* 7:12-16 and *1 Peter* 3:1-2 means that individual members of households were free to make their own choice about religious membership, even though the model of complete Christian households was held up as the ideal. The virtuous submissive conduct of

¹² Ibid., 111.

¹³ Carolyn Osiek, Balch, David L., *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 57.

¹⁴ Stark, 111-113.

¹⁵ Ibid., 114.

¹⁶ Ibid., 115.

Christian wives in *Ephesians* 5:22-24, *Colossians* 3:18, and especially *1 Peter* 3:1-6, like that of long-suffering slaves (2:18-25), would be testimony to the truth of the faith and perhaps even convert the other. Thus female submission becomes not only a God-given duty, but a missionary strategy, continued in *Clement* 1.3.¹⁷

Stark, Osiek, and Balch are not stating that early Apostles encouraged early Christian women to marry pagan men in hopes of “saving their souls;” but rather, they are suggesting the simple facts of the time. While it may not seem difficult for a Christian young woman to find a Christian young man to start a family with in modern times, Christianity was a brand new religion and way of life in the first and second centuries. Often, Christian women had little choice in who they would marry. While it is probable that Christian women desired to spend their life with a man who shared her same beliefs, this would most likely be the exception rather than the norm. By the time Tertullian entered the scene in the latter half of the second century, as well as the beginning of the third century; Christianity had grown more public, which meant there were more Christian men available to marry. Perhaps this is why Tertullian felt the need to express what he felt a Christian wife’s duty was and strictly condemned females of the Christian faith to marry outsiders.¹⁸

With all of that said; should a Christian woman so desire marriage and children in the first or second century, she most likely had to marry a pagan man in hopes of converting him to her faith. Seemingly, genuine Christian women must have impressed many men with their steadfast faith, morality, and Christian love, since many men did come to accept a Christian lifestyle. Since Christianity grew so quickly, it is obvious that Stark’s argument of “secondary conversion” is a solid one. This evidential theory suggests that many Christian women led pagan

¹⁷ Osiek, David L. Balch, 148.

¹⁸ Robert Sider, “Tertullian: Coptic Church Review,” *A Quarterly of Contemporary Patristic Studies* 19, no. 3 [1998]: 59.

men to Christ through interreligious marriage, resulting in many "secondary conversions." Not only this, but these marriages would produce children who would be raised to accept a Christian belief system, which would be passed down from generation to generation. Clearly, Christian wives leading their pagan husbands to Christ was a significant factor of Greek and Roman societies converting to Christianity so rapidly.¹⁹

III. Women and House Churches

Carolyn Osiek, Margaret Y. Macdonald, and Janet H. Tulloch offer compelling evidence for women acting as Christian leaders in the first century, in their book, *A Woman's Place*. The authors inform the reader of what life would have been like for women in the first century in the Greco-Roman world. While men were expected to be public figures and well known leaders in the political outside realm, the wives of these men were to take sole leadership in managing their household. In fact, men were not even supposed to know everything that was going on in his house; this would make the husband's public image appear weak.²⁰

The authors make it clear that women were expected to take full ownership of their homes, whether married or not. It is also clear that some Christian women lead "house churches." *Acts* 12:12-17 clearly suggests that John Mark's mother, Mary, led a "house church" where believers in Christ would gather to pray and worship. The passage states that a group of Christians were praying intensely for Peter as he was in prison; they felt sure he would be executed by morning. It is important to note that when Peter miraculously escaped prison, Mary's home was the first

¹⁹ Stark, 115.

²⁰ Carolyn Osiek, Macdonald, Margaret, and Tulloch, Janet H. *A Women's Place* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 148.

place he thought to go. It seems Peter and other Christians had grown accustomed to meeting in Mary's home.²¹ While many modern readers may have read this passage of scripture various times, it is unlikely many took a moment to "connect the dots," and realize Mary was the leader of a "house church."

Further, one must not forget about Lydia who ran a successful business selling purple cloth in Philippi. Purple cloth was expensive and a cherished item in her day. The Bible is clear that Lydia was the head of her household. When she decided to follow Christ and become baptized, she insisted her entire household follow her lead. While this does not seem common in Paul's letters, it did happen again in *1 Corinthians* 1:16 when Paul baptizes the household of Stephanas and in *Acts* 10:44-48 when the entire household of Cornelius in Caesarea (16:33) was baptized after receiving salvation. It is clear that whoever lived under the headship of a home (ex://slaves, children, spouses) were expected to follow their leader. This was a strange concept because they were even expected to take on their headship's religion. If the "head" decided to change his or her religion on any given day, all would follow their example. It was not as if others in the household had no religious beliefs to give up, many household slaves, for example, were part of religious cults. Further, Paul and Silas stayed in the home of Lydia for an indefinite period, which made Lydia's home the center of evangelization and teaching. It is obvious that Lydia was the head of a developing "house church." Paul and Silas were sure to mention Lydia's home and how it had become a regular place for Christians to gather.

One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul. And when she was baptized, with her household, she besought us, saying, "If you

²¹ Ibid., 157.

have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.²²

It is evident that Lydia was a strong leader in the first century of Christianity. She was the "head" of her home, led her entire house-hold (men and women) to Christ, and housed the Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter during critical times of evangelism. To assume that she was not teaching and praying with those who were gathering would be illogical.

In the book of *Colossians* (4:15), the author mentions a woman named Nympha who also hosted a church in her home. Other examples of females running their own households include Phoebe, who traveled independently as a *diakonos*, which means she was recognized for doing some sort of local ministry (Romans 16:1-2). She is also given the term, *prostatis*, which is defined as authority, at least in the patronage system. There is a possibility that Phoebe was married, but chances are she was not.²³ The role of Phoebe in the early Christian Church has been long debated. Due to the Apostle Paul's terminology in Rom. 16:2, some scholars have gathered Phoebe to be a deaconess. Their findings, however, are based off mistranslation of the Greek time era for which the word *deaconess* came into existence. The word *deaconess* was not created within the Greek language until the third to fourth century and was used to describe females who functioned with much less authority than first-century male diaconates. Those who have tried to discredit the authority of Phoebe in the early Church have been doing so by explaining that original biblical text entitles her a deaconess, as defined in the third to fourth century. Those who have under qualified Phoebe as a deaconess have done irresponsible research since the term did not exist in her lifetime.²⁴ It is important to note that Paul addresses

²² *Acts* 16:14-15 [RSV].

²³ Osiek, Macdonald, and Tulloch, 158.

²⁴ Caroline F. Whelan, "Amica Pauli: The Role of Phoebe in the Early Church," *JSNT* 49 [1993]: 67.

