4TH EDITION
revised and expanded

WOMEN, FORGIVE US!



WHAT WE MEN
MUST MAKE RIGHT
ON THE ROLE OF WOMAN AND MAN

HANS-JÖRG RONSDORF

WOMEN, FORGIVE US!

What We Men Must Make Right

On the Role of Woman and Man

Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf

German paperback edition available to order at www.hans-joerg-ronsdorf.de for €13.80 plus shipping.

4th expanded edition (German edition), July 2023

Translated from the German, 2026 – free download at www.hans-joerg-ronsdorf.de

© Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf – all rights reserved.

Albis 6½

87477 Sulzberg

Typesetting: Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf, with Papyrus Autor

Contact email: hj-ronsdorf@t-online.de

ISBN of the German edition 978-3-9820715-5-8

Cover design: Tobias Stricker

Graphics: Laura-Kristin Ronsdorf

Printing: www.wir-machen-druck.de

Bible translation used in the German edition, unless otherwise indicated:

Elberfelder Übersetzung (German Bible translation), Edition CSV Hückeswagen

For my beloved wife,

for my wonderful daughters,

for my esteemed mother,

for my grandmothers,

for my sister,

for my sisters

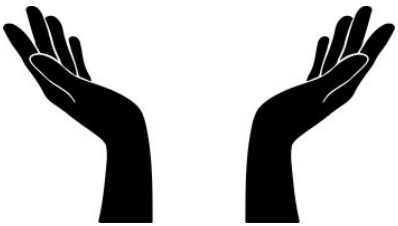
and friends in Christ,

all daughters of Eve,

with whom I have worked

together for God's kingdom

and will yet serve.



Contents

1 Preface **10**

1.1 Preface to the Second, Expanded Edition **13**

1.2 Preface to the Fourth Edition **14**

1.3 Who Is Writing This Book **14**

2 Creation and Fall **21**

2.1 How It All Began **21**

2.1.1 The Sixth Day's Work 23

2.1.2 The Human Being: God's Image – Imago Dei 24

2.1.3 The Human Being as Man and Woman 25

2.1.4 The Human Being and God's Commission 25

2.1.5 The Creation of Adam and Eve 27

2.1.6 A Brief Excursus on Hebrew Key Words 28

2.1.7 Adam Needs Help 29

2.1.8 Eve Is Created 31

2.1.9 From the Rib 32

2.1.10 The "Man-ess" (Männin) 34

2.1.11 Given to One Another 35

2.2 The Fall of Man and Woman **37**

2.2.1 Eve's Answer 41

2.2.2 Eve's Toil, Pregnancy, and Subjugation 41

2.2.3 Your Desire Will Be for Him, and He Will Rule over You 46

2.3 Objections to Equality **49**

2.4 The Differences between Man and Woman **53**

2.5 Creation Order **55**

2.5.1 From the Garden in Eden to the New Jerusalem 57

2.6 He Will Rule over You – the History **58**

2.6.1 Antiquity 59

2.6.2 Aristotle 60

2.6.3 The Woman as Property 62

2.6.4 Patriarchy 63

2.6.5 Greek Influence on Jewish Thought 64

2.6.6 Church Fathers 65

2.6.7 Reformation 67

2.6.8 The Secular Women's Rights Movement 68

3 Jesus the Messiah and Women **72**

3.1 Serving Women Disciples 73
3.2 Women Are to Learn 74
3.3 All Equal 75
3.4 Menstruation Is No Longer Uncleanness 76
3.5 Cast Out and Found 76
3.6 It Takes Two to Commit Adultery 78
3.7 Standing Upright and at Full Height 79
3.8 No Double Standard 80
3.9 Outrageous Grace 80
3.10 The Cross: Where Are the Men? 82
3.11 Mary, the Apostle 83

4 Paul, the Friend of Women 86
4.1 Lydia 87
4.2 Phoebe 88
4.3 Prisca 90
4.4 Junia 91
4.5 Mary, Tryphena and Tryphosa, Persis 92
4.6 Euodia and Syntyche 93
4.7 Chloe 94
4.8 Nympha 94
4.9 Paul, the Nursing Mother 96

5 Man and Woman in Marriage 99
5.1 The Ancient Household and Its Rules 99
5.1.1 Household Codes in the New Testament 100
5.1.2 The Effect of Christian Household Codes 102
5.1.3 The Household Code in Ephesians 5 103
5.1.4 The Reason for Mutual Submission 104
5.1.5 Instructions for Christian Life – Today 107
5.1.6 The Woman in the Ancient Household 107
5.2 The Head and Submission: Ephesians 5 109
5.2.1 The Head 110
5.2.2 Family in Antiquity 110
5.2.3 Take It Literally? 111
5.2.4 Contextualization 113
5.2.5 Once More: The Head 114
5.2.6 Conclusions 117
5.3 Being Submissive 119
5.3.1 Conclusion 125

6 Man and Woman in the Church **129**
6.1 1 Corinthians 11 – Head, Hair, and Veil **131**
6.1.1 Guidelines and Pointers for Interpreting the Text 133
6.1.2 The Scope of the Text 134
6.1.3 Three Pairs with One Head 135
6.1.4 What Does Head Mean? 137
6.1.5 Head Covering in Corinth 141
6.1.6 Having a Sign of Authority on the Head? 144
6.1.7 Present-Day Relevance 145
6.1.8 Explanatory Paraphrase 147
6.1.9 Conclusion and Summary 149
6.1.10 Another Reading of 1 Corinthians 11 151
Examples of Quotations **151**
6.1.11 Alternative Translation of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 153
6.1.12 Conclusion 155
6.2 Not Speaking, but Keeping Silent **157**
6.2.1 Questions 159
6.2.2 Puzzlement at the End of the Chapter 160
6.2.3 The Quotation Reading 161
6.2.4 A Roman Law? 165
6.2.5 By No Means! 166
6.2.6 Further Explanations 166
6.2.7 Probably Not from Paul 169
6.2.8 Final Assessment 175
6.3 May Women Teach? **178**
6.3.1 The Text 1 Timothy 2:8-15 180
6.3.2 The Historical Situation in Ephesus 180
6.3.3 The Setting 182
6.3.4 Praying in Every Place, Anger, and Adornment 183
6.3.5 Learning in Quietness and Submission 185
6.3.6 Not to Teach and Rule over the Man 186
6.3.7 Is Teaching the Same as Ruling? 186
6.3.8 What Does "Rule" Mean? 187
6.3.9 Adam and Eve in Ephesus 190
6.3.10 I Am Not Now Permitting 192
6.3.11 Salvation through Childbearing? 192
6.3.12 1 Timothy Today 194
6.3.13 Conclusions 195
6.3.14 An Explanatory Rendering of the Timothy Text 195

6.4 Universal and Time-Bound Commands ... **197**
6.4.1 Biblicism and Sola Scriptura ... 198
6.4.2 Taking Literally and the Literal Sense ... 200

7 Women Priests, Women Elders, and Women Deacons ... **202**
7.1 The Priesthood of All Believers ... **202**
7.2 Elders and Women Elders ... **203**
7.3 She Desires a Noble Task ... **205**
7.4 Women Deacons ... **206**
7.5 Women Preachers ... **208**
7.6 Summary ... **210**

8 "One in Christ": Galatians 3:28 ... **211**
8.1 What the Text Says ... **212**
8.2 What the Text Does Not Directly Say ... **213**
8.3 What the Text Does Say Indirectly ... **214**
8.3.1 Jew and Greek ... 214
8.3.2 Slave and Free ... 215
8.3.3 Information on Slavery ... 216
8.3.4 Man and Woman ... 216
8.3.5 Earthly and Spiritual? ... 217
8.3.6 There Is Not Male and Female ... 218
8.4 Summary and Conclusion ... **220**

9 God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit ... **221**
9.1 Is God Male? ... **222**
9.2 You Shall Not Make for Yourself an Image ... **224**
9.3 Female Images of God ... **225**
9.4 Father and Son ... **226**
9.5 Submission of the Eternal Son? ... **227**
9.6 Jesus and His 12 Disciples ... **230**
9.7 Conclusion ... **232**

10 My Confession of Guilt ... **233**

11 Conclusion and Outlook ... **237**
11.1 Pointers and Advice ... **240**

12 The Difference ... **242**
12.1 The Gift-Based Model ... **242**
12.2 The Hierarchical Model ... **244**

13 Afterwords from Various Readers ... **246**

13.1 The Open View Has Become Overgrown! 246
13.2 What Might Have Been! 248
The "Women's Question" and "Love for Our Brothers and Sisters" 250
13.3 Change 252

14 Closing Argument: Is the Women's Question So Important? 254
14.1 It Is Not about a Few (Forbidden) Ministries 254
14.2 What Men Feel and Do Not Feel 255
14.3 How Do We Read the Bible on the Women's Question? 256
14.4 Intuition 256
14.5 What I Am Not Concerned With 258
14.6 Grounds for Separation? 258
14.7 Women Must Stand Up 259
14.8 One Day and Now 259

15 Bibliography 261

16 Books by the Author 265

17 Recommended Books 267
Hanna-Maria Schmalenbach 269
Frausein zur Ehre Gottes (Being a Woman to the Glory of God) 269

1 Preface

Another book on this perennial issue? Hasn't everything already been said and written about it? Arguing again, or arguing on? Wouldn't an apologetic subject be more important, to defend the faith? It became clear to me that this subject, too, belongs to apologetics. It is the defense of universal ethical norms in a postmodern secular society, but also within a conservative and biblicist Christianity. I will make clear why the latter is the case as well.

The petty war, the struggle, and the strain over these questions go on even without this book. They still split churches. Some already over the question of whether women's voices may be heard in the worship service at all. Others over the question of whether they may have women deacons or women elders.[1] Or whether women may hold leadership functions and preach.

There are positions that sit in our heads like impregnable fortresses: that the word of God must be taken literally, against every spirit of the age. And there are those who have questions and doubts about whether it is to be followed literally like this by us today.

In this book I summarize my study of the subject. Whoever knows the literature on this subject can hardly expect new insights. Nor a review of all the positions that exist, from the most conservative to the most progressive. This book is *not* an open-ended study – it is a clear position. Finding it and giving reasons for it took me decades. It differs from what I learned and held earlier.

Does it take a whole book to explain this? Is it that complicated? Yes and no. If you follow the history of miscarriages of justice, as can be observed with death-row inmates in the USA, an immense effort of argument and gathering of evidence is often required to prove innocence. Sometimes, though, a DNA test is enough. However much effort it may take, look into the faces of such death-

1. In most places I use this feminine form of the term for clarity (German *Ältestinnen*, "women elders"). In common use today, and also in the original biblical languages, is the generic masculine, which includes the feminine form (see chapter 6.4.1).

row inmates who are released after 30, 40, or 50 years! In the same way you will find simple thoughts in this book, and sometimes somewhat more complex ones. The Bible is not always easy to understand. To think so would be a fallacy. Even the fisherman and apostle Peter notes this when he speaks of letters of Paul (2 Peter 3:15-16) that are not easy to understand.

If this book is read, rebuttals, refutations, and outrage will not be long in coming. I know these mechanisms and was once part of them myself. Even if there is no change of mind, at least the subject will be brought up.

Right now, as I write these lines, it is once again being hotly debated in the evangelical world of the USA. I cannot claim to have written this book without emotion. Nevertheless, I have tried to remain objective. May the reader be the judge of that.

And: There are, of course, points on which one can quite legitimately hold a different opinion. There I make my decisions in such a way that, as I understand it, they fit into the big biblical picture.

My heart goes out to the many women and the men affected who follow Jesus and find this subject of gender roles, and the prohibitions on speaking, teaching, and leading, questionable and a burden. Because on the one hand they want to take the Bible seriously, but on the other hand they cannot put it into practice. In addition – and this is not insignificant – there is the question of how we are perceived by the world in this matter. The world to which we bring the gospel.

Has God made it so hard for us? Is it his intention that millions of hours of study, prayer, and discussion be invested in these questions? That divisions be accepted and unity sacrificed?

I am convinced – and this book is my plea for it – that these questions are highly relevant. For if women stand hierarchically beneath men, and their ministry in church and congregation is therefore restricted (despite every assurance that there are countless other, non-public ministries), then God have mercy on us if we are wrong.

It is a question of obedience. For both sexes. Not of a legalistic, slavish, and fearful obedience.

This book is a summary of my studies and of countless conversations and discussions in internet forums over the last 40 years or so. I have been able to learn a great deal from others.

I try to show a biblical way. I explain it as simply as possible. At times it may become too complex for one reader or another. In that case I recommend setting it aside and reading the next chapter. I do not write as a theologian, nor for theologians or those who think they are. I have in mind those with whom I traveled together for a long time, and those who are new to the faith, whom I am to serve in teaching. I hope and pray that this book will be a help for men and women alike.

Some words of the Bible need to be thought through afresh. It is not the first time this has happened. For some, a new interpretation of biblical texts is presumptuous and suspect. Boundaries would be shifted, they say. But "*for a theology that sees itself in the tradition of the Reformation, it is part of its very nature that habits are questioned and biblical texts are read anew.*"[2]

You will find many quotations in this book. I often found these valuable thoughts in the English-speaking world and wanted to make them accessible to German-speaking readers.

Finally: *Our theology is not inerrant. Never.* However much we may wish it were. Like all books, this book has its mistakes, weaknesses, and strengths. This book, too, is one that others could have written better. I thank all the sisters and brothers involved for their thoughts, corrections, suggestions, and afterwords. I especially thank Conny Endrös (Lauben near Kempten in the Allgäu) and Bernd Hüsken (Schwelm) for editing the manuscript. It delights me and reminds me of my youth in Schwelm, where I grew up and received a good spiritual formation.

Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf

2. Wunderli, 53, "Ihm gegenüber": Geschlechter-Gleichberechtigung in der Kirche und was die Bibel dazu (nicht) sagt, 2020

Sulzberg in the Allgäu, November 2020

I delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.

Your precepts are my delight, they are my counselors.

I run in the path of your commands, for you make my heart wide.

Psalm 119:16, 24, 32 (Zürcher Bibel, German Bible translation)

1.1 Preface to the Second, Expanded Edition

For the second edition I decided on a light revision and some additions. I had felt that a few corrections were necessary, but even more so additions and stylistic improvements.

Essentially, I reworked the chapters on the three core texts on this subject. I expanded them, but also shortened them where possible. This applies especially to the chapter on head, hair, and veil.

After the first edition was published, I looked through even more material and also produced some of my own. You will find some of it on my homepage www.hans-joerg-ronsdorf.de.

In the USA a new book on this subject appears almost every month. Most of them are of high theological quality and work closely with the texts of the New Testament. They shed light on the subject in a way that confirms what I want to say in this book. More than ever I am certain that the full equality in rank of men and women in every area of life is willed by God.

I hope and pray that this biblical truth will bring healing to marriages, families, and churches. Perhaps only now is the book the way it should be. But it is still fallible – not the truth, but my interpretation.

Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf,

Sulzberg, July 2021

The third edition became necessary because of increased demand. At the same time I used the opportunity to make further minor corrections and additions. This does not change the message of this book. I am glad that this subject is being discussed more and more, and that sisters in the Lord are grasping more and more what their calling is.

Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf,

Augsburg, November 2021

1.2 Preface to the Fourth Edition

Almost two years have passed. The subject of this book remains a perennial issue. These days in the USA, churches are being expelled from the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) if they put women in leadership roles or have women pastors. And this in the Southern states, where many Christians also used the Bible to justify slavery.

In this 4th edition there is an important addition on the command of silence in 1 Corinthians 14.

Take a look at my homepage www.hans-joerg-ronsdorf.de, since new work on the subject keeps appearing there.

Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf

Augsburg, July 2023

1.3 Who Is Writing This Book

Usually the content of a book is more important than its author. In this case, with a subject so sensitive among conservative Christians, I would like to inform the reader about who is writing this book. And how he came to the positions described here.

Until I was thirty-six, my wife, our five children, and I were part of a (closed, exclusive) Brethren assembly, also known as the "Old Assembly" (*Alte Versammlung*). They do not call themselves that, since they reject any "denominational name." In these assemblies or worship services the women are silent. They do not take part. Almost always men and women sit separately. Women do not wear trousers in the worship service. Women cover their heads.

Then we became part of a church (movement) in the Allgäu that traced its origins to a work of God in the 1980s. There, in some of the churches, women were allowed to pray aloud, to give a testimony, or to suggest a song. Because of my background I struggled with this, since 1 Corinthians 14 commands women to be silent.

After a few years I faced this question again and examined Scripture intensively. It actually became clear to me that this practice – women praying aloud, giving testimony, and suggesting songs – is thoroughly biblical. My reasons can be found in the following chapters.

I came to see their participation more and more positively. One could object right away that my study of Scripture was therefore already influenced in this direction by this positive attitude. Unconsciously that may have been the case. Consciously it was not. I will show exactly why my conviction changed.

Now in this church women did not preach, and they were not allowed to be women deacons or women elders. That was, and still is, the case in befriended churches as well. In some of them the sisters are even silent, which can be traced back to the influence of, or closeness to, the Open Brethren assemblies in Germany and a church movement in the Salzburg region.

A few years ago I left this church. For reasons that contribute nothing to the subject here. This led to an experience that others have had too. Distance in space and time opens up for me a new, analytical view of what one belonged to for many years. I was an elder there for seven years, and I myself held, defended, and applied this view of the role of women. But the distance made it possible to think about this question anew. Without the outward pressure of a

community, I came over time to different insights. Probably that would not have been possible without the distance.

This process of changing my mind, which I do not hide from the reader, can be deliberately interpreted in a negative way – as decline, apostasy, worldliness. I have known these patterns of thought and judgments of motive, in almost "prophetic" proportions, since my youth. They are strong and run deep. It is hard to break free of them. I myself was an active part of it.

That is my church situation and my past. The Bible grants great freedom in church life. How we arrange our gatherings is not prescribed. There is no single right way. Even if there are Christians who believe there is. The form of the worship service – and there are many – is free! The role of women in it is the subject of this book.

The most important thing about me is still missing. Or better, the most important person in my life: my wife, Christine. For her I left father and mother, to share my life with her. We have five grown children. My wife is a strong personality. A lioness of a mother who can fight. A wise woman. For whom I am thankful above all else, just as many of my brothers in the Lord are thankful for their wives. She is part of my personal journey of discovery in matters of gender. Without her I would not be where I stand today. I am and remain a learner – and also someone who errs.

We both grew up in a free and democratic country. With the law of equal rights for men and women, even though women are still disadvantaged today. I am speaking of Germany and the Western cultural sphere. We have never yet experienced war. Never yet a famine. This year we are experiencing the first pandemic of our generation. For the first time, the feeling of eternal and untouchable security and growth is being shaken.

These life experiences, which so far have been overwhelmingly positive, shape our thinking and our view of other cultures. I consider equal rights to be a beneficial achievement of modern democracy. Comparable to the abolition of slavery, which never corresponds to God's will.

I mention this because our upbringing was shaped by the thinking of the (exclusive) Brethren movement. There men and women were and are regarded as being of equal worth, but the woman is excluded from participation in the church's worship service. The woman is subordinate. She is the man's helper (*Gehilfin*). The man is the head and has the leadership in marriage. In this way people believe they are being obedient to God's Word. Faithful to the Bible.

One can hold this conviction. But it is fair to ask to what extent this corresponds – or can correspond at all – to the reality of life today. What did my marriage look like, and how have I experienced the marriages of parents, grandparents, and today of friends and acquaintances who, out of conviction, try to live out a difference in rank or authority between the sexes?

Although in the early years of our marriage I decided many things myself and without consulting my wife, today I hardly ever do that anymore. We have always functioned best when we decided and acted as a team. Respect and love are not a one-way street. Sharing with one another and living together, speaking and listening as equals – that is the ideal situation. Everyone has strong and weak phases. Complementing each other whenever it is necessary – and it is normal anyway. It is not always the man who goes first. It can also be the woman. Taking turns. Complementing. Coordinated. Open. Willing to be corrected. Listening. Praying together. That is what I experience as the reality of life. Anything else would be a step backward. I do not want to, and will not, conduct a marriage as in the ancient Near East, in the time of Abraham or David. Nor as in the time of Jesus, and just as little as in the time of the Reformation. Nor as my grandparents did. As far as that is concerned, I am thankful to live in the twenty-first century.

Now I notice that those who believe they live faithfully to the Bible in the question of men and women hardly live any differently in practice than we do. Their marriages, too, are marked by equal rights – not by one-sidedness, but by twoness in unity. By this I mean that, apart from exceptions, I see nowhere Christian marriages as Paul and Peter describe them (these texts will be discussed in detail). On the contrary, these wives walk alongside their husbands as

equals. Most of the time they are a team. The sweeping insinuation that women want to manipulate or control their husbands is unfair. Even if that does happen. Sin remains a small or large source of fire in every marriage. But where there is good partnership, it is usually put out.

When in this book I advocate and give reasons for the view of marriage just described and a different role of women in the church, this will provoke incomprehension, rejection, alarm, and dismay in some. It always costs something to stand up for one's convictions. Especially when one argues against the position of one's own church or friends. I do so with respect for the old, conservative positions. Even though I consider them wrong. They dampen the Spirit of God and resist him. I wish every reader the perseverance to read through to the end of the book. I will gladly have a conversation about the content of my book once it has been read in full.

You are welcome to write to me, as long as the arguments are objective and free of insinuations. I know this business, in which things often get heated and unobjective – and sometimes personal and hurtful – precisely on these questions.

Let each person examine himself before God and recognize that our knowledge comes piece by piece and step by step, and is strongly shaped by our surroundings and their time.

From my youth on I was encouraged to read Scripture. Daily. And to study it. I did that. I am thankful for the good biblical foundation that was passed on to me in the "Assembly." This book is not an accusation or a reckoning with my past, in case anyone wants to read it that way. In any case, studying the Bible became my hobby from my early youth, and more than that. And it has remained so to this day. Back then I wanted to become a respected teacher of Scripture too, like my role models, some of whom are still living today. That motive disappeared long ago. Now if someone studies Scripture so much and so intensively, what do we think – what insights will come out of it? The same thing over and over again?

Sometimes studying Scripture is like Israel, which has a veil over its eyes (2 Corinthians 3:15). Often, despite the presence of the Holy Spirit, we see the same thing over and over. But whoever studies Scripture again and again should not be surprised if this Spirit suddenly shows something new (Matthew 13:52), even after almost 2,000 years. Is God's Word not inexhaustible? Also with the help of theologians and biblical scholarship. With the help of Bible schools and seminaries that also study Scripture. When, in this complex of questions about men and women in the church, in marriage, and in the kingdom of God, new or different insights emerge than those believed for centuries to be the only correct ones, they should not be rejected for that reason alone. This subject is not decisive for salvation, and we should not act as if it were! It is simply not a touchstone of faithfulness to the Bible.

I know from experience what it means to have to question truths one has cherished for several decades, because the evidence of Scripture is not as unambiguous and clear after all as one always thought or was taught. Processes of rethinking are painful; they do something to us. They show how fallible we are, helpless and simply dependent on God. We can bring our complaint to him, bring him our ignorance and questions and also our doubts. And our "blind spots," which crept in unnoticed where one is at home only in one's own church milieu and perceives one's own world as the only legitimate or Bible-faithful one.

For a few years I took part in a Biblical Greek forum. Many things were discussed, and discussed constructively. The subject of this book was also discussed. I collected a great deal back then and have now reread it. From a distance of several years it strikes me that the lines of argument were rarely if ever open-ended. No matter how high the linguistic competence, the prior decision and conditioning in favor of one position was decisive for the arguments pro or contra. In this case: whether women may say anything at all in the worship service, whether they should cover their heads today – quite apart from teaching or leading. Can one really prove or disprove anything with the Bible?

I never intended to write about this subject. It is controversial and fiercely contested. A minefield. There are no laurels to be won here. I could easily have used my time for other things in the kingdom of God. But I knew I was personally called to do it. People will accuse me of adapting to the spirit of the age. There is nothing I can do about that. I am not defending an emancipatory standpoint that the world is fighting for. My path is meant to be what the Bible teaches me.

Your word shines for me where I walk; it is a light on my path.

Full of wonders is what you testify in your word; therefore I hold to it with all my heart.

Psalm 119:105, 129 (Neue Genfer Übersetzung NGÜ, German Bible translation)

2 Creation and Fall

To understand a thing well, one should examine its origin. Almost every Christian book devoted to this subject begins with the primeval history. When the Pharisees wanted to trip Jesus up on the subject of divorce, he placed this problem in the light of the creation story (Matthew 19:3-9). For him, what was decisive was how it was in the beginning. What God's good plan had intended for humanity. What he said on divorce, by the way, served to protect women, who were more or less at the mercy of their husbands' whims when it came to being sent away.

In this book I try to follow this perspective of Jesus consistently. I spend time in the garden of paradise and will look closely at what happened. What was created, and how. What was said. For when it comes to the relationship of woman and man, the first three chapters of the Bible are decisive. *If the beginning – before the Fall – describes the ideal, then every detail counts.* Admittedly, though, it is a short text. The creation narrative is unique and deep. But brief. In a language that is no longer spoken today. And the questions people in the ancient Near East asked about origins differ from the ones we ask. Much remains open.

That is why general derivations or binding conclusions should be treated with caution. In any case, the relatively short description of the creation of the first human couple must not be overloaded with conclusions.

2.1 How It All Began

In many books on this subject one can almost always trace the following: the way a person interprets this primeval history is the way he interprets all the relevant texts of the New Testament. One's view of the primeval history sets the course for the position one holds on this subject. Depending on the pattern of interpretation, opposing and contradictory positions result. By and large there are two:

The equality in rank of man and woman without any difference in hierarchy (called egalitarianism in the English-speaking world).

The leadership role of the man and the subordination of the woman on the basis of a hierarchical difference (complementarianism).

Both positions are firmly committed to equal worth and to difference, but they have a different understanding of the roles and the hierarchy of the sexes. In chapter 12 ("The Difference") you will find a schematic overview of both positions.

In the German-speaking world I consider the terms used in the English-speaking world unfortunate. Complementary means completing the other. That also applies where there is a difference in rank. Mutual completion, however, is held by both standpoints. The one with, the other without a difference in hierarchy.

I begin with a curious look at events that took place many thousands of years ago. For that reason alone – because the records and the event are so long ago – our view of these narratives is not timeless or free of interpretation. The creation account was written in a historical situation, namely in the setting of the ancient Near East. *This text was not written to us in the twenty-first century. As if we in the twenty-first century were the first addressees. But these texts were written for us.* A difference one must not forget.

Paul, the apostle, refers several times in his letters to the creation of man and woman. I will *not* draw on these as an aid to understanding, *since in these texts Paul does not interpret or explain the creation of man and woman, but applies it to specific situations.* That is a big difference. The creation story will first speak for itself. Later I will come to the Pauline texts and his interpretation in detail. First I will sketch a picture from the narrative of the first two chapters of Genesis. Before the Fall. Before there were negative and deforming cultural influences on gender roles. Just as Jesus does when he speaks of the beginning.

2.1.1 The Sixth Day's Work

It takes until the last day of the creation narrative before the human being is created. Together with the land animals, the earth becomes their home. Here is the description of the sixth day, after the land animals had been created:

> [Genesis 1:26-31, translated from the German Elberfelder Bible] And God said: *Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness; and let them rule* over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that moves on the earth!
>
> *And God created the human being in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*
>
> And God blessed them, and God said to them: *Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it*; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every animal that moves on the earth!
>
> And God said: See, I have given you every seed-bearing plant that is on the face of the whole earth, and every tree that bears fruit with seed in it: it shall be food for you; and to every animal of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that moves on the earth, in which there is a living soul, I have given every green plant for food. And it was so. *And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.* And there was evening, and there was morning: the sixth day.

In examining this text and all the others that follow, the point is not a general interpretation or exegesis. The focus is on the two-ness of woman and man in their relationship to each other and to their Creator. What light can these texts shed on the subject of this book? How have they been interpreted and applied?

One could write, cite, and quote a great deal. Within the scope of this book I will keep it short and try to describe the big picture.

2.1.2 The Human Being: God's Image – Imago Dei

The human being – the Hebrew word is *adam (earthling)* – is raised above all other creatures. Perhaps the popular phrase "crown of creation" fits. It is obvious that the human being is extraordinary in relation to everything else. As God's image, as like him, he becomes, so to speak, God's representative in the created, visible realm. On earth, dominion is entrusted to him on God's behalf.[3] He becomes the representative of his Creator. In this "equipment" as God's image, like him (not the same as him), he is also – unlike the animals – the one who can speak with God. A counterpart with whom the Creator communicates and has fellowship.

To be this – like God – the human being is "majestically" equipped and gifted with abilities and possibilities that God also has. Since God is not material but spirit, much of him becomes visible on earth in the human being.

In the ancient Near East it was the kings and rulers who set up their statues in conquered territories to demonstrate their claim to power. *An image, without being bodily present.*

The creation narrative is therefore unique in the cultural setting in which it arose, because it makes every human being – woman and man, even slaves – kings and regents. *Every single human being is the image of God. And thereby receives dignity, worth, and protection. That is the Bible's view of the human being.* The foundation on which everything else is built that makes up – or should make up – being human and living together.

Every man and every woman bears the unmistakable dignity of being made in the image of God. Being human as man and woman means being the image of God.

3. God is serious about handing dominion over to human beings. With all the possible consequences that may arise for human beings from this authorization and freedom. Good and bad. God respects this commission and will not constantly intervene to correct.

2.1.3 The Human Being as Man and Woman

The role of bearing God's image belongs to the human being, whether male or female. So it is intended, and it cannot be otherwise: it takes both sexes to represent God and to fulfill the creation mandate. Neither can ultimately be God's image fully on his or her own.

God himself makes no comment on the difference between the sexes. Without any difference in abilities, worth, significance, role, or position, both are mentioned in one breath. In one word: the human being. For that time, this too was unique. *Here the woman stands beside the man as his equal in rank.* In the cultures of the ancient Near East, that was not the norm.

The question here is not whether the sexes differ in their constitution, function, or role. On the first page of the Bible, where the foundation for everything is laid, the first concern is equality. That is how the Bible opens the subject of woman and man. *This is the most important setting of the course, the premise and basic assumption of Holy Scripture itself, by which everything else it says is explained and oriented.* And by which we may have to correct ourselves. In this light – not the other way around – Paul must also be interpreted. More on that later.