Phoebe as a patron of his. He speaks to her as if she had been brought on to his “Missionary Team,” and expects her to both lead the church established in Ephesus, and financially support its growth while Paul was in the West. Caroline F. Whelan writes of Phoebe,

As a member of the upper classes, she was able to secure connections for Paul and his church connections which, in a status-conscious society like the Roman world where wealth and power went hand and hand, could only be beneficial.²⁵

R.A. Kearsley seconds Whelan’s belief by stating,

In the light of this and of the textual tradition which describe Phoebe as a *prostatis*, it is reasonable to assume that in Kenchreai it was, indeed, as Paul said; Phoebe was a benefactor and patron of the Christian believers there, and of himself when present.²⁶

If the life of Phoebe and the first century church were a modern day film, she would be much more than a supporting role. Phoebe would have had a lead role, if the Apostle Paul had anything to do with the decision. Paul not only allowed Phoebe to financially care for his spiritual children of Ephesus, he encouraged her to spiritually lead them as well.

Other important female leaders were Euodia and Syntyche. They were active in the Philippi church, and it seems probable that each of these two women hosted their own house church (Phil. 4:2-3). Paul addresses the two women as if they were part of a team of male and female evangelists, in which he was involved. While it is obvious in the text that the two women are disputing over something and Paul hopes they will make peace, he sings their praises as those who have worked side by side with him.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., 84-85.

²⁶ R.A. Kearsley, “Women in Public Life in the Roman East: Iunia Theodora, Claudia Metrodora and Phoebe, Benefactress of Paul,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 50.2 [1999]: 202.

²⁷ Wendy Cotter, “Women Authority Roles in Paul’s Churches: Countercultural or Conventional?” *Novum Testamentum XXXVI* 4 [1994]: 353.

Further, *1st Timothy* 5:9-10, encourages widows to remain unmarried so that they might fully dedicate themselves to showing hospitality to Christians and performing acts of charity. While some Christian widows may have gone to live with a son or another male figure, it is not unlikely that Euodia and Syntyche stayed in their homes and were the sole authority of their households.²⁸

It is clear that Christian women in the first century ran their households, with or without a husband.²⁹ Osiek argues that many wives managed their homes, despite literature that often suggests that a wife had to be supervised by her husband at all times. She first points to the biblical female epic, known as the “Proverbs 31 women.” While there is dispute over when *Proverbs* was written, one can be certain that the later it is dated, the more likely it was Greek and Hellenistic influenced. Assuming it was influenced; the “Proverbs 31 women” was expected to manage her household, children, slaves, agriculture, and business. Certainly, the often fantasized over “Proverbs 31 women” was the head of her household, while her husband was out in the city dealing with civic affairs.³⁰ Another example that validates this belief is Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*, from late traditional Greece that is known to be read by persons such as Cicero, Philodemus, and Galen in the Roman period. The piece acknowledges a wife as an equal to her husband in running a household. It also compares the wife to the Queen Bee, who ensures everything going on inside the home is proper. This means that she is to regulate who comes and leaves the house, care for slaves when they are sick, reward and praise slaves for their doings,

²⁸ Osiek, Macdonald, and Tulloch, 159.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 163.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 144-145.

distribute supplies, supply food and clothing. The wife is to be the sole guardian of her home.³¹

Further evidence states,

The Roman Stolic Musonius Rufus (first century CE) asks whether women should study philosophy, after having clarified that men and women have the same virtue and both need to acquire virtue. He answers that the woman who studies philosophy will be better equipped to be a good manager (*oikonomike*) and accountant (*eklogistike*) of the household and ruler (*archike*) of its slaves.³²

Females leading their households, with husbands or not, was commonly practiced in the Greco-Roman world. Christianity, with its stance on spiritual equality, only further liberated females to be in high positions of leadership. To have one of the apostles come to visit one's home assembly, would have been a rare occasion. Someone else had to be leading and it is evident that many women had Christian church meetings in their homes. While time and culture has changed quite a bit, this might be equivalent to a pastor or a "small group" leader, teaching others what it means to truly follow Christ.

³¹ Ibid., 146-147.

³² Ibid., 150.

CHAPTER 2

PAULINE PASSAGES CONCERNING WOMEN

(Paul's Letters Support Female Headship in the Church when Read in Correct Context)

I. Biblical Female Leaders

If one is not yet convinced that the Apostle Paul was an advocator for women in ministry over both men and women, it is crucial to identify seven different female ministers found in Pauline letters. Firstly, there is Apphia, found in *Philippians 2*. Some have assumed that Apphia is the wife of Philimon because her name follows his. This assumption, however, makes little sense being that the Apostle addresses three individuals, rather than two who could maybe be assumed to be married. For instance, when Paul addresses Aquila and Prisca (Rom. 3:16), he is clear that they are a couple who works with him. In Apphia's case, she is addressed as an individual and Paul calls her a "sister." The two men who were mentioned with Apphia were named "fellow worker" (Philimon) and "fellow soldier" (Archippus). It should also be mentioned that Paul calls Timothy a "brother" (masculine version of "sister"), which implies that Apphia was considered the most prestige of the three house-church leaders mentioned. Further, Paul only uses "sister" again to identify Phoebe from Cenchreae who he identifies as a deacon and a patroness/protectress to many, even to himself.³³

The second female leader mentioned by Paul was Chloe (1 Corinthians 1:11). It was Chloe that told Paul of the division in the Corinthian Church. While there is no title given to Chloe that is known, it is obvious that she was an important person in the Corinthian Church. Paul mentioning her name would have been irrelevant to his motives in writing the letter if he did not think she was well known among the community. It is safe to say that she was prominent among the Corinthian Christian community.³⁴

³³ Cotter, 351.

³⁴ Ibid., 351-352.

Thirdly, it is crucial to mention Prisca (1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:3-4). Prisca and her husband Aquila worked very closely with the Apostle Paul. The couple had a church in their home in Ephesus in which Paul was involved with when he wrote his first letter to the Corinthians. Paul later mentions the couple again and states that they "risked their necks" for him. He appears to be grateful and encourages all the Gentile churches to be thankful for Aquila and Prisca. Obviously, the couple was well known throughout Christian communities.³⁵ It is also important to recognize that Prisca's name is mentioned before her husbands when Paul sends them his greeting as his fellow co-workers (Rom. 16:3). The fact that Prisca's name is written first could signify that she was considered more active in the ministry, therefore, more important to Paul's mission. Whether this is the case or not, it is evident that Prisca was a missionary on her own right, with or without Aquila. Paul so obviously treasures Prisca as one of his co-workers who is not dependent on him for her church leadership and missionary position; but, as one scholar explains Paul's words "...as he did of Timothy, that she is doing the work of the Lord, as I am" (1 Cor.16:10).³⁶

Next, there is Euodia and Syntyche who belonged to the Philippian community. The two women are important enough for Paul to mention in his community letters. The women were in a dispute over some sort of matter and Paul begged them to work out their differences for the sake of the community of Christ. It seems obvious that whatever the two are quarreling over is insignificant and Paul does not want to get in the middle. He does, however, say that the two females "...have labored side by side with me, Clement and the rest of the fellow workers whose names are written in the book of life" (Phil 4:3). While Paul does not deal with their issue himself, he calls on another leader to mediate the two and help them to reconcile. Since Paul

³⁵ Ibid., 352-353.