2.1.4 The Human Being and God's Commission

God blesses human beings and thereby enables them to carry out their commission as God's representatives. On the one hand, this is dominion over the earth and the animals. On the other hand, it is the command to be fruitful and multiply, in order to populate and take possession of the earth, the whole globe, to govern it with care and to make use of it gently. In other words: to extend paradise over the whole earth. We do not know exactly what state nature was in when this commission was given.

It is a mandate for civilization. It is also called the cultural mandate. It is the living out of all God-given abilities in the use of all the God-given resources of the earth, as God created it. This text has agriculture, farming, and animal

husbandry as its living environment. But the development over thousands of years up to today shows how many-layered the earth and its resources are on the one hand, and the abilities and gifts of human beings on the other. A potential that God himself laid down.

The point is not *how* the commission was carried out. It is a commission given before the Fall.[4] It did not change after the Fall. As described here, it applies to this day, for man and woman.

Reproduction, as it also happens in the animal world, can only be accomplished by man and woman together. Both sexes have to come to terms together with this fact and with sexuality.

In this extensive, highly responsible commission, man and woman are equal, of equal standing, dependent on each other just as they are on God's blessing. Without any hierarchy, without any question or stipulation of authority as to who is the one in charge in this life task.

The human being, man and woman, are rightly described – in the setting of the garden paradise and with their commission – as *king-priests*.[5] On the one hand, they rule over the earth as God's representatives. But they are also the ones who live in God's presence, in the garden paradise. This role applies equally to both, to man and to woman.

This important aspect, which will not be explored further here, arises from various *parallels between paradise in Eden and the symbolism of the temple.*[6]

4. (status integritatis – the state of integrity before the Fall, as opposed to the status corruptionis – the state of corruption after the Fall)

5. Beale, Gregory K., 65 ff., Der Tempel aller Zeiten, 2011

6. *There is a direct connection between paradise in Genesis 2 and the temple:* East entrance: The entrance of the garden of paradise faced east, exactly like the temple house proper and the camp of the Shekhinah (Gen 3:24; miqedem = to the east). River: The river that springs up in Eden finds its wonderful counterpart in the temple river of the sanctuary according to Ezekiel's building plan (Ezek 47). God's presence: God's presence and God's walking about could be experienced in a special way in the garden of Eden, as in the temple (Gen 3:8-9; Lev 26:11-12). Cherubim: The cherubim, so important in connection with the temple (e.g., Exod 25:18; 26:1, 31; 1 Kgs 6:23, 29), had their very significant function as guardians in the garden of Eden (Gen 3:24). Worship: Adam's work in the garden is described with the terms "work" ('avad) and "keep" (shamar) as a service to God (Gen 2:5, 15). In connection with the sanctuary, these verbs are typical words describing the service of the priests and Levites ('avad: Num 4:24, 26, 30, 37, 41, 47; 8:11, 15, 19, 22, 25, 26; shamar: Num 3:7, 8, 10, 28, 32, 38; 18:3, 4, 5, 7). See Roger Liebi in Genesis 2: Die Schöpfung des Menschen

With regard to man and woman in the church and in gatherings for worship, there is a first, if indirect, indication here that they are active there, too, as equals. The priesthood of all believers is already hinted at here.

2.1.5 The Creation of Adam and Eve

In Genesis 2 the narrative turns concretely to the creation of the human being. What is reported in general terms in chapter 1, within the framework of the six days' work of God, Elohim, now passes into an expressive narrative. The most important thing from chapter 1 is, so to speak, taken out and deepened. In chapter 1 one finds the creation account, in chapter 2 the paradise account. The garden of Eden is the place where things happen. The name of God is now Yahweh Elohim. The God who as Creator forms the human being, comes close to him, and is there for him.

> [Genesis 2:4-9, translated from the German Elberfelder Bible] This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, on the day when the LORD God made earth and heavens, and before any shrub of the field was on the earth, and before any plant of the field had sprouted; for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and *there was no human being to work the ground.*
>
> But a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. And *the LORD God formed the human being, dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the human being became a living soul.*

The narrative conveys the creation of Adam from the dust of the ground. The one who is God's image is created from the earth. The earth is his home and always will be. Even in the new creation. His closeness to the earth and his transience are both expressed in this strange act of creation. Clay is actually used to build houses, not human beings. But God does it in this strange, mysterious way. Brought to life by the breath of God, by the Spirit of God, Adam becomes a living soul.

2.1.6 A Brief Excursus on Hebrew Key Words

Key words (*Leitworte*) have an important significance in Hebrew biblical texts. But they only reveal themselves when one *hears the Hebrew text!*

One such chain of key words comprises the words Adam (human being), Adama (soil), Dam (blood) – the linguistic root of all three is "red stuff." These terms show the manifold connection of the human being with the earth.

"Adama" is the earth. "Adam" is the earthling who came from it. "Dam," the blood, is the carrier of life (the human blood shed when Cain murdered his brother Abel returns to the earth – Genesis 4:10-11).

More than that: A threefold umbilical cord binds us to Mother Earth. From her we were taken, to her is our homecoming, from her we all draw our food. … Adam and Adama are bound together in a shared destiny that none of us is able to dissolve. In the Bible, "Adam" meets us as the proper name of the first human being. But "Adam" is always (also) the generic term "human being," which can denote both all of Adam's descendants together and every human child as an individual. In both cases "earthling," as the epitome of being bound to the earth, points to the frailty and mortality of our humanity. In the Hebrew of the Bible's prophetic texts, the collective name for every two-legged creature is "son of man" (literally: son of Adam), as Jesus also calls himself.[7]

> And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, toward the east, and there he put the human being whom he had formed. And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground, pleasant to look at and good for food; and the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
>
> [Genesis 2:15] And *the LORD God took the human being and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and to keep it.*

7. After P. Lapide, War Eva an allem schuld? 1998, pp. 71 f.

The commission already described in chapter 1 becomes more concrete here. Cultivating the soil, breeding food plants and grain, is among the things in view here. In other words, agriculture. Just as much – and just as important – the keeping of the place God has prepared for the human being. Keeping belongs to the creation mandate. Accordingly, even in the situation described there are already negative tendencies and forces that must be held back and warded off. The serpent is an example of this.

Here Adam is in focus. Before Eve was created.

2.1.7 Adam Needs Help

> [Genesis 2:18-20] And the LORD God said: *It is not good that the human being should be alone; I will make him a helper who corresponds to him.* And the LORD God formed out of the ground every animal of the field and every bird of the heavens, and he brought them to the human being to see what he would call them; and whatever the human being called each living creature, that was to be its name. And the human being gave names to all the livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every animal of the field. But *for Adam he found no helper who corresponded to him.*

In chapter 1 it is mentioned as a matter of course: man and woman are each, alone but also together, God's image. Here the special process by which the two-ness came about is described. One can hardly imagine that all this happened on the sixth day. One could free oneself, in one's thinking, from a tight time frame of a sixth day lasting 24 hours.

This narrative wants to make essential things clear. What God does here is not an experiment for himself, but a lesson for Adam. And for us. The naming of many animals shows the closeness of all living beings, of humans to animals, but also the elevated position of the human being over the animal. *Here a hierarchy does indeed become clear.*

If on the sixth day of creation everything was very good, now something is not good. Adam was a social being, and as such he was alone. God, who knows

an beings, knew it before Adam felt it. Perhaps it was already recognizable in various things. Did he already see among the animals that there were male and female, and that he lacked a female counterpart?

After Adam had given names to, among others, Tyrannosaurus rex, a saber-toothed tiger, ants, and bees, the search for a partner had been unsuccessful. No animal could be this counterpart, this missing piece of the puzzle. God was looking for a helper for Adam, so that he could fulfill his creation mandate. Alone he was not complete. And alone he was not able to be what God had intended. The "job posting" is looking for someone who would do Adam good. *A kindred spirit. An ally. A counterpart, a complement. A counterpart to every aspect of his existence: physical, emotional, spiritual; mental; outward as well as inward. In summary, that is what is meant by a helper who corresponds to him.*

Adam is not described as a head that lacks a body. He is described as an earthling who needs help. *He needs no subject, no assistant, but a personality of equal strength at his side.* A helper who makes acting together possible.

The man often behaves as the one who manages everything alone. Who seeks no help. God looks further. He knows what the man needs to master life.

On the expression "*a helper who corresponds to him*," I quote the Assyriologist and professor of Semitic languages R. David Freedman[8]: "I believe that the usual translation of these two words [i.e., ezer kenegdo, or 'helper'] is wrong, despite its almost universal acceptance. That is not what the words are meant to convey. Instead, they should be translated to mean something like '*a power or strength equal to man*.' That is, when God concluded that he would create another creature so that the man would not be alone, he decided to create 'a power or strength equal to man.' Someone whose strength corresponds to that of the man. The woman was not intended to be merely the man's helper. Rather, she was to be his partner."

"Freedman then turns his attention to the following word, kenegdo, which is often translated as 'fitting' or 'suitable.' This word appears only once in the Bible,

8. R. David Freedman, "Woman, a Power Equal to a Man: Translation of Woman as a 'Fit Helpmate' for Man Is Questioned," Biblical Archaeology Review 9, 1 (1983): 56.

so we have no other biblical comparison to help us with the translation. In later Mishnaic Hebrew, however, the root of this word means 'equal.'"

Freedman concludes (and we anticipate the next verse): "When God creates Eve from Adam's side, his intention is that she – unlike the animals – *'will be a power (or strength) equal to him.'* I believe there is no other way of understanding the expression 'ezer kenegdo' that can be defended philologically. The traditional translation is based on a late nuance of ezer (help) that is not justified by the context."

Even without this linguistic insight, every woman and every man can conclude that the woman is a counterpart of equal rank. *The marks are sameness of nature, difference, and complementarity. Not hierarchy, authority, following, or subordination.*

So the woman was not created to serve Adam, but to serve with Adam.

Being a helper to someone does not establish a difference in hierarchy. God, too, is our helper! It is a fateful mistake to conclude that being a helper establishes a difference in hierarchy. What a negative, even tragic picture of the woman is drawn in this way, and what far-reaching consequences are bound up with it. The point is not that Adam fulfills his creation mandate, but that both fulfill their common commission (1:28).

When a husband helps his wife – and that is supposed to happen too – the hierarchy is not reversed. Help has nothing to do with hierarchy, neither in the Bible nor in everyday life.

"The idea in Genesis 2:18, 20 is that the woman is a source of strength or power for the man, whom she serves as friend and ally. *Subordination is not the intention of the text.*"[9]

2.1.8 Eve Is Created

> [Genesis 2:21-22] And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on the human being, and he fell asleep. And he took one of his ribs and closed up

9. WKG study paper, September 2003

its place with flesh; and *the LORD God built the rib that he had taken from the human being into a woman, and he brought her to the human being.*

This narrative reports a mysterious process that we can hardly imagine. What exactly is described here, in a few words, only the angels could see. These holy observers marveled, just as we would have marveled. Eve comes into being out of his side. As if she were born out of Adam. She is not created out of earth. What is needed is not a second Adam, but a human being who corresponds to Adam completely. Had Eve been created first, she too would have needed a helper. Neither male nor female is meant by creation to be alone.

Too much cannot be read into this text either. It makes little sense to speculate about genetic material and bone marrow or chromosomes. It is a deep, physical-spiritual process which, from God's point of view, was the only way to bring forth the counterpart and helper for Adam.

That understanding and translating words is not always enough on its own to understand a text from antiquity can be illustrated by this explanation:

"When we read that Adam is put into a deep sleep and Eve is 'made,' we automatically think that Adam is being wheeled into the operating room for surgery. But an ancient Near Easterner would not have thought that way. The Hebrew word for 'deep sleep' is used throughout the Old Testament to describe a visionary experience. That is how an Israelite reader would have taken it. So I believe that this deep sleep was visionary for Adam, and not a surgical operation. In other words, he sees something, and then more and more of Eve."[10]

2.1.9 From the Rib

I admit that this description seems strange to me. Almost mythological. As mentioned, it was more understandable for the thought world of that time than it is for us. It makes little sense to look at this process through scientific, medical, biological, or anatomical glasses. Yet it is so profound and fundamental that still more is meant to come to light from it.

10. John Walton, Interview by Kevin P. Emmert/ March 19, 2015

So both are of the same substance. Of the same nature. Not each a separate, individual creation, but a separate expression of the same creation.

Why the translators use the word "rib" here is strange. Nowhere else in the Old Testament is this word translated that way. And there is no reason for it here either.[11] Mostly it is translated as an architectural building element: board, side structure, paneling, door leaf, and side. It is always about building. What these terms have in common is the "side."

Eve is built from the side (zela). Adam was, so to speak, shaped from clay like pottery, and now Eve is built from the side (or side component). It is a question of imagery, not of anatomy.

A man has 24 ribs and could easily do without one. But he has only two sides (compare the two leaves of the door in Solomon's temple, the same word, 1 Kings 6:34). The left and the right half of the body. Here the pair of terms "male–female" from 1:27 is continued. The woman does not consist of a bone, but of half of the man. *"She is taken from the man's side so that both people go through life side by side and each finds in the other his or her 'better half.'"*[12]

Pinchas Lapide writes on this: "The Hebrew word used here can only rarely mean rib and is usually translated as flank or side. … *No wonder, then, that this mistranslation as 'rib' inevitably had to lead to a low regard for women in the Christian world.*"[13]

With the wording changed, the verse reads like this:

> And the LORD God reached into Adam's side (or: took one half of Adam's body) and filled the place up again. Then he took the side component and constructed a woman out of it.

They become two people who understand each other and are drawn to each other. Who become one flesh, as if the separation were being undone. That is the mystery of marriage, of the covenant of faithfulness and love between man and woman.

11. Bielefeldt, 43, Die Sache mit der Rippe, Die himmlische Idee von den Geschlechtern, Asslar, 2007
12. Bielefeldt, 45
13. Lapide, 161, Lapide, Pinchas, Ist die Bibel richtig übersetzt? Gütersloh, 2004

That the woman is built from one half of the man perhaps hints at what will come true in the fruitfulness of reproduction: the division of the germ cell. The cells divide in half, and each is a complete cell. The woman is not without the man, and the man is not without the woman.

Does it matter how the word is translated? Certainly. The rib triggers something in women that makes them feel like an appendage. How would we men feel if we had been built from a "rib"?

2.1.10 The "Man-ess" (Männin)

> *And the human being said: This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called "Man-ess" (Männin; ischah), for from man (isch) this one was taken.*

Adam rejoices and is thrilled. We hear poetic words. What a holy moment. Before him stands the most beautiful woman in the world. Naked and without shame. Like a gift. He sees at once: she does not come from the animal kingdom. He had dealt with that intensively. This is something completely different now. *She is the one he was missing. Who is like him. The same kind. Like him, but a she. A "man-ess." Adam says: At last someone like me!*

Did Adam notice God's intervention, so that he even knows she came out of him? She is not a stranger to him; at once they are close. There are only the two of them in the garden. And the animals.

> *Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they will be one flesh.*
>
> *And they were both naked, the human being and his wife, and they were not ashamed.*

Eve, the "man-ess," will in the future be so attractive to the man that he will leave everything for her, to be with her. Once again the dignity of the woman is particularly addressed. She is the one who is desired. It is not described the other way around.

Becoming one flesh indicates that no greater unity and equality is possible.

These words must *also* be considered *historically*. The man must have the independence to be able to live without his parents, in order to found a new family.