³⁶ Keith A. Gerberding, *Women Who Toil in Ministry, Even as Paul* (Southgate), 287.

shows a genuine concern for these two women, it is evident that both Eudia and Syntyche held some sort of leadership positions in the Philippian Church.³⁷

Another woman who Paul showed great respect towards is the deaconess, Pheobe. In *Romans* 16:1 (RSV translation), Paul himself states, "I commend to you our sister Pheobe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae..." One scholar writes, "The Greek word translated "deaconess" is *diakonos*, without any feminine case ending which would necessitate the translation "deaconess" instead of "deacon."³⁸ Paul introduces Pheobe as "our sister." In the past "our sister" has been translated as "helper," but the new RSV correctly translates the two words as "benefactor." Paul recognizes that Pheobe has not only been a sponsor of her own Christian community, but to him as well (*Rom.* 16:2).³⁹

Perhaps one of the most significant female leaders found in the New Testament is the Apostle Junia, since being an apostle was the greatest of church offices. *Romans* 16:7 states, "Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners they are men among note of the apostles and they were in Christ before me" (RSV). The name Junias is translated Junian in the accusative form. Junian could be translated either Junias, which is masculine, or Junia, which is feminine. In the past, translators have assumed Junias was a man, but the new RSV has translated the name as Junia, a female. There are several reasons for this change. One, the name "Junia" is a commonly used name in historic Latin and Greek literature and inscriptions, while "Junias" is not. Secondly, the writings of the patristic era exhibit the name to be Junia, a female

³⁷ Cotter, 353.

³⁸ Gerberbing, 289.

³⁹ Cotter, 353-354.

apostle. Further, the word "men" and the "men" of "kingsmen" are not even in the Greek text, according to the RSV translation.⁴⁰

Professor, biblical scholar, and author of *Junia: The First Woman Apostle*, remarks as follows.

For me – and those like-minded – the task that lies ahead is to make only one of these corrections, and to make it stick: Junias must be corrected to Junia. I trust that both theoretically and actually the Apostle Junias, who had deprived Junia a century of apostleship – has evaporated – and rightly so – for he was merely the figment of the wishful imagination of some influential white European, British, and American male scholars, caught up in but actively abetting a culturally shaped bias that wished to exclude women from leadership positions in the church – in this case a role that a named woman filled in the earliest period and fulfilled as an outstanding member.⁴¹

Eldon Epp's book, *Junia*, is not without negative criticism. While many commentators and biblical scholars now admit that Junia was a woman, they often demote her authority as an apostle. Leaders in the debate, such as Burer and Wallace, conclude that Junia was a female and well known among the Apostles, but not actually an apostle herself. Others state that Junia was called an apostle because Paul used the word more "loosely" than many people realize. Further, some have agreed to call Junia an apostle, but conclude that the other name written in *Romans* 16:7, is her husband, and the two hold apostleship together.⁴² Each belief has some method of study to back its finalized ideas, but none compare to Epp's discoveries, which has an entire book to back his thesis.

While many scholars have refused to acknowledge Epp's findings, it is undeniable that his in depth, critical analysis and biblical exegesis of *Romans* 16:7, is more than impressive. One scholar who critiqued Epp's book states, "Epp has written a hook that will make a difference,

⁴⁰ Gerberding, 288.

⁴¹ Eldon Jay Epp, *Junia: The First Women Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), XVII.

⁴² Heath R Curtis, "A female apostle? a note re-examining the work of Burer and Wallace concerning episemos with en and the dative," *Concordia Journal* 28 no 4 [October 2002]: 437.

and only those who refuse to read it will be able to hold to the view that the second figure named in *Romans 16:7* was either a man, or not an apostle.”⁴³

Biblical feminists owe a great deal to Epp and other biblical scholars who have taken the time to uncover the name and gender of Junia. In some way, Junia being discovered as a female apostle is ground breaking, in that it completes the belief that females occupied every office of leadership in New Testament times. While this argument has not been difficult to follow when researching church history, many conservatives and traditionalists have refused to believe anything outside of biblical text. It can now be said that the New Testament is proof that Paul did not give “Christian titles” or positions of authority based off gender; he simply chose whoever was best for the job. It was Paul, after all, who said, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, *there is neither male nor female*; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”⁴⁴

II. Doctrinal Debate Concerning Pauline Letters

Christians and assemblies who embrace the view that women should not hold governing church offices over men often use New Testament Pauline passages to validate their belief. “Complementarian Pioneers,” Wayne Grudem and John Piper are lead opponents of female leadership in the Church and use the words of Paul to validate their conviction. They state,

Many of those leading the egalitarian movement continue to profess a high view of Scripture and a trust in the total truthfulness of the Bible, even while their practice contradicts their profession. Paul’s charge to Timothy, “Guard the good deposit” (1 Timothy 6:20), is what keeps complementarians in the battle and gives us the impetus to encourage one another to stand firm. So much is at risk in this debate: the health of the home and the church; the way in which we understand the Christ-church paradigm; how

⁴³ Paul Foster, “Junia—Female and an Apostle,” *Expository Times* 117 no 9 [June 2006] : 372.

⁴⁴ *Galatians*, 3:28 [RSV].

we apply God's Word to the Christian life; and the way we raise masculine sons and feminine daughters.⁴⁵

This bold and direct statement implies that Piper and Grudem, and those of like mind, must lean on *1 Timothy 6:20* as a theological crutch, and without this one verse swaying in their scholarly direction, their entire argument falls to the ground. Since the self-proclaimed "complementarians" have given such heavy weight to these select words of the Apostle Paul, written to Timothy (found in verse 20), it is appropriate to examine its meaning and context.

First and foremost, verse 20 is not meant to stand alone; it is the beginning of a Pauline thought, which is in support of previous written text found in the sixth chapter of *1st Timothy*. While seemingly obvious, it should be remembered that Paul is writing a letter to a young pastor named Timothy, who he is mentoring in the faith. Hence, he is not labeling his sentences into numbered verses. Therefore, verse 20 cannot be understood apart from verse 21, since together they connect a complete thought. Paul guides Timothy as follows,

O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called "knowledge"-- which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith. Grace be with you.⁴⁶

When considering this text, it is evident that Piper and Grudem deem that Christians who support female headship in the Church, have foolishly accepted a "worldly lie" and have stumbled in their "faith-walk" in Christ. While this may seem like a harsh accusation, it is unlikely that the two authors would disagree. It is peculiar; however, that Piper and Grudem use a portion of scripture which discourages quarreling and promotes peace among Christian brothers and sisters,

⁴⁵ Piper and Grudem, xiii.

⁴⁶ *1 Timothy 6:20-21* [NASB].

when they have dedicated their time and resources into writing an entire manuscript purposed to argue against egalitarian Christians within the Universal Christian Church.