Here the woman is seen historically as remaining connected with her parents' home, in contrast to her husband, and so receiving a certain protection. She does not leave it the way the man does. In the security of her parents' home, or near it, within the extended family, she is thus protected from a husband who may be violent or deceitful. The woman receives help by living near or in her parents' house.

Nevertheless, the two form a new, largely independent and self-reliant unit. Being one flesh denotes the fulfillment of the commission to be fruitful. That is, the sexual act as the expression and also the high point of being one, and of procreation and reproduction. The unity also describes the whole life of marriage. The marriage covenant, which is not spoken of directly here, describes the bond between one woman and one man for their whole lives. *As Jesus says, so it was in the beginning, and so it is to remain.*

With several wives, fertility and thus the population would have grown faster at the beginning. People and societies introduced polygamy. But it was never God's idea, even if he had to bear with it among his people (e.g., the patriarchs, David, etc.).

2.1.11 Given to One Another

Two people stand facing each other. Adam receives Eve as God's gift. Two different kinds of human beings meet for the first time. To each other and for each other, the two different bodies that fit together are given as a gift. In the different sexes and the sexuality that belongs to them, God shows his plan of love. In this way sexuality becomes God's gift for one another. It serves mutual enrichment and fulfillment and should lead to gratitude for the sexual difference.

When Adam was alone, he could not express this gratitude in mutuality. In his being alone he is not even able to perceive himself fully as a person, for there

was not yet another "I." Being a personality requires relationship and a counterpart. *For the man, the woman is the help to recognize his own humanity and the awareness of mutual enrichment. Not only is Eve a gift, but she enables Adam to recognize himself as a gift for her. Living not only with one another but for one another is the kind of fellowship God planned.* In this way they reflect God's love as mutual gifts for each other, through their masculinity and femininity.

Adam's joy, his gratitude at seeing in Eve not simply a subordinate helper but a gift of God, expresses the dignity of her personality – which Eve, for her part, also recognized in Adam. *Eve is a free personality with equal rights. To realize this, today as well, means to accept her as God's gift and present. Femininity is a gift of God. The first gift (apart from his life and his existence) that the man received.*

Authority that demands subordination denies the gift. When you receive a gift, you receive in a certain sense authority over this gift. *What was Adam authorized to do when he received Eve? To use his body in love for her – beyond sexuality.* He is authorized to receive her – like a sister. It is not an authority to give instructions or to rule over her. That only becomes the evil consequence of the Fall.

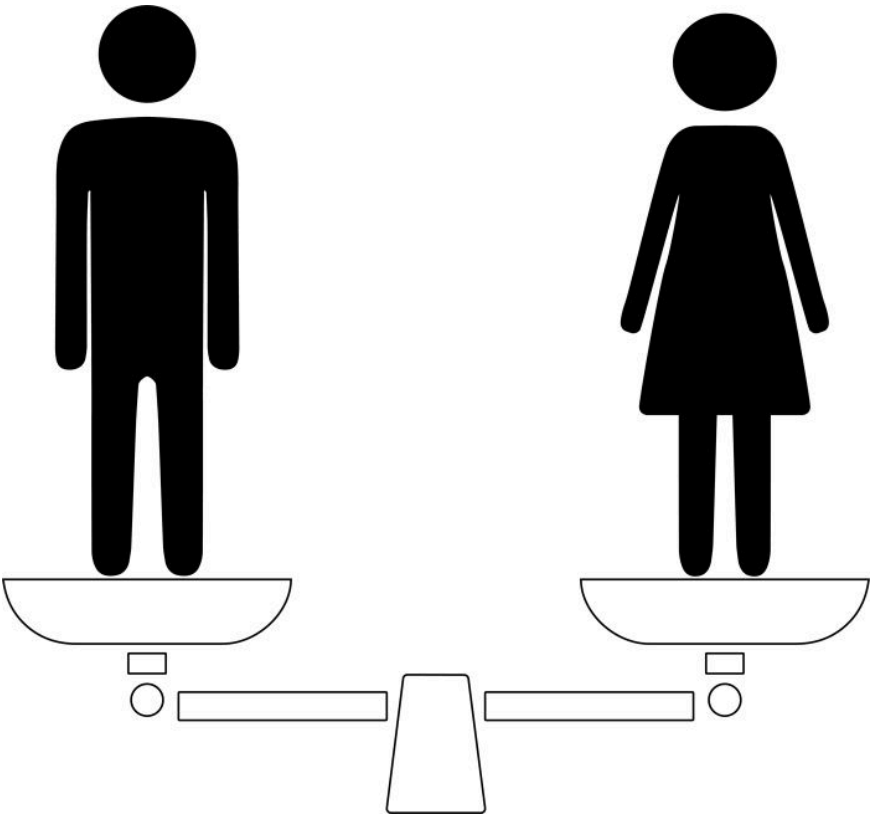
Adam's first words when he sees Eve find their echo in the bridegroom in the Song of Songs 4:9: "You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride; you have stolen my heart with one of your glances."

The man, created first, is authorized to be the first to love, the first to sacrifice himself, the first authorized to serve, the first to empower her – and not to exercise power over her.

This attitude of gratitude for one another finds its perfect expression in Christ's love for his assembly. That is what should be visible and tangible in our churches, congregations, and assemblies for everyone – including visitors who do not believe – and for the people around us.

"The opening of the Bible promises a primal human dream: equality of the sexes and uninhibited sexuality."

Arnold Angenendt



Your righteousness remains righteousness forever, and your instruction is truth.

Psalm 119:142 (Zürcher Bibel, German Bible translation)

2.2 The Fall of Man and Woman

As I go through the primeval history of the first three chapters, I deliberately refrain from going deeper into typological interpretations or foreshadowing. The concern is humanity as it shows itself in the relationship of man and woman in their literal existence. At this point it makes no sense yet to bring in texts by Paul for interpretation. I say "at this point," because later I will certainly have to do so. There is an important rule in reading the Bible: *context*, context,

context. First and foremost, open up the text in its *immediate context* and setting and historical circumstances, as far as that is possible. There are many aids and sources for this today. Only after that are further steps of interpretation on a good path.

Genesis 3 depicts the tragic deception and disobedience of Eve and then of Adam, which led to several levels of brokenness: shame, guilt, enmity, painful toil, death, and banishment from the garden of Eden. God turns to all those involved – the serpent, the man, and the woman – and warns them of the consequences of their actions. And to a certain degree he prepares them for everything that lies ahead of them. There is one verse that has moved to the center of the debate. It is Genesis 3:16: "You will long for your husband, and he will rule over you." But let us, as before, go briefly through the biblical account [Genesis 3:1-7, translated from the German Elberfelder Bible]:

> Now *the serpent* was more cunning than all the animals of the field that the LORD God had made; and it said to the woman: Did God really say: You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?
>
> And the woman said to the serpent: We eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, God has said: You shall not eat of it and you shall not touch it, lest you die.
>
> And the serpent said to the woman: You will certainly not die; for God knows that on the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. And the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable for giving insight; and she took of its fruit and ate, *and she also gave some to her husband with her, and he ate.*
>
> Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

God had said to Adam, before Eve was there [Genesis 2:16-17]:

> And the LORD God commanded the human being and said: You may eat freely of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of

> good and evil, of that you shall not eat; for on the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

In its maneuver of deception, the talking serpent deliberately turns to Eve. Was she the weaker one? Or the easier of the two to seduce? One could interpret the situation that way. Not because she was a woman. *But because she perhaps knew the commandment only secondhand. What she knew, she could only have known from Adam.* A small detail possibly shows that Adam had told her more than God had told him. Or that she added something to what Adam had told her. Perhaps also as a precaution: *Do not touch*, Eve said. And in the middle stood the far more important tree of life, not the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:9).

Some already see in Eve's words the first signs of weakness or of disobedience. But Eve's words, as Moses wrote them down, could convey how we can understand sin figuratively as uncleanness. Under the law of Moses, whoever *touched* something unclean was unclean and needed cleansing. The book of Leviticus describes this more than 160 times. Seen from this angle, Eve's words make clear what it means to fall into sin and become unclean.

The deception of the seducer, the serpent, succeeds. It sows doubt about God's goodness and truthfulness. Eve believes it, and the forbidden fruit becomes the desired fruit. Not hunger, but gaining the insight and knowledge that God seemed to be withholding from them, made Eve reach out. A fatal decision. A small step with a great effect.

Eve and Adam were there together. Adam was with her. Had Adam also heard the serpent speak? Had he abandoned his leadership role? All of that is speculation. Eve gives him the fruit she herself has already tasted. Adam takes the forbidden fruit. *Adam deliberately transgresses God's commandment, which he had received from him personally.*

Although nothing good can be derived from this incident, this situation too shows how both act with equal strength and, at the same time, equally wrongly. Eve is seduced. She knew that the tree was forbidden. Adam lets himself be seduced without a word, although he knew that this tree was forbidden.

Instantly they realize that they are naked. A new knowledge. As the serpent had promised.

> [Genesis 3:8-19, translated from the German Elberfelder Bible] And they heard the voice of the LORD God, who was walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And the human being and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called to the human being and said to him: Where are you?

What an unimaginable privilege: in the garden paradise, every day in the cool of the day, in the early evening, to meet God himself in visible form. As in the sanctuary. But now everything is different. Fear and an awakened conscience drive them to flee from God. They know the good relationship has been disturbed. They have disregarded something that was very important to God.

> And he (Adam) said: I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I am naked; and I hid myself. And he said: Who told you that you are naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat? *And the human being said: The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.*

The awareness of being naked goes hand in hand with the transgression. The one follows the other. Nakedness becomes exposure, disgrace. A sign of guilt. Innocence is a thing of the past.

God addresses the transgression concretely. Adam is aware of his guilt. But he looks for someone else to blame, a scapegoat onto whom he can shift his guilt. As pitiful as it is: he makes his wife responsible. How cowardly! Instead of owning up to his guilt, he accuses his wife. And he practically makes God (jointly) responsible, because God had given him the woman as a gift.

In fact, in this narrative God does not settle the matter entirely with Adam, but also turns to the woman. Each is addressed and regarded individually and as an equal, just as God will judge all people in righteousness and will overlook no detail.

2.2.1 Eve's Answer

Eve had been seduced, tricked by the liar and murderer of humankind. When God spoke to her, she pointed to the one who bore the greatest guilt: the serpent.

> And the LORD God said to the woman: What is this you have done! And the woman said: *The serpent deceived me, and I ate.*

Eve distances herself from the serpent and accuses it. The great transgression, with which Eve sets off an avalanche, came about through seduction. And she admits that she ate. Her attitude is better than Adam's. The degree of her transgression cannot be compared with his.

"God asked the woman, as in Genesis 3:13: 'What have you done?' *She answered God without excuses. She answered God without reproaches. She spoke in a completely different way from the man.* She was no longer deceived. Perhaps everything became clear to her when she heard God questioning the man. In any case, she now saw what had happened. In her new wisdom she recognized the evil and said: 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.' With this answer she exposed the evil serpent as the source of her deception. And she confessed the evil she did while she was being deceived: 'and I ate.' Had she committed more evil than the man had just done? No. Did she blame the man who was with her? No. Did she blame God? No. And yet what the Bible tells us about her is not the way she is often portrayed. And this false portrayal of her has existed for a long time."[14]

2.2.2 Eve's Toil, Pregnancy, and Subjugation

God's words of punishment to Eve read like this in the Elberfelder translation (German Bible translation):

> To the woman he said: I will greatly increase the toil of your pregnancy; in pain you shall bear children; and your desire shall be for your husband, but

14. Fleming, Bruce; Fleming, Joy; Hagemeyer, Joanne. The Book of Eden, Genesis 2-3: God Didn't Curse Eve (or Adam) or Limit Woman in Any Way. Kindle edition, p. 56

he shall rule over you.

The Zürcher Bibel (and the Einheitsübersetzung), both German Bible translations, separate the toil from the pregnancy. And that is correct, for two things are meant:

To the woman he said: I give you much hardship *and* let your pregnancies be numerous; in pain you will bear children. You will long for your husband, and he will rule over you.

Bruce Fleming, quoted above, renders these words like this:

I will surely multiply (1) your toilsome labor in the field and (2) your conception.

Then God instructs the woman about what has happened to her and to them, now that they are mortal and fallen.

With effort you will bear children

Your [loving] desire [is] for your husband

But he [rebelliously rules over himself and] will rule over you.

Is this distinction in the first part of verse 16 important? Through it the words to Eve take on a completely different tone – more important still, a different content. *First of all, it is important to note that in this address of God no curse whatsoever comes upon Eve. On the contrary!* First she is told that she will have much toil and effort with regard to agriculture. This includes keeping livestock and other manual work needed to sustain life. The word *toil* occurs in this form only three times and always means the toilsome work in the field. That is how Adam hears it: The ground is cursed because of you: "In *toil* you shall eat of it all the days of your life." And that is what Lamech later says to his son Noah (Genesis 5:29): "This one will comfort us concerning our work and the *toil* of our hands because of the ground that the LORD has cursed."

Adam simply took the fruit from Eve in full knowledge of the prohibition, and ate. But God's curse does not strike Adam. It passes him by and strikes the ground. *That is grace in Eden.* The consequences are toil in producing food.

Existence becomes a struggle for survival, unlike in Eden. And because Eve lives on the same ground, and they are on the way together as a married couple to master life, the same toil strikes her as strikes Adam. The reason is not Eve but Adam, because it is on account of his deed that the ground is cursed.

But now, in the second part of the first sentence, comes the good news, the gospel. *Pregnancies (plural) will be multiplied!*

Despite the transgression, Eve may fulfill the creation mandate: Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth! Despite the transgression, life will go on. There will be many descendants. Even more important, one of these descendants will crush the serpent's head. The serpent was the first to hear these words, which God addressed to it:

> And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; *he* will crush your head, and *you* will crush his heel.

These words are called the first gospel or proto-gospel (protoevangelium). *But they are addressed to the devil, and for him it is certainly not good news.* Then the serpent has to listen as God makes sure and guarantees that there will be descendants, that there will be the seed of the woman. For Eve, good news – as it is for Adam and for us, who are allowed to listen in, in the garden. *So the words to Eve have a positive, a hopeful meaning.*

Bearing children will be toilsome for Eve, just as farming will be for Adam. After the Fall, life has become different. When Eve heard the words, she had not yet given birth to a child. The serpent and Adam hear words of curse and punishment: there is a good before and a negative after. *Not so for Eve!* God does not change the woman's body when he speaks to her in Eden. Yet some translations sound as though God somehow changes the woman and turns giving birth into an evil thing.

Giving birth is a risky process when medical help is not available, as it is today in many parts of the world. But God stands at the side of women. He is their helper and savior (1 Timothy 2:15).

In a figure of speech Jesus said to his disciples – and we may assume it is the same one who spoke with Eve in the garden:

> [John 16:21] When a woman gives birth, she goes through something hard (or: hardship), because her hour has come; but when she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish (or: pains), for joy that a human being has been born into the world.

"In verses 16-19 the writer comes to terms with the hardships of human existence, in particular with the creative aspect of life: reproduction and the production of food. The earlier ease is now mixed with toil: the good (offspring, food) comes with the bad (toil)."

> And the LORD God said to the serpent: Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all the animals of the field! On your belly you shall crawl, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he will crush your head, and you will crush his heel.