One scholar who studied the entirety of the passage, which *1 Timothy* 6:20-21 is in place in, recognizes the proper context of the two verses and that Paul is not only writing to Timothy, but to all Christians, despite their gender. Bryan Chappell summarizes verses 11-21 as follows;

...there must be no compromise in any aspect of our mission; not in belief or message or manner. His *actions* reminded me that we are called to be uncompromising in faith, witness and charity. God's instructions remain the same for you: no compromise. You must remember the God who is sovereign above your works, so that you will perform his work his way. May graciousness characterize all your words and actions that grace may fill your life and the lives of those you touch. "The grace be with you."⁴⁷

While complementarian forerunners use verse 20 to inspire their theological message and Christian mission concerning gender roles in the Church, the verse and the whole passage for that matter, has absolutely nothing to do with gender roles. To be fair, maybe Piper and Grudem would say that they understand this passage does not discuss female headship and their usage of it reflects more of a "fight for truth" allegiance. The fact that they even mention this verse, however, is odd, being that the primary message in its entirety is to avoid dispute and strive for Christian unity. Regardless of the complementarian authors reasoning for selecting this verse to motivate their audience, their argument cannot stand firm. Its grounds are shaky because its foundation is the New Testament and the New Testament clearly demonstrates female leadership.

While Piper and Grudem express genuine concern for the Church and the health of general Christian households, their fears are not only unnecessary, but must be refuted in Christian love. Their agenda is dangerous because it directly stumps the growth of the Church that female church officials and evangelists have worked so diligently to help flourish. While

⁴⁷ Chappell, Bryan, "No Compromise: A Sermon on 1 Timothy 6:11-21," *Presbyterion* 17 no. 2 [1991]: 94.

male headship in the church is perfectly acceptable and praised among Christian egalitarians, they equally encourage female leadership to do “God’s work.” The idea is not to demote male authority in the Church; rather, it is to promote female ordination and headship to the same level that has been offered to men. This way the two may work side by side, offering male and female strengths and perspectives, allowing for greater relevance and outreach among the Christian community, and ultimately building a stronger and larger Universal Church.

Complementarian agenda, on the other hand, seeks to prevent or end female ordination and leadership in the Church. They argue that men are to be the head of all church assemblies, just as they are to be the head of their households. They claim that even though they do not allow female headship over men in the Church, they value the humanity of women just as much as that of men. This belief, however, is difficult for a female to understand when she feels certain God has called her to some type of leadership role in the Church. If she is really valued at the same worth as a man, why does she have to deny her calling and silence herself when she sees various women in the New Testament occupying official church roles? Complementarians use a few Pauline passages to demonstrate their case, but have little to say about New Testament females who Paul himself recognized as his “co-workers in Christ.” Piper and Grudem express concern for the raising feminine daughters in a church that allows female headship, but what does femininity have to do with female authority? More importantly, what sort of credentials do these male authors obtain to attempt to define and understand the extremely broad and subjective meaning of femininity?

Complementarian conviction is discriminatory toward women and lacks solid biblical grounding. Why would God want pastors, evangelists, apostles, prophets, and teachers to stop ministering His love and grace, just because they are female? This is no different than denying a

person equal rights based off their skin color, which is widely condemned by most Christians. Yet, many of these same Christians are still subscribing to the bias view of complementarianism, due to their empty denominational traditions. Whether Piper, Grudem, and their followers admit it or not, the “Body of Christ” would be dramatically paralyzed if female officials in the Church were to be hypothetically removed from history and/or asked to step down from their present day leadership roles.

Wendy Cotter argues that female authority, within domestic life of Romanized cities, was somewhat common. Therefore, Paul worried less about asking Roman women to take on headship roles in their homes.⁴⁸ This does not imply gender equality; however, it exhibits male’s expectation of females to take charge of the household so they can better focus on public affairs. Prior to one interpreting Pauline letters, it is crucial to seek and develop an understanding of who Paul was as a follower of Christ, as well as what seemed to consume his everyday thoughts and life choices? The Apostle Paul had one primary objective while he walked the earth, which was to spread the Gospel message of Jesus Christ to as many Gentiles as possible, by using the most efficient measures, influential people, and affective resources he could find.⁴⁹ Therefore, Paul had little distress over gender and racial issues, unless these issues would somehow distract a person or people group from accepting Christ as their Savior. Further, it is obvious throughout the New Testament that the Apostle was much more concerned with truth being taught, than who was actually teaching it.

Cotter also notes that Christian household meetings are fitting with Pauline philosophy which explains the universal Church as one family in Christ. She also argues that female

⁴⁸ Cotter, 371.

⁴⁹ *Romans*, chapter 11.

headship of the home in Roman society may not have been as controversial as one may think and that Roman men would have been more offended if females were taking governance roles in political and civic affairs. Cotter sums up her reasoning by stating,

Moreover, as we have seen, Paul gives the impression that the community as a whole will become the citizens of heaven and exercise authority there as well. Again, there is no exception in the case of women. It is assumed that their authority will be ratified and recognized in the last day. And this manifestation will be seen not only by Christ and the rest of the Christians but indeed before the whole world who stands awaiting judgment.⁵⁰

Walter L. Liefeld aligns himself with Cotter's ideas by noting that Paul mentions several female associates who worked with him side-by-side in the Bible books, *Philippians* and *Romans*. Liefeld contends that if the names of those cited would have been masculine, most Bible-readers would have automatically assumed them to be co-evangelists, functioning in the same undertakings as the Apostle. Liefeld states, "The high percentage of women cited along with men in Romans 16 is remarkable..."⁵¹ While there is no doubt that a 'select few' Pauline passages have caused many Christians to question female authority, it is clear that Paul did not discourage women from taking leading roles over men or partnering with women who he felt could affectively evangelize the Gentiles.

Paul's writings have continually suffered from abuse and misunderstanding. His words have been hijacked by unbiblical feminism and complementarian thinkers who carelessly take Paul's words out of biblical context to support an agenda the Apostle himself would dispute. Inappropriately, modern culture has divided Paul's ideas throughout the New Testament; pastors, evangelists, scholars, and authors have often preached "topical sermons" and written entire

⁵⁰ Ibid., 371-372.

⁵¹ Walter L. Liefeld, "Women and Evangelism in the Early Church," *Missiology: An International Review* XV, no. 3 [1987]: 292.

books based of one or two Bible verses without studying the entirety of the passage, as well as the writer's ideals and practices.

Secular feminists and complementarian views make the great Apostle Paul seem as if he is "theologically bipolar" by focusing their arguments on a couple controversial scriptures (ex:// Corinthians 11:3 and Ephesians 5:23) and neglecting the great portion of the New Testament that Paul wrote. Frankly, this is to be expected among radical feminism, which typically deems the Bible as a mere ancient document, but it is tragic that complementarians, who typically have an extremely high view of the Scripture, so easily neglect the many biblical examples of female headship in the Church. It seems as if complementarians form their entire argument out of just a few scriptures written by Paul, while ignoring a great portion of the New Testament. They depend on extra-biblical evidence and just a small selection of scripture.

Christian feminism does not depend on extra-biblical resources to justify their conviction; rather, they rely on the vast evidence provided by the actual New Testament writings of Paul. If one wanted to learn about C.S. Lewis, they would start by reading the various books he wrote, before turning to books that others have wrote about C.S. Lewis. Likewise, if one really desires to understand Paul's letters, thoughts, and personal theology, it would be wise to read everything he has written and done, before seeking to learn about him through other ancient documents. With this in mind, it seems OK to assume complementarians have come up with much secular evidence, but lack in depth biblical research. Christian feminism, however, leans very little on extra-biblical resources, but stand firmly on the many examples of "female headship" found throughout the Bible. To a Christian feminist, the "Word of God" is the utmost primary source. Since Paul is deceased and unable to defend the truth or dismantle misconceptions which have made his writings seem contradictory, it is the Christian's duty to practice responsible exegesis

in order to validate Paul's character, as well as his holistic theology. While Christian scholars are expected to carefully consult extra-biblical documents, as well as thoroughly examine social and historical resources surrounding a biblical text, they should not forget that the Bible itself is the most significant primary resource within biblical exegesis. While ancient, secular documentations have their place of importance when translating biblical language and terminology, they must always remain secondary to what evangelical Christians believe to be the "infallible Word of God." Therefore, the greatest tool in translating Pauline terminology and theology concerning "female headship," is to study all of the Apostle's writings in the New Testament. This is especially important when studying the first and second centuries of Christianity, which is scarce in primary evidence outside of the Bible.

III. *First Corinthians* 11:3: the Term "*Head*" is Highly Debatable

First Corinthians 11:3 is a key Pauline scripture for those who subscribe to complementarian values. It states, "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."⁵² This passage, however, was never meant to demote women; rather, it was meant to address faulty worship taking place in the Corinthian Church. While Paul does write of a religious paradigm describing God as being the head of Christ, Christ being the head of man, and man being the head of woman, the term "head" is thought to be mistranslated by many New Testament scholars. As a result, Christian pastors and laymen have often accepted traditionalism, which accepts "head" to mean that of "authority over."

In the last sixty years or so, traditional family and church values have been challenged by egalitarian thought, some known as "Christian feminists." In general, the church has rejected

⁵² *First Corinthians* 11:3 [NASB].

the word “feminism” because of the extreme examples, such as women who have gone as far as calling God sexist. It must be noted, however, that a “Christian feminist” within the 21st century is commonly a Christian (male or female) who believes the Bible to reflect egalitarian principals. This merely means that both men and women are completely equal in all aspects of life. The major difference between a Christian feminist and a complementarian is that a Christian feminist would argue that men and women are not only equal in value, but also hold the same authoritative rights according to God’s Word. A complementarian, however, would claim that men and women are equal in value, but different in roles. The greatest reason to why these two Christian belief systems clash has to do with ecclesiastical power and authority. Christian feminism strongly believes in male and female headship in the home and church, while complementarians majorly disagree. It is precisely this feud that causes strife between the two Christian groups. It should be noted that both sides have ligament arguments, but an unequal amount of evidence. However, both sides feel that they are the one with greater evidence which has literally split large Christian denominations down the middle. While it may not be possible to persuade every Christian to subscribe to the same message, it is the duty of the Christian scholar to set aside their traditional understanding of the Bible, as well as their personal biases, and discover the truth of God’s Word through hermeneutical, sociological, and historical analysis. This leads us back to *1st Corinthians* 11:3, which has been a continuous “trouble maker” among the two Christian philosophies.

Complementarians translate this scripture to mean that male headship is ordained by God in both the family and the Christian Church, therefore determining the term “head” to mean “authority over.” Christian feminists, on the other hand, argue the term “head,” in this verse, denotes “source” or “origin” according to their own Greek translation. Therefore, God is the

source or origin of Christ, Christ is the source of all life, and in the beginning of time, God took a rib from Adam to make female (Eve), designating male the source of female.⁵³ Mary J Evans states

...it is important to remember that 'head' used in this context is a metaphor and there is no reason to suppose that the first century use of this metaphor will be identical with its twentieth century use, particularly as in the first century it was the heart not the head that was seen as the source of thought and reason, the head at this time being seen rather as the source of life.⁵⁴

It is crucial that modern Christian scholars and laymen remember that Paul is writing in Greek and catering to a Greek audience. Considering his fluency in this language, it would be odd for the Apostle to use his native tongue of Hebrew when trying to convey an important message to people abiding in a Greco culture, located in Corinth. Some scholars have argued that since Paul was born a Jew, it is likely he would have a Hebrew understanding of the term "head," which could denote "chief over;" yet, there is no substantial evidence to suggest Paul would use the Hebrew meaning of "head" when writing his letter to the Corinthians in Greek. In defending this idea, the accurate translation of "head," in this scripture, is the Greek term "kephale." Many egalitarian thinkers claim "kephale" was often used to imply a "...sense of source or origin- as the source or head of a river."⁵⁵ This does not denote that all Christian feminists believe the Greek word "kaphale" was commonly used to represent "source" in the ancient Greco period, but it is generally a chief argument among the group.

The term "head," quite possibly suggesting "source" or "origin" in *First Corinthians* 11:3, is not without great dispute. Wayne Grudem has made it his mission to prove the Greek

⁵³ Don Williams, *The Apostle Paul and Women in the Church* (Van Nuys: Bim Publishing, 1977), 64.

⁵⁴ Evans, 65.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 66.

term, “*Kephale*” is not understood as “source” or “origin,” but rather, a reflection of a “leader” or one who has “authority over.” Grudem has written an extensive article in which he claims to have studied 2,336 examples where the term “*Kephale*” is found in Greek literature. Although Grudem’s title suggests he is going to do a non-biased word study to see if “*Kephale*” can signify “authority over” or “source,” it does not take long for the reader to discover that he has a personal agenda. The piece should be titled in such a way that clarifies Grudem’s real intentions, which is to defend his belief that “*Kephale*” was commonly used to denote “authority over,” rather than “source” or “origin,” in the Greco-Roman era.⁵⁶ Actually, the main objective of his article is to display 49 examples of “*Kephale*” meaning “leadership” and only two, very questionable examples of the term signifying “source,” which he discovered during his “scholarly research” of ancient Greek literature.

Richard Cervin directly refutes Grudem’s article by stating that his 49 examples are invalid. Cervin agrees with Grudem’s method in analyzing Greek literature from the Classical, Hellenistic, and Greco-Roman eras, in hopes of finding a common thread of term usage. However, Cervin highly questions Grudem’s research. Grudem claims that his authorship studies ranged from Homer (8th c B.C.) to Libanius (4th c. C.E.) and that he found about 2,000 instances from the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (TLG). The authors who were checked and the instances which were claimed to be located can be found on pages 66-67 of Grudem’s article. From the beginning, Cervin finds inaccuracy in Grudem’s claims;

...he [Grudem] claims “that all extant writings of an author were searched and every instance to *Kephale* was examined and tabulated with the exception of fragmentary texts and a few other minor works that were unavailable to me” (p.65, emphasis mine). I myself have access to the TLG here at the University of Illinois and I have checked several of the authors in Grudem’s list as to the frequencies. I have found some rather

⁵⁶ Wayne A. Grudem, “Does *Kephale* (“head”) mean “source” or “authority over” in Greek literature : a survey of 2,336 examples,” *Trinity Journal* 6, no. 1 [1985]: 40.