Addressing the serpent, God pronounces what the consequences of this transgression are for the three involved. The serpent is brought low to the ground and into the dust. For the serpent, the attack on the woman has devastating consequences. It has made a mistake that will cost it its life.

First there will be perpetual enmity between the woman and the serpent. Interesting: *Not between Adam and the serpent. Even more remarkable: between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. Here the woman will have descendants, or seed.* One of these descendants will kill the serpent by crushing its head. But at the cost of a painful bite in the heel.

These few words have great significance and far-reaching scope. The serpent is more than a reptile. It is the enemy of human beings and the enemy of God, Satan, the devil.

I find it astonishing what role Eve, and with her women, will have in this cosmic conflict. And that is what this conflict turns out to be when we look back

on the history of the world and of salvation. The devil will attack the woman in her "saving" role. He will do everything to humiliate her, to weaken her effectiveness, to make sure her words go unheard. *What an important role the woman plays in this cosmic conflict! Without her there can be no victory of God through a descendant.*

Although she has just been seduced and has sinned, *she is appointed by the Creator as the means of rescue. Not Adam.* She experiences the grace of a great promise.

Even in this chapter of the Fall, the woman is not described in a subordinate role. It is almost the reverse. As if she were more important for the future reversal of the Fall.

Now, as the second consequence of the transgression, her relationship to the man is described. Every reader senses that this describes a serious disturbance of their relationship. That is nothing good. Not a blessing, but like a curse. One that has come true in this way in the history of the world.

Adam, too, who is held responsible for this sin, must hear the bitter consequences of his deed:

> And to Adam he said: Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying: You shall not eat of it! – cursed be the ground because of you: in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; and thorns and thistles it shall sprout for you, and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat your bread, until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. For dust you are, and to dust you shall return!

God does not release Adam from responsibility. It was to him that he had given the commandment, and he had transgressed it. Whether indirectly through his wife is of no significance. He received the commandment, and he transgressed it.

The consequences are bleak. Toil and effort – in a word, the struggle for survival and existence – are what will make up the fate of Adam and all the sons of Adam. *While Eve hears the "first gospel" or "proto-gospel" and has a decisive part in it, all that remains for Adam in the end is to become again what he was taken from. A*

tragic verdict. No hopeful prospect. But the victory of the woman – or rather, of the seed of the woman – will one day also snatch the man out of the dust and into life.

2.2.3 Your Desire Will Be for Him, and He Will Rule over You

This word of punishment is among the most tragic in the Bible and is (sadly) interpreted in different ways to this day. It belongs to the core of our investigation. The Gute Nachricht (German Bible translation) reads here: *You will be drawn to your husband, but he will rule over you.* The word rendered *desire* in the Elberfelder translation means determined, unwavering devotion to her husband.

The word *rule* is neutral in itself. It still seems unclear whether this is good or bad rule. But one senses that the description of the relationship between the two is not what Genesis 1 and 2 show. Here there is brokenness, an asymmetry. *A field of tension in which inequality and imbalance will gain the upper hand.* On the one hand, the woman, who after all was created toward the man, experiences disappointment. She entrusts herself to the man in her weakness and vulnerability. Weakness because she is physically the weaker one. But also because her social and cultural conditions became the weaker and disadvantaged ones (1 Peter 3:7).

But in the man she does not find the fitting answer to her desire. What meets her is not empathy or mutual attraction (see 2:24). Nor being "one flesh." Probably in the sexual act and in procreation, but not in every area of their life together. The unity of hearts is in danger. Rule is the man's answer. Not together as equals – instead, subjugation, oppression, and discrimination will accompany the relationship of the sexes. That is no blessing. That is the consequence of sin. The continuation of sin – here, the man's. *Ruling over his wife, or over women in general, was not and was never meant to be part of their relationship. Nowhere does Holy Scripture instruct men to rule over them!*

It is not what God planned, nor how he created the two of them. The creation of Eve and their first encounter were so promising. But "East of Eden" a different wind blows. There the male sex seldom shows itself as a gentleman, and

more often as a despot and macho.[15] Even to such men many women still feel drawn.

Another interpretation understands this word as though the woman would strive to rule over the man.[16] But he – apart from exceptions, of course – would prevail against this and defend his power and supremacy. I have often heard this reading. As if the woman by nature reached for the crown. Give her an inch and she will take a mile. There will be such women. Women who want to manipulate and control their husbands. No question. But to place the whole female sex under this general suspicion, or to hold it collectively liable, springs more from the degenerate mindset and attitude of the male sex. The male sex, in turn, falls not only under the suspicion but, according to God's words, under the verdict of being bent on authority. Here, too, one must add: apart from exceptions. Both kinds of behavior exist in every possible strong and weak form. *And that never rules out that there are positive, loving partnerships! Of course also outside Christian marriages.*

The woman's desire is not a striving for dominance. Nor is it sexual desire in order to have children. That may be included in it. At a deeper level it is the being drawn to the man, the seeking of protection, the seeking of togetherness, as it is laid down in creation. And in her role as the weaker one and mostly without means, it becomes her fate: "The basic idea is that the woman's desire, which makes her dependent, is due to her need to fulfill her maternal instinct … Let us recall what sociologists have called the principle of lesser or least interest: in a relationship involving two partners, the one who is more dependent on the other partner is the more vulnerable one, while the one who has the lesser interest in being bound to the relationship is in a dominant position."[17]

If one takes Freedman's mutualistic[18] view of Genesis 1–2, the reading of Genesis 3:16 turns out completely different: "A tragedy of a quite different

15. One wonders whether this word of punishment from God also affects parts of the animal world.
16. See the same sentence construction as in 4:7; but also Song of Songs 7:10. The word occurs only at these two other places.
17. Walton, 228, Genesis, The NIV Application Commentary, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2001
18. Mutualistic means being mutual, reliant on one another and dependent on one another, in equality and unity.

magnitude. *The original relationship of mutual support and strength, of equality and sharing, of recognition among equals and of the other as the closest companion, has become a terribly disordered and emotionally unequal, power-based, loveless relationship.* The woman will desire her husband, but he will dominate her. It is a terrifying breakdown and upheaval."

Andrew Macintosh points out that the consequences of Eve's sin "are defined against this background of the radical complementarity (equality and completion) of the sexes in creation: *Precisely where the woman's joyful fulfillment in life is to be found, the burden of pain and subjugation now enters.*"

This is how Matthew Lynch comments on this verse: "Just as her childbearing is a 'good' now stained by pain (3:16a), so her 'devotion' is also a good now stained by domination (3:16b)."[19]

This verse is a sign of both female and male disturbance, of disorder and tragedy. A woman in her brokenness and vulnerability turns to a man rather than to God to meet her needs, and instead of kindness and compassion she meets his broken and disordered need to dominate her. A tragedy that has played out throughout history with frightening regularity.

Adam must take responsibility for the Fall. Eve was a victim (and of course responsible nonetheless). Adam was a perpetrator. He sinned "with a high hand." With his eyes open and in full knowledge of God's commandment, he ate the fruit. He, not Eve, becomes the head of fallen humanity (Romans 5; 1 Corinthians 15), although she is the mother of all the living.

The cursed ground will determine Adam's life, rule over him, and make his life hard. In this way he, for his part, will behave toward his wife and toward the female sex as a whole.

Throughout human history the woman often ends up in a situation of complete dependence and subjugation. Whole societies are shaped this way. This is not about exceptions, but about the rule. In the majority of cultures this was normal, and it often still is today.

19. Lynch, Contrary Women Genesis 3:16b on the ESV

Both, man and woman, are now sinners. Fallen ones. As a sinner the man will rule over his wife, and she as a sinner will use every means of her own so as not to lose out in this relationship, to defend herself, and to find her way. And to manipulate her husband and still exert indirect influence, which is mostly denied her.

"This battle of the sexes will show itself from then on at every level of the cultures of all peoples. It can only be healed if the evil that triggered it is tackled at the root."[20]

2.3 Objections to Equality

Against the position I find in the creation narrative there is the opposite reading of the same few texts. Those who believe in male headship and precedence read the creation story as proof that Adam is the head of Eve[21] and that she stands in the hierarchy under the man's leadership.

Adam is both a name and the designation of the human race.

In this case Eve is also "Adam," that is, a human being. God did not call the human race woman. That would "smell" of male leadership.[22] I see in this the emphasis on man and woman being bound to the earth. Adam was taken from adama (earth), and after that Eve from Adam. She too, like Adam, will one day return to the earth. It is hard to see a leadership role in this unless one is trying to find one.

God makes Adam the center.

The project "humanity" begins with Adam. At first it is about him. Until it turns out that something is missing. The other half of life. The process that makes this lack clear (the naming of the animals) at the same time shows the

20. Schmalenbach, 87, Frausein zur Ehre Gottes: ... im Kontext verschiedener Kulturen, 2007
21. Among other authors, I mention above all the arguments put forward by Alexander Strauch. Strauch, Alexander, 2001, Die Revolution der Geschlechter, Bielefeld
22. Ortlund, 119

worth of the woman, who fills the lack. The human being – as man and woman – is together the center of creation. That is what Genesis 1:26-27 shows.

Adam, not Eve, is created first. Therefore he is above Eve in the order of hierarchy.

How much – or how little – time may have passed between the creation of Adam and that of Eve? Even if in antiquity, unlike today, the old or older is always the weightier and takes precedence, this inference is not suited to such a determination. Scripture nowhere says that this sequence is the reason for the man's leadership role. These are and remain arbitrary conclusions. This sequence should not be interpreted as a ranking. When Paul – and I will come back to this in detail – emphasizes in 1 Timothy 2 that Adam was created first, it is not a matter of biblical remedial lessons there, but of other questions that have nothing to do with an order of hierarchy.

The birthright, as is well known, works according to this principle of temporal sequence. But it is nowhere applied to the relationship of man and woman.

Depending on how we read the Bible, it can reinforce our wrong or right views. *Not infrequently, our understanding of the Bible reflects not God's will but our own way of thinking or the attitude of our hearts.*

This sequence can also be interpreted differently: not the first takes precedence, but the second is the climax, the high point in the literary narrative of the creation of the human being. In the first account the human being (man and woman) is the high point of creation. In the second account it is not the man, but the woman. I mention this as an example – not to build my thesis on it, but to show how different perspectives can be, and how far wrong conclusions go when we think there is only one perspective, or only ours.

Adam, not Eve, is given the commandments by God concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which indicates that he is the natural head/leader.

According to the creation narrative, Eve was not even there yet when God gave this commandment. It would only be a legitimate thought if she had already been there and God had then said it only to Adam.

The woman is made from the man and is therefore dependent on him.

In patriarchal ways of life this dependence exists. But it is never endorsed by Scripture as an ideal. Even if all the people in the Old Testament lived in it and the Bible describes it. Today the woman is not dependent on the man. Both can live and exist on their own or alone. Seen neutrally, that can be regarded as progress. It is good that it is so.

Adam gives the woman the name Eve, which is a sign that he has authority over her.

Naming has nothing to do with authority. Rather with knowledge, assessment, and insight, since names in the Bible often describe the nature of a person. That is why Adam calls Eve the "mother of all the living." Whoever links naming with authority should note that this happened not before but immediately after the Fall.

The woman is created from the man to be his "helper" (Gehilfin).

The way the writer uses the term "helper," what is in view is not a subordinate person but a person of equal strength and equal rank.

Men gladly welcome the woman's helper role, so that they can reach goals that they alone set. But that is not the idea. Help never establishes a difference in authority or rank. How would one apply that to God, who is our helper? Besides, won't the man also want to be a helper for his beloved wife? Without a hierarchy arising from it?

Eve is created for the man. Not the other way around.

That is how it is reported. Nevertheless, Eve becomes neither Adam's possession nor his property. She is created as a counterpart of equal strength from Adam's side. When it comes to the marriage covenant, the man's desire for the woman is a direction or movement from which one could also conclude – if one wanted to – that she is the stronger one. He feels drawn to her.

Eve sins first. A sign that the woman is the weaker sex, more susceptible to temptation and deception.

Even if this conclusion were correct – which I do not believe – it would not establish a hierarchy, in view of countless men who were seduced by women and fell into sin.

How was the tempter supposed to know that she was the weaker sex? Adam did not even have to be tempted in order to sin!

Adam failed in his duty to take the lead and be the head. That is why the tragedy happened.

To prevent this event and this original sin, no hierarchy is needed. Such situations occur thousands of times every day. Sin is prevented by a clear "No." It is true that Adam, since he had received God's commandment, should have contradicted Eve. As far as a hierarchy is concerned, this event establishes nothing. For both of them it was the free decision of a responsible human being entitled to decide.

If Adam was the head and had the leadership role and failed in it, why is Eve held accountable at all? Then Adam alone should have been held responsible. But precisely because both are equally responsible, both must answer equally. Adam's guilt is much greater than Eve's. She was seduced by cunning, and she recognized this at once and rightly laid the main guilt on the serpent. Adam sinned without hesitation, "with a high hand," and then even made Eve responsible for it – and ultimately even God, who had given him the woman.

Isn't the reverse argument possible as well? If Eve takes a leadership role here, even if it led to sin, then this surely shows that in a marriage the woman can lead just as well as the man. In a "marriage team" each is sometimes weak and each is sometimes strong. Each will therefore take the lead as circumstances require, for mutual help and in mutual submission.

Perhaps there are more arguments, but none can tip the God-willed balance of man and woman. The original biblical text remains the strongest argument for a partnership of equals. There is no hint of a God-willed or pronounced leadership of Adam. Everything we have points to partners working together. Nevertheless, the reading of the creation text leads to clearly different positions.

Here, at the beginning, the decision is made as to how one answers and puts into practice the gender question, and how we interpret statements of the New Testament on this subject.

2.4 The Differences between Man and Woman

Since I emphasize the equality and equal rank of woman and man, it will be objected that I overlook the differences. But I do that nowhere. On the contrary, I expressly oppose any "leveling" or equating of roles. *But if there are different roles, that does not make the man the governing and leading head.* This distinction is important. If it is not made, a tendentious mixing occurs between an imagined creation order (the man is the head of the woman) and the consequences of the Fall, where it says "he will rule."

Obviously there must be differences. Otherwise Eve would not be a counterpart, not an adequate counterpart. If a side, the whole half, is "taken away" from Adam, he lacks something that he finds again or gets back in the woman. The two together form a whole.

Nevertheless, the Bible is not a textbook on the differences between man and woman. Not even when this is constantly pointed out. What is overlooked is that these are often differences that have arisen from history, from the development of cultures and societies, and are precisely not the pure and perfect expression of God's will as Creator.

"The creation account provides no indication of the rule of one over the other, nor of a gender-specific division of tasks. The sharp separation of spheres of activity and areas of responsibility observable later in human cultures – into the man's public, culture-creating sphere and the woman's private sphere of reproduction – cannot be grounded in creation. It suggests itself on the basis of biological facts, but it cannot be derived from the biblical statements and demanded as God's will as Creator. *Rather, God here leaves man and woman great latitude in dividing responsibilities within the framework of the biological givens."*[23]

23. Schmalenbach, 72

I will mention only in note form some gender-specific differences that – in addition to the quite obvious ones – have been more or less recognized by research. The subject is complex, and with few exceptions I could only repeat what others have found out about it. The Bible itself is not a specialist book in this respect.

Body build and body size are stronger and larger in men. That is why sporting competitions are separated by sex.

Men are more or less gifted in spatial-abstract thinking. Women have greater communicative competence.

On average, women have a greater need for conversation. Women are more person-oriented and men more task-oriented.

Sexual experience is fundamentally different.

That women by nature bear children, and not men, need not be mentioned. But therein lies a great biological difference.

I plead for a gift-oriented division of roles that is not oriented to the cultural, societal, or social conventions of the past. Where equal rights are part of the constitution, the best abilities should come into their own and be valued, regardless of sex, for the benefit of all. *In God's kingdom and in his church, men should make sure that these opportunities are open to women without restriction. There is a good deal that can be made right there.*

In our (postmodern) time, the role of woman and man has changed in many ways along with social change. Maintaining a supposed creation order within it is difficult to impossible. Adapting to the social situation is not worldliness, but part of coping with existence. That is no problem if one accepts that the Bible does not prescribe an understanding of roles. Being a man and being a woman are the subject of many books offering well-meant life advice. The Bible itself gives practically all its instructions to men and women alike.

When today a husband looks after the household and takes care of the children, while the wife earns the necessary income, this division of roles is more and

more often the reality of life. Whether it is the optimal one cannot be judged from a biblical point of view.



2.5 Creation Order

This term is used often. A typically German word (*Schöpfungsordnung*). We love order. We want to know what applies and what does not. That has its advantages and can be useful. The term is often used when people want to give a basis for the New Testament texts that deal with the submission of the woman to the man.

The good creation is described in the first two chapters of Genesis. It is the pattern and the expression of what God wants. Before the Fall!

The Bible does not know the word creation order. In itself that is not a problem, just as with other theological "helper terms." But which orders do we want to derive from these chapters, or even lay down as binding for all time? Veganism, perhaps, since no meat is eaten in paradise? What about married couples who have no children and cannot be fruitful? What about the large and growing number of single households? What about those who are born with both sexes? Should we walk around naked? Of course not. But that was normal before the Fall. The weighty word *creation order* must be used with discernment, if it is useful at all.

Indeed: What is described about man and woman in Genesis 1 and 2 is meant to hold for all time. Whatever is different or worse than there came through sin and does not correspond to God's plan and will.

Man and woman are of equal worth, equal dignity, equally commissioned, equal in rank, equal in standing. There is no hierarchy in chapters 1 and 2. It is unity in diversity. Complementing each other on the same level. Mutual, not one-sided complementing. The help described in Genesis 2 is not the subordinate part. The helper is a full counterpart for Adam. Together, as equals, they are a strong team. Gifted and equipped differently, they help each other. The difference between the sexes is an essential and indispensable part of the whole. The difference is a necessity, but it has nothing to do with submission or authority. The difference between the sexes completes the image of God and so enables them to fulfill the far-reaching creation mandate.

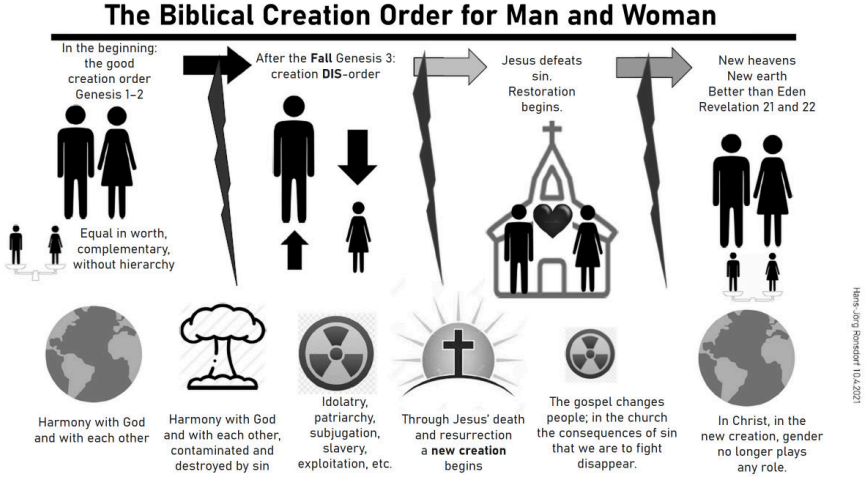
This picture of man and woman before the Fall is the divine norm: the divine creation order. It holds forever. Universal and timeless. Everything must be measured against it. It is an eternal norm that remains for all time.

We see that this norm – or, if you like, this order – is thrown off balance by sin, attacked and, with a few exceptions, destroyed. Only thousands of years later is

this norm restored in Christ (Galatians 3:28), to remain for all time and never to be attacked again.

The word *creation order* is often used when people point to the submission of the woman and the prohibition on her speaking in public (in front of men), teaching and leading them. A well-worn reflex when people insist on order. But after the Fall one can hardly speak of an order of creation anymore. *It is rather creation DIS-order when the man now rules over the woman and the roles of the sexes are now determined by this. Because of his stronger physical constitution, the man has seized authority.*

A universal creation order is the basis of Christian ethics. It contains no difference in hierarchy between man and woman. Besides the dignity that human beings have as bearers of God's image, it also includes the qualities anchored in God himself: *justice, love and truth. They are meant to make good life together possible.*



2.5.1 From the Garden in Eden to the New Jerusalem

Christians are on their way to the new creation (2 Peter 3:13). A new and better Eden awaits them. A new creation that somehow continues the present one and at the same time is new. The new is now described as a city in which elements

of Eden are found again. So it is not a return to the situation before the Fall. It is a movement forward, to the new and eternal city.

In the new creation, men and women will relate to each other freely, like siblings, like brother and sister. In love and respect. Without hierarchy. The mandate to be fruitful and multiply will then be over. There will be no more sex. Everything connected with it will then be history. What plays a big role now will not be missed there. Although we will always remain the individual personalities God made us to be, gender, male and female, has become meaningless in Christ (Galatians 3:28). How much "gender" will still be there, we do not know.

In our fallen world, a small number of people are born with *both* sexes, more or less developed. For them it is a difficult situation. For them the New World is a redemption (as it is for all of us).

Since the new creation has already begun in the church, the way we relate to each other may already be shaped by it now. *In the body of Christ, gender no longer plays a role.* But since the church is still on its way in the first creation, it encounters the most varied cultural challenges. For the sake of the gospel there may be adaptations where gender is still taken into account after all. More on that later.

There will be no hierarchy or submission in the new creation, for in Christ we are all one. Let us live the life of the new creation!

2.6 He Will Rule over You – the History

In this chapter I pursue the tragic question of how the words of judgment in Genesis 3:16 have been fulfilled. I can only do so to a limited extent. *This fulfillment contains a universe of oppression, exploitation, discrimination and disadvantage. A sea of suffering and tears.* Into the 21st century. The world was and is a dangerous place for all who have no power, whether woman, man or child.

It is thanks to the research of many historians, archaeologists and theologians that today we have much evidence of what the situation of women was like. The internet makes a great deal of information easily and quickly accessible.

What follows is a collection of quotations from various eras that express how influential and well-known men thought about women. In such brevity one can never do justice to this subject. *But it should be enough to recognize what baggage was not only present in the world, but was carried from there into the church, Christianized and cultivated.*

It is impossible to overlook how a basic contempt for women became embedded in Judaism by way of the great Greek thinkers. This in turn left its traces in the church. What is more, Church Fathers valued the Greek heritage on this question more highly than the view of the Bible. Their influence down to the present is tangible. That is why this should also motivate us today to uncover it and to contradict it.

On this question there is only one motto: Back to the Bible! Back to Jesus!

2.6.1 Antiquity

Women in antiquity[24] embodied beauty, were subordinate to the man, but also had less physical strength. If they were wealthy, they wore long silk garments and had elaborately styled hair. If a man had a beautiful woman at his side, it could well bring him business and political advantages. In society, women had only limited rights or none at all. In cases of adultery, women could be accused, dispossessed or even banished. Public offices were held only by men. The role of the woman was clearly defined. They were expected to produce male offspring, if at all possible. Rich people also had slaves who took care of the household. Female slaves had no rights and had to perform many services. But there were certainly exceptions, in which many a well-to-do woman held a higher standing and could strongly influence decisions. Feminine charms were often a useful tool in a world dominated by men.

"In antiquity, the 'free man' or 'citizen' (male) was regarded as the perfect model of the human being, clearly set apart even from the 'free woman' or 'citizen' (female). *Because of the physical constitution and inferiority ascribed to her, the woman was regarded as inferior to the man. This inferiority was considered innate and unchangeable; it was*

24. Antiquity refers to Greek and Roman culture from about 600 BC to AD 400.

used to justify the woman's lack of legal capacity and her permanent need for a male guardian. In keeping with her role in society, the woman was regarded as passive, and this also extended to (heterosexual, penetrative) intercourse. An active role on the part of women, for instance through dominance in the household, too much visibility in public or a dominant position in intercourse, was considered shameful and threatened the honorable position of the whole family. The man, on the other hand, faced the loss of his civil rights if he did not control his house and household dependents (women, children, female slaves), did not control his own needs (food, drink, passion, sexuality, sleep), spent too little time in public, or took passive roles in intercourse."[25]

Women in Athens were subject to the man, similar to the time of the Roman Republic, and had to conform to him. Women were always legally minors; that is, they needed a person to direct and guide them. As a girl and as a woman, one was at the mercy of one's guardian and his moods.

2.6.2 Aristotle

Aristotle, 384–322 BC, one of the greatest Greek philosophers and polymaths, made the inferiority of the woman a universally valid fact. On the question of the woman's worth, all his learning does not help him, and in this he remains a child of his time. "*Females are mutilated males*" is one of the momentous statements of his worldview. Since it is the spirit that begets, women are now only "spiritless" assistants who provide their body/uterus as a brood chamber for the "spiritual" male seed. Having started from the inferiority of the woman's biological makeup and thereby legitimized her social subordination to the man, Aristotle also makes her responsible for any failure, for a predominance of the female share in conception is "... responsible for the birth of monstrous forms."

In this form of society, women had no legal or social relevance. Women were excluded from politics; they were economically and in every other respect dependent on their husband, the master of the house, and thus lifelong minors under the

25. Voß, Heinz-Jürgen, Das differenzierte Geschlechterverständnis der Antike, Gender, 2/2009

guardianship of a man. Men generally married much younger women, which intensified their dominance even further. "The essential task of wives was to provide male heirs and to run the husband's household."

Daughters were often exposed after birth at the father's decision. Of the girls who survived, chastity was expected before marriage and later within marriage. Respectable women spent most of their lives in the house.

In the Aristotelian worldview, hierarchies are "given by nature," and it is likewise in the nature of things that some rule and have all rights, while others are ruled and possess no rights. According to his worldview, some people are born to rule and others to be ruled. For him, the male is worth more than the female, and therefore the female exists to be governed by the male.

"Now, just as humankind is the most perfect of all animals, so within humankind the man is more perfect than the woman, and the reason for his perfection lies in a greater amount of heat, for heat is nature's most important tool."

In this way Aristotle laid a lasting philosophical foundation for the notion that women are inferior to men. He formalized the practice of sexual discrimination and offered a learned domination that believed in the inequality of the sexes. *Centuries later, church leaders who were themselves a product of Greek culture and education interpreted Paul's writings from the perspective of Aristotelian philosophy.*

The Athenian philosophers left the world a double indictment against womanhood. From the classical period, especially the teachings of Aristotle, came the conviction that women are inferior to men. Therefore women are to be commanded by men, and they are to be used for men's pleasure. Then from the Stoic philosophers came the conviction that women are a distraction and a temptation for men. Therefore women should be avoided by men, who would otherwise be free to acquire the qualities that make men superior. Both views underlie the traditional interpretations of the Pauline writings concerning women and marriage. Namely, the submission of the woman and celibacy, which until the time of the Reformation was widely regarded as the ideal.

It was Socrates (470–399 BC) who immortalized the Athenian contempt for women. Often calling women the weaker sex, he argues that being a woman is a divine punishment, since a woman is something halfway between a man and an animal.

The life of a single man outweighs a thousand women, says Euripides (480–407 BC), the Greek tragedian.

There would be many more and even more degrading quotations, which only confirm how women were generally thought of.

2.6.3 The Woman as Property

Women were largely deprived of the right to self-determination; in part they were treated as a kind of possession. Sons were valued more highly than daughters, as heirs of the father's property and as heads of families – daughters, who could be sold to other men as a valuable resource for a bride price.

As the literature of antiquity shows, women were not always and everywhere without rights, but they were clearly subordinate to men. In the end, husbands used their advantages to secure the sexual availability of women as far as possible.

Women were not represented in the public and political sphere and were as a rule confined to the household and to reproductive work. Women were in principle under the guardianship of a man (husband, father or brother) and in complete economic dependence on him.

The decisive power within marriage belonged to the husband. He was the guardian of his wife and children and had the final and usually sole authority to decide in all matters concerning property and family. The role of wives was almost entirely exhausted by the household and the care of children.

Special attention was paid to their childbearing, and their chastity outside marriage received special social recognition. Unmarried women (concubines, female

slaves), on the other hand, were expected to serve the satisfaction of the sexual needs of the free men on whose estates they worked.

2.6.4 Patriarchy

The major religions and Hinduism, with their rules and regulations, have contributed worldwide to the emergence of patriarchy.

Linguistically, the term derives from the Greek *patér* – "father" and *archê* – "origin" and "rule." Patriarchy, also called androcracy[26], describes in the conventional sense a system historically derived from Greek and Roman law. In it, the male head of the family and household exercised legal and economic power over the female and male family members dependent on him.

Within one and the same social class, men stand above the women who belong to them as daughters, sisters or wives. Nevertheless, biblical patriarchy is not simply to be misread as male rule, since women of the upper class had power over the female and male persons subordinate to them.

Patriarchy is the determining social form of the household, as can already be seen among the patriarchs. It developed that way and was normal. It is not an ideal demanded by God, but part of cultural history east of Eden. With all its advantages and disadvantages.

Some think that patriarchy reflects the fatherhood of God and thus corresponds to a divine pattern. But such an idea for a family structure is not supported in that way. Even if it can function well under God's "common grace." This family structure is part of a fallen world and a development of its history. It did not arise from a divine pattern or instruction. It prevailed as a model that ensured survival and in many places on the planet still does. As such a social structure, it is to be evaluated in the light of Scripture.

26. Androcracy, translated from the Greek, means rule of the man. This word is used rather rarely as a synonym for the more common form of rule, patriarchy.

2.6.5 Greek Influence on Jewish Thought

The reason I quoted Aristotle above is that this way of thinking also influenced Judaism.

"When we come to the New Testament, we find that most Jewish men did not regard women with the high esteem reflected in the Old Testament. Three factors led the Jews to distort God's man-woman relationships.

1. Sinful behavior. Sin distorts understanding and relationships.
2. Misinterpretation of biblical texts.
3. The influence of Hellenistic (Greek) ideas.

In the third century BC, Hellenistic ideas began to infiltrate Jewish thought. This infiltration was accelerated during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, who began his rule in 175 BC. Antiochus then invaded Judea and tried to Hellenize it by force. The result was that Jewish thought was influenced by Greek philosophy. This colored the Jewish view of women."[27]

"Taken as a whole, the position of women in religious law can best be expressed by this constantly repeated formula: 'Women, (Gentile) slaves, and children (minors).' Like a Gentile slave and a minor child, a woman has a man over her who is her master; this likewise limits her participation in worship, because from a religious point of view she is inferior to a man.