different figures for the same authors in Grudem's list: Grudem claims that Kephale occurs 114 times in Herodotus — I found 121 occurrences; Grudem found 56 in Aristophanes — I found 59; Grudem found 97 in Plato — I found 90; Grudem found 1 in Theocritus — I found 15. The discrepancy may be due to our using different "editions" of the TLG database; but his assertion that he has checked *every* instance may be overstated.⁵⁷

Cervin gives Grudem's research another blow when he points out that Grudem admittedly used translations to aid his word study (p. 65). Cervin finds this method ludicrous and reminds Grudem and all biblical scholars that it is crucial to work with original texts when conducting a word study of Greek, or any foreign language for that matter.⁵⁸ Cervin agrees with Grudem when he states that certain studies (mainly the Mickelsens and some New Testament commentators) are wrong in saying that the term "*kephale*" was *commonly* used to mean "source," but does not follow Grudem when he states that the term was commonly used as "authority" either. Grudem claims to have found 49 instances of "*kephale*" meaning "authority over" out of 2,336 examples in ancient Greek literature. This would give Grudem a whopping 2.1% of "commonality" to lean on. In case the sarcasm was overlooked, the very low percent of 2.1 hardly allows Grudem to state that it was common for ancient Greek authors to use "*kephale*" to mean "leadership." While many Christian feminists are wrong in stating that the ancient Greek word for "head" often meant "source," there are relevant documents which Grudem may have been too quick to dismiss.⁵⁹

When reading Grudem's article, he makes it clear that he believes there is no evidence for "kephale" translating to "source." He states,

⁵⁷ Richard S. Cervin, "Does Kephale mean "source" or "authority over" in Greek Literature : A Rebuttal," *Trinity Journal* 10, no. 1 [1989]: 88.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

Authors who propose the sense “source” are proposing a new meaning, one previously unrecognized by New Testament Lexicons. That does not make the meaning “source” impossible, but it does mean we have the right to demand some convincing citations from ancient Greek literature that the editors of these lexicon have overlooked or misunderstood.⁶⁰

Cervin not only meets Grudem’s demand by providing instances in Greek literature where “head” could have very well meant “source;” he also finds that all 49 examples in which Grudem claims as valid evidence for “head” representing “authority over,” are either invalid or highly questionable. Cervin does not claim to be an egalitarian, and does not confirm that the term “*kephale*” was commonly used to represent “source;” he does however, find that it is a much more likely translation than “authority over.”

Cervin defends those who have contended that “*Kephale*” means “source” in *Herodotus* 4:91, against Grudem’s accusations that they have not carefully studied the text. Cervin also notes that Grudem himself must not have been careful enough either, being that he too misunderstood the text in *Herodotus*. Cervin provides a thorough explanation of *Herodotus* 4:89-91, within the correct context; this is precisely what Grudem failed to do. Cervin goes on to show the reader enough text and explanation to prove Grudem to be mistaken, in both Greek and English.⁶¹ And so Cervin concludes,

In context, it is clear that Herodotus is discussing the "source" (πηγαί) of the Tearus river. There are 38 springs, some hot, some cold, which form the source of the river. Darius camped by these springs for three days, and was so impressed with the springs that he ordered a stele erected at the spot which began.”⁶²

⁶¹ Cervin, 89-90.

⁶² Ibid., 90.

Cervin goes on to write out 4.91.2 in Greek, which translates as “The source [lit. "heads"] of the Tearus river, provides the best and most beautiful water of all rivers...,”⁶³ in English. Cervin concludes by stating that the passage clearly denotes “source,” rather than “leader,” when including the entire context of the term.⁶⁴

The second example which Grudem dismissed as evidence for the term “head” representing “source” is found in the *Orphic Fragment 21*. The term “*kepahle*” is used to describe Zeus and that it would not be fitting to denote Zeus as a “source,” yet, it does make sense to call Zeus a “leader” or one who has “authority over” others. Cervin, however, examined the passage closely and discovered that there are two issues with the fragment. One, there is a variant in the text, which Grudem mentions, but downplays its importance, and two, the entire text is ambiguous. After writing out the text in Greek, Cervin notes,

Fragment 21A has κεφαλή whereas *Fragment 21* has αρχή, which may mean "source" or, as Grudem notes, "beginning" Grudem's understanding of "beginning" for this fragment is quite valid. However, the understanding of "source" is also quite valid.⁶⁵

Cervin goes on to explain that there are two ways in which “head” could mean “source” in this text. Firstly, *Fragment 21* states, “He is the beginning, as the producing cause, and he is the end as the final cause, and he is the middle, as being present in everything equally, and everything partakes of him in a variety of ways.” Based off this passage, the idea of “source” makes perfect sense; Zeus being the “source,” the first cause of all things.⁶⁶ Secondly, the text is ambiguous and could support two different things. One, it could denote that everything has been accomplished by Zeus, or two, it might suggest that everything is done by Zeus. Either way,

⁶³ Ibid., 90.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 90.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 91.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 91.

Grudem is wrong in saying this text cannot be considered as possible evidence for the “head=source” theory.⁶⁷

Not only did Cervin offer Grudem the evidence he asked for, he also took a close look at Grudem’s “49 examples,” in which he claims as strong evidence that the term “head” commonly meant “leader” or “authority over” in ancient Greek literature. Cervin noticed that there were a few examples that were incorrectly cited and could not be used. He also points out that 12 of Grudem’s examples were found in *New Testament* passages; ones which are being disputed. Cervin states, “In citing these NT passages, Grudem commits the logical fallacy of assuming what he sets out to prove. The whole purpose of Grudem's study is to determine whether or not κεφαλή can denote "authority over" or "leader" in Paul's epistles.”⁶⁸ Grudem did not label his article as a persuasive piece, but one of genuine research, concerning the term “Kephale’s” rightful meaning. In doing this, Pauline passages cannot be used as valid evidence. Therefore, Grudem is now down to 37 examples.⁶⁹

Cervin goes on to write each example left in Greek and English, explains the context and proves Grudem’s examples to be invalid evidence that the Greek word for “head” regularly meant “leader” or “authority over.” For the sake of limitation and relevancy in this thesis, only the first 17 examples will be discussed in detail; however, it must be noted that by the end of Cervin’s responsibly researched article, he has finds that every example Grudem has given are either invalid or in major question.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 91

⁶⁸ Ibid., 94.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 94.

The first two examples were taken from *Herodotus* 7.148.3 (5th CE B.C.). The second example given by Grudem encompassed a similar word, but not the term “*kephale*.” Therefore, there is one example left to examine. Further, the context of this passage was war and battling. It tells of Greek warriors going to an Oracle for advice on how they should prepare for the next battle. The Oracle’s response was clear and advised them to protect their heads. The word “head” should be taken literally, when considering the full context.

The third example Grudem uses as evidence is found in the *Timaeus* 44D, Plato (4th c. B.C.). It is regarding how the gods created the human body and how the soul is tied to it. In this passage, Plato is expressing his high view of the literal “head” of a body. There is no metaphor going on in this passage. It is simply a glorification of the natural human head.⁷⁰

Examples 4-16 are taken from the *Septuagint* (*LXX*). Cervin notes that there are several issues with the *LLX* passages that Grudem either failed to see or choose not to mention. The greatest problem is that the Greek term “*Kephale*” is rarely translated into Hebrew. The obvious reason for this is that the term “head” in Hebrew unambiguously denotes “leadership,” and the term “head” in Greek (*Kephale*) has a vaguely understood definition. Grudem should not have been so rash in dismissing the Mickelsons when they pointed out that there are only 8 times out of 180 (4.4%) instances when the Hebrew translators of the *LXX* used “*Kephale*” in place of the Hebrew word for “head” (leader). If “*Kephale*” was commonly accepted to mean “leader,” than why did translators of the *LXX* avoid using it for the most part? Secondly, it must be noted that the *LXX* is a translation and should be valued as a secondary source. When working with secondary sources rather than primary ones, there is always a chance of translators being

⁷⁰ Ibid., 95.

influenced by their original language, poor translators, which result in poor translations. These are all risks that Grudem has failed to mention.⁷¹

Example 17 is found in the *T. Reuben 2.2* and it speaks of the evils of the mind and spirits of dishonesty, which are named to be the “heads” of rebellion. There is nothing in the passage that signifies militant, social, or political means; therefore, the term cannot denote “leader,” as Grudem suggests. Cervin actually states that “the notion or ‘source’ is much more appropriate to the context, the seven spirits being the “source” of rebellion.”⁷²

Cervin goes on to find issues with every example Grudem has proudly provided to support his complementarian agenda. He states,

The bulk of Grudem's examples of κεφαλή meaning "authority over" or "leader" have proved to be non-examples. Of Grudem's 49 examples, the 12 of the NT are illegitimate as evidence on the grounds that one cannot logically assume what one intends to prove. This leaves 37 examples, only four of which are clear and unambiguous examples of κεφαλή meaning "leader" (examples 8,10,14, 30). Eleven examples are dubious, questionable, or ambiguous (4,5, 6, 7,11,12,13, 23, 26, 36, 37); twelve examples are false (1, 3, 9,15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 28, 29); seven other examples are illegitimate (24,25,27,31,32,33,34); two examples do not exist (2 and 16);³⁸ and one example (35) cannot be decided. Of the four clear examples, three are from the *LXX* and one is from the *Shepherd of Hermas*, and it is very likely that all four of these are imported, not native, metaphors. Six of the questionable examples come from biblical sources, while all of the false examples have been from non-biblical writers.⁷³

Cervin concludes that the usage of “head” meaning “source” in Greek literature is certainly possible, but not common. He also notes that there is little to no evidence in Greek literature, which supports the term “head” denoting “leadership” or “authority over.” Cervin states that the common day meaning of the term “head” in ancient Greek was primarily understood as a literal head, and if it was used in a metaphor, it was likely to mean preeminence. He argues that it

⁷¹ Ibid., 95-96.

⁷² Ibid., 99.

⁷³ Ibid., 111.

would not have been uncommon for Paul to use this type of metaphor, since he was living in a male-dominating society. Cervin ends his article with excellent wisdom, which deserves to be put in his own words:

Furthermore, it must never be forgotten that we are 20th century Americans looking back into the world of 1st century Rome whose lingua franca was Greek. It is presumptuous for us to think that we can understand every aspect of a world which existed two thousand years in the past. Just because *we* might have difficulty with a given metaphor does not mean that Paul would have had the same difficulty; it is after all *his* metaphor, not ours.⁷⁴

Richard Cervin's research is appreciated because he is unbiased and does not claim to be an egalitarian or complementarian.⁷⁵ His article is repeatedly used because it is a direct rebuttal to leading complementarian beliefs, which are strongly defended by Wayne Grudem in the article Cervin refuted, as well as a popular Christian book. While Grudem is an excellent and persuasive author, his article is biased when it claims not to be. Further, Grudem's writing skills make his principals sound remarkably convincing to anyone who has not been trained in biblical languages and interpretation. Cervin exposes the truth, example by example, in an honest and non-biased way, which any person of literacy can follow. While Grudem may be an excellent scholar in other areas, he has unremittingly taken Greek literature out of context to substantiate complementarian conviction, which he has held all along. If Grudem would have been sincere when giving his article a title, and allowed it to expose his intentions to persuade (as he and John Piper did when they titled their book *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to evangelical feminism*), his article may have at least prompted trust in further scholarly attributes.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 112.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 112.

Due to this word study of “*kephale*,” it’s clear that the term denoting “source” is a rare certainty. While Cervin seems to have little to know faith in “*kephale*” meaning “authority over,” the eight examples found in the *LXX* can not be totally ignored. Therefore, it should be concluded that there is a slight chance Paul was denoting “source” when using the term “head” in *1 Corinthians* 11:3, and an even slighter chance, he was meaning “authority over.” Hence, it is most probable that Paul was using “head” in its common usage, which means he was likely using a Greek metaphor of the literal head being the preeminent part of the body. While preeminent can sometimes mean superior, this would take a whole other word study that neither egalitarians nor complementarians seem to want to admit. With this said, *1 Corinthians* 11:3 and all other Pauline passages which utilize the term “head” should, for now, be dismissed from any case for or against female headship in the church.

IV. *First Corinthians* 11:4-16: Female Head Coverings and Silence in the Church

Before discussing the following scriptures (*1 Corinthians* 11:4-16), it should be understood that the Apostle Paul felt a heavy responsibility to spend his Christian life introducing the Salvation of Christ to non-Jews. Paul had a very specific calling on his life in which he was keenly aware of. The Lord said of him, “... he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.”⁷⁶ Therefore, the Apostle was strategic in his ministry. His sole purpose was to make and *keep* followers of Christ. In order to do this, Paul had to learn to delegate. Each Christian church he planted was made up of “baby Christians” who he spent months and sometimes years “raising spiritually.” However, there always came a time when Paul had to move on to another mission, leaving his “children” in someone else’s care. For this reason, Paul had to choose leaders based off their Christian attributes and management abilities.

⁷⁶*Acts* 9:15-16 [NASB].

Paul had no problem choosing females to fill these roles; what he did have a problem with was anyone who brought disunity and disorder in a church he spent significant time building.

Unfortunately, the “trouble makers” in Paul’s churches were mostly females, making all women look bad. Yet, these were individual situations, which have often been taken out of context to demote all women in the universal church.

To understand *1 Corinthians* 11:4-16, one must consider the society that Paul and His churches lived in. During this time period and culture, it was crucial that women wore head coverings in public. These veils were considered sacred; they represented the honor, authority, and dignity of a woman. If a female did not wear a veil in public, she was considered a thing rather than a person, which could be taunted and disrespected. Therefore, when some of the Christian Corinthian women were removing their head coverings while praying and prophesying, it is no wonder it raised issues of offense. Many would have questioned the validity and morality of Christianity, which was a new and growing religion at the time. While it is difficult to find a comparison to help a 21st century American understand, women not wearing their head coverings just because they had converted to a new faith, may be somewhat equivalent to women suddenly deciding not to wear their wedding bands due to what they call, “a new religious freedom.”