To all this one can add that plenty of contemptuous opinions about women were expressed. *It strikes you when you see how such views outweigh the opinions of high esteem, which are by no means lacking.* It is typical that there was joy at the birth of a boy, while the birth of a daughter was often received with indifference, even with sorrow. We therefore have the impression that Judaism at the time of Jesus also had a very low opinion of women. Just as is customary in the Orient, where the woman is valued above all for her fertility but is, as far as possible, secluded from the outside world. And is subject to the power of her father or her

27. WKG study paper, September 2003

husband, and where from the religious standpoint she is inferior (subordinate) compared to men."[28]

2.6.6 Church Fathers

Here, too, only a few quotations can be given that reveal the traces of Greek philosophy in early Christianity as well.

"In a woman, even the awareness of her own nature must produce shame." *Clement of Alexandria*, AD 150–215, *The Instructor*

"A formative example is the Church Father *Augustine* (AD 354–430), who contributed in a special way to the development of the 'Christian' image of woman. Shaped by the philosophy of Aristotle, he found it hard to acknowledge the full image of God in the woman: 'The woman together with her husband is the image of God, that is, the two together are one whole image. But in her function as helper, a task that belongs to her alone, she is not the image of God. As for the man, however, even taken by himself he is just as completely and fully the image of God as if he were joined with the woman into one.'"[29]

In the 5th century, Paul was used to confirm the picture of inequality and hierarchical separation that Aristotle had developed. The initial freedom of the gospel had to give way again. *As church structures became increasingly established, the equal rank of the members of Christ fell more and more by the wayside. The proof is the decline of women in church offices and their exclusion from them.*

"In the year 585, at a gathering of 63 bishops and their representatives present in Mâcon, France, on the question 'Are women human beings?' 32 voted yes and 31 no. So women were declared human beings by a majority of one vote!"[30]

The formative theologian of the Middle Ages, *Thomas Aquinas*, confirms the view of Aristotle (Prima Pars, Quaestio 92):[31]

28. Jeremias, Joachim, pp. 359-375, Jerusalem zur Zeit Jesu, 1963
29. Schmalenbach, 196
30. Smith/Kern, Frauen und Männer im Dienst für Gott, Gießen, 2000, p. 114
31. For further research I recommend the freely accessible library of the Church Fathers at www.unifr.ch/bkv/ (in German).

"a) It seems that the production of woman should not have been mentioned among the first works of creation. For:

I. Aristotle calls woman a human formation that is more imperfect than man. But what is in itself imperfect and deficient ought not to have been mentioned in the description of the first establishment of things.

II. Subjection and diminishment come from sin. For it was said to the woman: 'You shall be under the power of the man,' and Gregory the Great writes: 'Where we have not sinned, there we are all equal.' But woman is by nature weaker than man, both in dignity and in strength.

III. Occasions of sin must be avoided. But God knew that woman would later become an occasion of sin for man. Therefore he ought not to have produced her. On the other side stands the authority of Scripture. (Genesis 2:18.)

b) I answer that it was necessary for woman to be made as a 'helper to man.' And indeed not as a helper for some other work, where in every case another man would have helped the man better; but for the work of generation. This is best seen when we consider the various levels of generation. ... Only with regard to the individual, particular human nature is woman something deficient and weaker."

He wrote elsewhere that the woman will be governed by sexual desire, but the man by reason. Or: The woman is a mistake of nature, physically and mentally inferior, a kind of mutilated, defective, failed man.

The red line ran from Aristotle via Paul (so people thought) via Augustine and Thomas into the theology of the Reformers as well. Many today (especially Christians of the Reformation tradition) understand this view as God's universal creation order. That is indeed a view of humanity poisoned by philosophy, one that even the greatest thinkers and theologians fell for. Lord, have mercy.

2.6.7 Reformation

The Reformation led to the break with the medieval Catholic Church. That brought the woman a new freedom and a new appreciation. Luther's elevation of the woman in marriage and family cannot be rated highly enough, considering that the average, socially prevalent attitude toward women was more or less rigorous contempt.

For Luther, the submission of the woman was a matter of course, given by nature. He revered his wife, Katharina von Bora, who was a strong counterpart to him and also knew when she had to slow down or even stop her Martin. But his sayings about women in general probably reflect the coarse, obscene and foul language of the 16th century. "… the rule of women has never accomplished anything good since the beginning of the world, as the saying goes: women's rule seldom comes to a good end! When God had set Adam as lord over all creatures, everything was still well and right, and everything was governed in the best way; but when the woman came and wanted to have her hand in the pot too and be clever, everything fell apart and became a wild disorder. … When women are eloquent, it is not to be praised in them; it suits them better to stammer and not be able to speak well. That adorns them much better." Or: "Order demands discipline and honor, that women be silent when the men speak." Or: "Weeds grow fast, that is why girls grow faster than boys." He himself meant it literally, in deadly earnest, when he quoted Exodus 22:18 in a sermon: "Do not allow a sorceress (witch) to live." To what extent the early and the late Luther play a role in this context, I cannot say at this point. It is not about judging or condemning, but about researching causes. Evidently this question must be clarified again and again, in our time as well.

My concern is to indicate how even great men of God fell prey to this great error, and God bore it and tolerated it. Just as he often does today. He blesses and works and in doing so has to bear views, practices and behaviors of his children that he never wanted.

After the dissolution of the monasteries, the woman's service and place were confined to the domestic sphere. *Church offices were not opened to women. Their dignity as human beings and as wives was raised, but not their standing in the church of Jesus.*

In summary, the historian Arnold Angenendt writes: *"In countless written documents of all eras and cultures, the female sex has been the object of disdain, indeed of mockery."* This applies equally to Christianity, not infrequently to this day.

"We Christians would like to be the better people. But we are not. At best we are better off."[32] *Christians today are not trailblazers for a more just world for all either. I cannot contradict a woman who says: "There is so much contempt for women in church history that as a woman it takes your breath away."*

Nevertheless, according to Angenendt, Christianity in the first centuries returned to God's original creation order: "So it is no wonder that women in particular felt drawn to Christianity; in the first three centuries they formed the majority in the churches. *The reasons are not hard to identify. Where else was the woman so equal to the man?"* This light of the gospel was, sadly, to grow dark again.

In the 18th and 19th centuries there were great revival movements. In these it was often women who led and proclaimed the Word.[33] In such times of awakening, which were not tightly organized, where structures were lacking and the Spirit of God blew like a storm, he was free to let the gifts work unhindered, because the difference between the sexes could be completely disregarded. *That is a good precondition, when this difference plays no role.*

2.6.8 The Secular Women's Rights Movement

The term feminism is often disparaged by conservative Christians. Yet they in particular should know that courageous women, and men too, achieved what they themselves should have stood up for. Today they themselves, and above all their wives, benefit from what these movements have achieved. This is not a canonization of feminism. It is a recognition and also an acknowledgment of facts, which apply just as much to the achievements of labor unions, from

32. Schmidt, 118, Endlich gleich, Holzgerlingen, 2019
33. Krüger, Hartmut, Frauen im Pietismus, Marburg, 2005

which (conservative) Christians (undeservedly) benefit. *We can never say per se that such movements of modern culture are bad or an attack on the Bible if we already benefit from them positively in some form and would be reluctant to give up these achievements.*

"Feminism is rooted in the secular women's movement. Its first wave at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century was a women's rights movement fighting for equal rights to political participation. Above all the right to vote and access to political office; fighting for the right to education, especially the education of girls; fighting for free choice of profession and access to employment. In 1896 women were admitted to universities for the first time as auditors; they were first allowed to study regularly in Baden from 1900, in other states considerably later; in 1918 women's suffrage was introduced; in 1949 the equal rights of women and men were enshrined in the Basic Law (Grundgesetz); in 1954 the ban on employing married women in the civil service was abolished; in 1957 the husband's right to the final decision; and finally in 1958 the so-called 'teacher celibacy,' which obliged female teachers to remain unmarried and to give up their profession upon marriage.

The second wave of the women's movement in the 1970s understood itself as a women's liberation movement. For although women were largely equal in law, at least on paper, they still experienced themselves as discriminated against and unfree: through unequal educational opportunities – at that time more boys than girls still attended the academic high schools (Gymnasien), and significantly more men than women studied at university; through poorer chances on the job market; in times of high unemployment they faced the reproach of being 'double earners' or were not hired at all, partly because of possible absences due to pregnancy; through lower wages for the same work; not least through the double or multiple burden of family, job and caring for relatives. Gender-fair language came into focus, equal opportunity officers for women were elected, plans to promote women were written."[34]

All this is only a fraction of what could have been cited here. *I hope these few lines make clear the hard road of women east of Eden. How strongly the thinking of the world has influenced that of the church can be seen in the fact that "Aristotle light" is still being*

34. Wikipedia (various articles)

justified today with the words of Paul. Only dark powers, whose leader is the ancient serpent, can take pleasure in this stony road of women. With Jesus, God's attitude toward the daughters of Eve is also finally revealed.

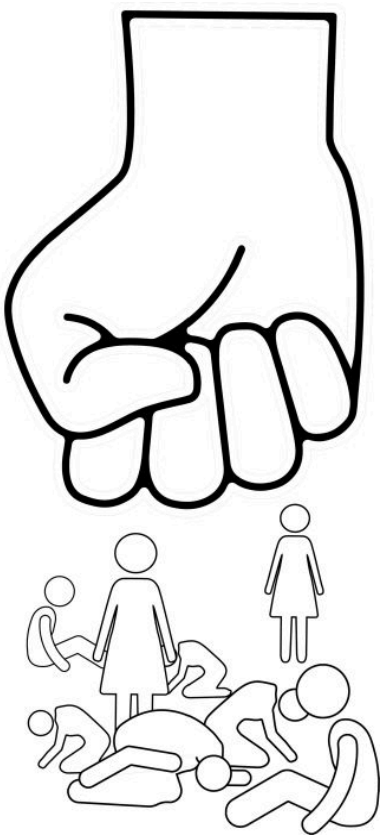
Perhaps you think all this is history. It was long ago, and today everything is completely different everywhere. Far from it: World Vision reported (10 years ago) on countries without a Christian heritage: 450 million women suffer from physical disabilities due to poor nutrition in childhood. In many societies, girls and their mothers eat only after the men and boys have had their fill. Women make up half of the world's population but own only one percent of its wealth. Of the 1.3 billion people living in poverty, 70% are women. A girl is twice as likely as a boy to receive no schooling.

Two million girls, mostly in Africa and the Middle East, are mutilated by circumcision to kill their sexual pleasure. If they survive this procedure, they grow up to face painful intercourse, possible infertility and a greater likelihood of dying in childbirth. More recent statistics show that in the current generation, 100 million girls are actually missing. They were killed by their families because of their sex. Many millions of these girls are missing in India and China, where mothers routinely have abortions when they learn they are pregnant with a girl. Or, as in antiquity, they are exposed to die. Medical care is withheld from them.

How many tears have been wept in secret? Heaven weeps too when Yahweh Elohim sees what befalls the daughters of Eve. Who will come to their aid? Who will stand up for them? Whose heart remains untouched in the face of these realities?

Hierarchy is the origin of patriarchy, and patriarchy is the origin of the abuse of sex and power.

Beth Allison Barr



3 Jesus the Messiah and Women

Our calendar begins with an unparalleled miracle: God becomes man. The Eternal One, the Creator, comes himself. He starts from zero like every human being, lives through childhood and youth and working life as a builder in Nazareth and the surrounding area. Later, when his public ministry begins, he makes his home in Capernaum in Galilee. All this takes place within the Judaism of the first century.

For women, too, a new era begins with him. He is the same one who once met Adam and Eve in the garden in the cool of the day. Yahweh Elohim as Son of Adam, as Son of Man, he is the seed of the woman. And her liberator. A man who understands women. Although unmarried, he experienced his mother and his sisters. He senses and sees every day how men behave toward their wives and toward women in general. He himself, as the firstborn, is perhaps responsible for the family, if Joseph, his father, is no longer alive and he had to take over his role. How did his sisters experience him?

He sees behind the scenes. In his public ministry at the latest, he tears down walls and turns the Jewish world of that time upside down. *If anyone is our example, it is the one who revealed God.* He is the end of all contradiction.

This chapter is not about doctrine, dogmatics or positions. It is about the reality of life. Stories. Encounters. Attitudes. Discoveries.

All the encounters of Jesus with women mentioned here have been examined many times.[35] And they are crucially important. Central, in fact, for in these texts we find how *God's redeeming and restoring power becomes reality in the lives of women. How they are brought back to the standing that the woman had in Eden. That is God's goal. To destroy the works of the devil, including the negative, overbearing and oppressive rule of the man over the woman in all its forms.*

35. For reasons of space and time I refrain from looking at the courageous women in the Old Testament who took on leadership roles or prophesied, and likewise at Elizabeth or Mary. The mother of Jesus is a unique, courageous, independent, spiritual and brave woman whom I do not consider further here.

How did women experience Jesus? They were there when Jesus was born, when he was tortured on the cross and when he had risen. Read this powerful and world-famous quotation from Dorothy L. Sayers:

"Perhaps it is no wonder that women were the first at the manger and the last at the cross. *They had never seen a man like this one – there has never been such another.* A prophet and teacher who rebuked without nagging and praised without condescension; who took their questions and arguments seriously; who never urged them to be womanly and never mocked them for their femininity; who took them as they were and dealt with them completely unselfconsciously."

Jesus meets women without a double standard, without exclusion, without condescension, without mere toleration, but with care and understanding, indeed with kindness and love.

Perhaps there are not very many incidents that are reported. But these pack a punch. There will have been many more that have not been reported to us. But perhaps one day we may look back on them, when God's eternal kingdom has dawned.

You have read or heard these stories a hundred times. Nevertheless, I will take a look at them and briefly point out their special features, including the cultural ones. I give the texts in full; you do not need to have a Bible at hand. And I share only a few thoughts on them. Immerse yourself in these holy moments!

3.1 Serving Women Disciples

> [Luke 8:1-3] And it came about afterward that he went through one town and village after another, preaching and proclaiming the kingdom of God. And the Twelve were with him, *and some women who had been healed of evil spirits and diseases: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, a steward of Herod, and Susanna, and many other women, who served him with their possessions.*

Not only Jesus, but other rabbis of this time too were surrounded by their disciples. But: rabbis had no women as their students and did not want any. Learning from a rabbi was the exclusive privilege of men. When we speak of the disciples of Jesus, we always think of the Twelve. Luke speaks of women whom he can name, and of many nameless women. We know that there were more than the twelve men. Luke spoke of 70 (Luke 10:1, 17). But perhaps women were already included there. In any case, the crowd of disciples as Luke describes it appears to us as a mixed company of men and women. Some of the women had experienced rescue through the rabbi and had followed him from then on. And had contributed their possessions. They served him, their master, and probably all who were traveling with Jesus. That does not mean cooking and doing laundry – perhaps that too: they served with their possessions. They, or at least some of them, *financed* the mission of Jesus and his followers.

It is an unparalleled breaking of a taboo: Jesus takes women into the circle of his disciples. Jesus wants them to learn. For he knows what an enormously important role the women, on whom he could rely more than on the men, were yet to play in the future for the kingdom of God and his church. Luke mentions them positively, without mentioning any special feature in their relationship to the male disciples.