While it is not lawful to force a married woman to wear a wedding band, it is a sacred European tradition, which Americans honor as a treasured cultural custom. One can be sure that if a new religion arose in the United States, which seemed to permit married women to stop wearing their wedding rings, that religious group would make few converts.

Paul was not legalistic, but he did make it clear that he would do anything (within obedience to Christ) to blend in with culture in hopes of not offending, and leading more people

to salvation. The Apostle expected the congregation that he started to have the same attitude.⁷⁷

One scholar writes,

Thus for Paul, Christian freedom cannot mean unveiled women who violate the general order of society. The church is not an enthusiastic cult abrogating the common life. Paul's dictum, "Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please all men in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of the many, that they may be saved" (10:32-33), is here applied to women in worship.⁷⁸

Therefore, Paul did not have an issue with Christian women prophesying and praying publically in the church, as long as they were not abusing their freedom by taking off their veils and being insensitive to the culture in which they lived. This observation is crucial for understanding the Apostle Paul's seemingly biased words, just a few passages later in his letter to the Corinthians (*1st Corinthians* 14:33-35).

Probably the most convincing evidence that Paul is not an advocator of all women, at all times, being silent in the church, is the fact that just a few passages prior to *1st Corinthians* 14:33-35, Paul is instructing on how women should pray and prophesy in public (with a head covering). It is understandable, however; why Christians get confused with Paul's feeling on women doing ministry. He states,

For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If 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 (*1st Corinthians* 14:33-35, NIV).

It is imperative to understand that the Corinthian Church was quickly falling apart. Paul was located far from this church, so he is unable to personally observe and correct the problems at hand. The Apostle's primary concern is that the church comes to a peaceful order,

⁷⁷ Williams, 63-64.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

representing Christ to the fullest. Obviously, there were female “prophets” stirring up trouble by not wearing their veils. Paul was not able to handle church discipline from afar and could not even know all the women who were causing disunity. Therefore, Paul is not contradicting himself; rather, he is basically saying, "Better yet, let all the women be silent as the law says, and their husbands can explain the message to them later." While this sounds harsh in modern church life, Paul was simply trying to put an end to church disruption; and since these particular females were abusing their freedoms in Christ, Paul points them back to doing what the law says. One scholar puts it like this,

Paul's forcing a spiritual vote of confidence at exactly this point shows that the women's silencing is not a parenthetical matter but the turning point in his argument concerning the spiritual. Once he has called for their silence he has done all he needs to do. It is as if this move solves his problem concerning tongues and prophesy and now he only needs to ensure obedience.⁷⁹

Paul does not have an issue with women being ministerial leaders as one can see throughout his various letters; what he does have a problem with is disruptive men and women who cause disorder and abuse their freedom in Christ. In the Corinthian Church's case, it just happen to be women who were causing harm. There are many women mentioned in Paul's letters who were recognized for being outstanding leaders in the Christian Church, and one does not see Paul telling those women to be silent. On the contrary, Paul displays a deep respect for the female leaders he worked side-by-side with and trusted that they would take proper care of his churches.

⁷⁹ Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 155.

V. *First Timothy 2:11-15: Female Submission, Silence, & Subordination*

First Timothy 2:11-15 seems to be the mother of confusion when it comes to Paul's feelings towards women headship. In fact, it is at this point that one has to wonder if Paul even liked women and deemed them to be useful in more ways than just childbearing. It states,

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve, and Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety (NIV).

To appreciate what Paul is trying to say to both Timothy and his congregation, one must fully understand the issues at hand in the young pastor's church. Certain females were falsely teaching and disturbing the order of the congregation. What must be understood is that prior to Christianity, Greek females were not permitted to even be instructed in spiritual matters. The synagogues were used by men alone. Therefore, when Christianity arose and welcomed female participation to learn and be instructed about Christ, many jumped at the opportunity.

Unfortunately, some women abused this new freedom and began to teach as well. Since women had been previously untrained in any sort of spiritual education, especially the very *new* religion of Christianity, their lectures were untrue and reflected poorly on Christianity. Paul was not there to correct the women who were causing problems, so he opted that all women sat in silence, listened, and learned. While many think Paul was being sexist, he was actually allowing women to have greater freedom than they had ever had. However, as stated previously, Paul had one primary concern, and that was to convert pagans to Christianity. Therefore, if this mission was being interrupted in any way, he did what he had to do for the sake of the mission. Paul was not about to let these loud-mouth women undo all he taught when he was present, especially if his "children in the faith," as well as new believers, were beginning to accept deceitful Christian

doctrine.⁸⁰ The apostle would have taken the exact same measures if he had heard certain men were perverting the Gospel of Christ with lies.

Paul's phrase, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man" comes across as if he is saying "I never ever allow women to teach men in church," in the English language. In Greek, however; there is a "present active indicative verb which can be translated, *I am not presently permitting* a woman to teach or to have authority over men."⁸¹ In other words, Paul never meant for this passage to be a universal and continuous principal.⁸² Perhaps he was suggesting that women stay quiet and listen so they could "catch-up" on the learning they were previously denied, so that one day they could teach and hold authoritative positions in the Church. No matter what the exact intentions were, it is clear in Pauline letters that the Apostle not only allowed women to be in church leadership, he welcomed it.

⁸⁰ Williams, 111-112.

⁸¹ Ibid., 112.

⁸² Ibid., 112.

CONCLUSION

Obviously, it has been a few phrases found in Paul's letters that have led many men and women to believe female headship over men is not permissible by God. Pauline scriptures that have been used to support this conviction are few and require more careful contextual examination than they have often been given. At first glance, it is understandable why many Bible readers take these verses "literally," but it is truly impossible for a 21st century American, who speaks English, to understand the literal meaning of these verses without in-depth study. When observing the "whole-picture," it is clear that the Apostle Paul held a deep respect for women who held leadership positions within the church. One must not forget the culture in which they lived during the first and second centuries. The Greco-Roman public world was dominated by men and women had little say or chances to take leadership roles, outside of their homes. When Christianity began to rise, women who took part finally had a voice and an opportunity to lead. Though some took advantage of their "new freedoms in Christ," others remained balanced and accepted leadership roles gracefully, humbly, and with a passion to see more Gentiles come to follow Christ. If Paul ever told females to "keep silent" or "not to practice authority over men," it was because they were negatively affecting the rise of Christianity, not because of their gender. It is crucial to remember that these women were the "exception." Most females Paul speaks of are ones he greatly respects as his fellow ministers of Christ. In actuality, Paul appears to have been blessed by women who stood up for the truth and walked in their new found freedom in Christ. The Apostle encouraged all Christians, despite their gender, to walk in their spiritual gifts and leadership ability, in hopes of winning souls for the sake of Jesus Christ. Despite complementarian agenda or any other groups who oppose female leadership over both genders; Christian women will continue to answer God's calling on

their lives and carry on to operate at every official level of church leadership, just as women have done since the first and second centuries of Christianity.

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