3.2 Women Are to Learn

> [Luke 10:38-42, translated from the German Elberfelder Bible] As they went on their way, he came into a village; and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat down at the feet of Jesus and listened to his word. But Martha was very busy with much serving; she came up and said: Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me. *But Jesus answered and said to her: Martha, Martha! You are worried and troubled about many things; but one thing is necessary. For Mary has chosen the good part, which will not be taken away from her.*

Jesus loved these three siblings. He liked being in this house. He was welcome. The hours in which he taught were like being caught up into heaven. Words of life, words that had power, came from his mouth. And Mary found that more interesting than taking care of the crowd of disciples. Understandably, there was a squabble between the sisters. But Jesus, to whom Martha seems to turn reproachfully, gives Mary, and with her all women, the privilege of being a student and a learner. Without any difference between male and female disciples. At the feet of Jesus all differences are leveled. There everyone is equal! Today too. It is just as important for women to be instructed in the truth and firmly grounded in the faith. Just like the men, they take part in the discussion and in the questions.

3.3 All Equal

> [Mark 3:33-35] And he answered them and says: Who is my mother and my brothers? And he looked around at those sitting in a circle around him and says: *Here are my mother and my brothers; for whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and my sister and my mother.*

Jesus' family thought that Jesus had now completely lost control. Jesus does not appear here as a family man. For him, the new family of the kingdom of God and of the new creation counts for more. As we saw in the previous point, in the relationship to Jesus, in discipleship, gender is not abolished, but it no longer has any significance. Certainly no hierarchical significance, as if women were subordinate to men. It is crucial for understanding the roles of man and woman that Jesus never spoke of a hierarchy or taught one. Without words, Jesus already broke through the cultural and "pious" conventions of his time with his actions. He calls those who obey him brothers and sisters!

3.4 Menstruation Is No Longer Uncleanness

> [Mark 5:32-34] And he looked around to see the one who had done this. But the woman, full of fear and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. *But he said to her: Daughter, your faith has healed you; go in peace and be healed of your affliction.*

Menstruation in itself is something that for a woman is not a blessing but a burden. We men cannot put ourselves in her place. In Israel, women were ritually unclean during their menstrual period. Unclean for something they could do nothing about. Fate? Worse than that was when the bleeding did not stop. This disease exists today too. It made the woman permanently unclean. Much like a leper, she could hardly take part in social life and not at all in religious life. Her courage to seize healing from Jesus is one of the moving stories in the Gospels. Jesus calls this disease an affliction. He is the one who ends it. He leads the woman back into life. Much as he raises the daughter of Jairus immediately afterward. That is where he was going. *He calls her, in a touching way, daughter.* Like a father, he awakens in her the sense of acceptance, care and esteem that she has missed for 12 years. As when a daughter experiences the caring attention of her father. In front of everyone – the street was packed – he speaks like this to this *"unclean"* woman and does what only he did: speaking publicly with a woman and giving her back her life and her dignity before everyone. What will the men have thought? And the women even more!

3.5 Cast Out and Found

> [John 4:6-9] Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus, then, tired from the journey, sat down thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman from Samaria comes to draw water. Jesus says to her: Give me a drink! (For his disciples had gone away into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman

then says to him: *How is it that you, being a Jew, ask me for a drink, since I am a Samaritan woman? (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)*

[John 4:27-30] *And at this point his disciples came, and they were amazed that he was speaking with a woman.* Yet no one said: What are you looking for? or: Why are you talking with her? The woman then left her water jar and went away into the town and said to the people: Come, see a man who told me everything I have done! Could this be the Christ? They went out of the town and came to him.

How often in my youth did I hear words from chapter 4 of the Gospel of John. Mostly the ones about the Father seeking only such worshipers as worship in spirit and truth. Part of the truth in my youth was that women do not do this. They are silent in the meetings.

Why then did Jesus speak these deep and important truths to a woman? And to a Samaritan woman at that? One who had been divorced several times? To one who had only just come to know the Messiah?

He was free. He was Yahweh Elohim, who created man and woman as equals. He could meet women the way it should be. The disciples were amazed that he was speaking with a woman. How degraded the image of women was in those days. Jesus went this arduous way to turn the tragic life story of this woman, who had been sent away several times, into a story of salvation. No, it was not a man to whom Jesus said such words; it was a woman who had lost all self-worth and had to entrust herself to yet another man in order to survive. This man at the well of Sychar was different. As every man should be. It was the Messiah.

She becomes the first woman missionary. Her whole village comes to faith because she tells her story and overcomes her fear. It really is a breathtaking story that brings tears to my eyes. There were not many to whom Jesus directly revealed that he is the Messiah. But to this woman he opens heaven.

The question must be asked: How can one interpret Paul's prohibition on speaking in such a way that it extends to all women of the church at all times,

when Jesus here teaches a woman about the nature of worship? About worship, which is an essential characteristic of the church!?

3.6 It Takes Two to Commit Adultery

> [John 8:1-11, translated from the German Elberfelder Bible] But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came to him; and he sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees bring to him a woman caught in adultery, and they stand her in the middle and say to him: Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women; so what do you say? They said this to test him, so that they might have something to accuse him of. But Jesus stooped down and wrote with his finger on the ground. But when they kept on asking him, he straightened up and said to them: *Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her. And again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. But when they heard this, they went out one by one, beginning with the eldest down to the last;* and Jesus was left alone with the woman in the middle. But when Jesus had straightened up and saw no one but the woman, he said to her: Woman, where are they, your accusers? Has no one condemned you? She said: No one, Lord. *And Jesus said to her: Neither do I condemn you; go, and sin no more!*

Various Bibles have the heading: Jesus and the adulteress. But: where was the adulterer? Church Fathers thought, and some still think so today, that women are the seduction to sexual sin. The Jewish view of the woman made her responsible for sexual seduction. Jesus, by contrast, places the responsibility on the man (Matthew 5:28). When he looks at a woman, he is to be aware of sexual desire and to suppress it. In other words: don't look too long if you don't have your desire under control. I doubt whether the woman is the one who seduces. Men, more quickly aroused than women, do everything to get a woman into bed quickly. How it was here, we do not know. The lover had cowardly left her in the lurch or had been covered for by his male colleagues.

"Jesus said only a few words, but they spoke volumes. Sin was sin – whether committed by a man or a woman. Each of us will stand before God's judgment. No one will be able to hide or escape. No one will be able to point to someone else. The woman's sin was no worse than the man's – but no better either. When equality is the standard, hardly any stones are thrown."[36]

3.7 Standing Upright and at Full Height

> [Luke 13:10-17, translated from the German Elberfelder Bible] Now he was teaching on the Sabbath in one of the synagogues. And behold, *there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a spirit of weakness; and she was bent over and quite unable to straighten herself up. But when Jesus saw her, he called her to him and said to her: Woman, you are set free from your weakness! And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and glorified God.* … But this woman, who is a *daughter of Abraham*, whom Satan had bound, behold, for eighteen years, should she not be released from this bond on the Sabbath day? And as he said this, all his adversaries were put to shame; and the whole crowd rejoiced at all the glorious things that were being done by him.

The synagogue was the place of men. They were in the foreground. They did the talking. But Jesus sees this woman and brings her to the front. Into the center. A woman. And one who was terrible to look at, at that. The great Physician brings her into his presence. The men will not have welcomed this break with tradition. Only the fact that it was the Sabbath gave them a flimsy reason to attack Jesus. The term "daughter of Abraham" is unique. And so the bent woman straightens up. Compassionately, turning toward the poor woman, he lays his hands on her. Then she stands where otherwise only men are. Upright. Yahweh Elohim gives her back not only her health but her dignity: he calls her a daughter of Abraham. Where otherwise only men are heard, she raises her voice to glorify God. Yes, she strikes up, as it were, the praise of God in the synagogue. What a holy moment!

36. Hamilton, David

The Jewish synagogue, where women were virtually hidden in the background and the men alone spoke, is never the model for how the church of Jesus Christ functions.

3.8 No Double Standard

> [Matthew 19:8-9 (5:31-32)] He says to them: Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to send away your wives; but from the beginning it has not been so. But I say to you: Whoever sends away his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries a woman who has been sent away commits adultery.

Jewish husbands could send away their wives relatively easily. A reason could always be found. So the woman who was sent away, or rather cast off, was virtually an outcast and could hardly survive. It is Jesus who exposes the Pharisees and scribes and leads them back to the beginning. Man and woman are created as equals in God's image and united in marriage. That was the creation order.

Men and women alike are to keep to the same rules. Thank God it is no longer the way it was among the Jews back then. But divorce remains something that wounds most deeply and also breaks God's heart. Referring to the creation account, Jesus takes the woman under his protection and appeals to the men not simply to send away their wives for unjustified reasons, except in the case of adultery. He stands up for women. He raises his voice for them and rebukes the hardness of heart that he sees as the reason for these dismissals.

3.9 Outrageous Grace

> [Mark 14:3-9, translated from the German Elberfelder Bible] And when he was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, while he was reclining at table, a woman came who had an alabaster flask of ointment of genuine, very costly nard. She broke the alabaster flask and poured it out on his head. But some were indignant among themselves and said: Why has this

> waste of the ointment happened? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor. And they scolded her harshly. But Jesus said: *Leave her alone; why are you making trouble for her? She has done a good work for me;* for you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good to them; but you do not always have me. *She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. But truly, I say to you: wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told, in memory of her.*

It is an incomprehensible, even an embarrassing situation. This woman had already met Jesus, and he had made her life new. She plucks up the courage to burst into this society of men and to be stared at by everyone. And then to do what she could. Jesus knew she could do no more. A year's wages saved up, everything she had – it was worth it to her to sacrifice it for Jesus. Never before had anything so precious been poured on the head of the man from Nazareth. Never had he smelled so fragrant. And Jesus exalts this woman before everyone and gives her a place in history that he gave to no man. He valued it beyond measure – no one understood that his mission was ultimately to have its lowest and highest point at Golgotha.

"She is more than a sinner who has been forgiven. Her many tears of joy as she serves Jesus stand in contrast to those of Peter, who weeps bitterly after he gives up serving and denies Jesus (Luke 22:62). Her continuing kisses stand in contrast to the treacherous kiss of Judas (Luke 22:47). Her position at Jesus' feet is that of a servant, the position that Jesus himself takes (Luke 22:26-27). Her loving act of breaking the alabaster flask and pouring out its precious contents is a symbolic imitation of Christ, who allows his body to be broken and his precious blood to be poured out for all his beloved (Luke 22:20). She is an icon (image) of Christ!"[37]

All you men who impose silence on women and forbid them to preach: how often in your proclamation and preaching of the gospel have you mentioned this woman?

37. Reid, Barbara E., p. 76, Wisdom's Feast, 2016

3.10 The Cross: Where Are the Men?

[Matthew 27:55-56] *Now many women were there, watching from a distance, women who had followed Jesus from Galilee and had served him.* Among them were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

[Mark 15:40-41] There were also women watching from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome, *who, when he was in Galilee, had followed him and served him; and many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.*

[Luke 23:55-56] And the women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. But when they had returned, *they prepared spices and ointments;* and on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

[Matthew 28:9-10] But as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them and said: *Greetings! And they came up, took hold of his feet and worshiped him.* Then Jesus says to them: Do not be afraid; go, tell my brothers that they are to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.

Isn't it remarkable how the male writers of the Gospels write about these women here? They do not overlook them. They do not forget them. After all, they had experienced the women as fellow disciples who followed Jesus together with the Twelve. These writers, too, had grown up with the Jewish and Talmudic image of women. But Jesus had made their image of women new as well. It took a few years, but in this respect they walk in Jesus' footsteps.

Moreover, it was quite embarrassing for them as men to write that the women at least watched the crucifixion from a distance, while they themselves – except John – had fled.

Jesus' behavior toward women had made them strong and courageous. He had encouraged them. Had valued their services. What we read here is the echo of the respect Jesus had for them. Contrary to tradition and conventions, he had taken them into the circle of women and men disciples. There is much we do not know, but the facts mentioned make one thing clear: he respected them equally, male and female disciples alike. Even if no women belonged to the innermost circle.

3.11 Mary, the Apostle

> [John 20:15-18] Jesus says to her: Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for? She, thinking it was the gardener, says to him: Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus says to her: Mary! She turns around and says to him in Hebrew: Rabboni! – which means Teacher. Jesus says to her: Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father. *But go to my brothers and say to them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God. Mary Magdalene comes and announces to the disciples that she has seen the Lord and that he had said these things to her.*

In a court case there were no women as witnesses. They were not considered worthy of being witnesses. That is how far things had gone. That Jesus entrusts and commissions women with the most important message of all time cannot be valued highly enough – for the disciples themselves too. Never has a more important and greater message been proclaimed than the one immediately after the crucifixion. Mary was the only one who was there, where this message could be heard. She is commissioned to proclaim this truth to the disciples, who had fearfully gone into hiding. In view of this commission, the question of whether women may preach shows little sense.

In this unique sending I call Mary an apostle, a woman commissioned by the risen Lord. In a garden Eve let herself be deceived. In this garden no man is to be seen. Only a woman who misses her Lord and liberator and is looking for

him. Not the living, but the dead Jesus. She had tied her existence to him. He was her all in all. This faithfulness and love is valued and honored by the Lord Jesus.

Because *Mary Magdalene* is named as the first to meet the risen Lord and to be appointed by him to proclaim the message of his resurrection to his disciples (John 20:11-18), she was already venerated in the early church as equal to the apostles. In the 3rd century, Hippolytus of Rome established the honorable title *apostola apostolorum*, which means apostle to the apostles, a title taken up by the theologians Rabanus Maurus and even Thomas Aquinas, whose view of women I have already indicated.

"Jesus did not found a women's movement, but a movement for human beings. It is not surprising, however, that women were especially receptive to his ideas. Trapped in the isolation of a sometimes hostile family, women knew how insecure, unjust and lonely the world was."[38]

In Jesus I find no hint whatsoever of a hierarchical submission of the woman or of her exclusion from a public ministry or a ministry of leadership in the church. His conduct toward women makes clear how far the rabbinic image of women had moved away from the Creator's design.

The Messiah took up the cause of the daughters of Eve. He who revealed God perfectly in his deepest nature.

You are always good and do so much good to me! LORD, help me to know your will!

Psalm 119:68 (Gute Nachricht, German Bible translation)

38. Boulding, Elsie, 358, A View of Woman through Time, 1976



For all eternity, Lord, your word stands firm; it stands as firm as the heavens.

Psalm 119:89 (Neue Genfer Übersetzung NGÜ, German Bible translation)

4 Paul, the Friend of Women

I have often heard, and sometimes thought myself, that Jesus and Paul do not mean and say the same thing. As if they contradicted each other. If you want to see it that way, you will be able to construct reasons. I believe that Paul walks in the footsteps of Jesus, also where women are concerned. Their dignity, their devotion and faithfulness. It is in fact Paul who, through his letters, shapes the image of woman in the church even more than Jesus does. But whoever misunderstands him will set up a contrast to Jesus.

Paul himself, in some passages of his letters, gives reason for the fact that for many he has gone down in history as a woman-hater. But the perception is changing. And that is because we perhaps can and must understand those passages differently. More on that later.

Although he came from the Pharisaic tradition, which did not have a very appreciative image of women and was influenced by Greek thinking, he was completely set free from it.[39] Elsewhere in this book I express the supposition that the three years in Arabia immediately after his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus were a hard school for getting rid of all this baggage of Pharisaic conditioning. *For the Talmudic images of women, which Jesus had already broken through, have no place in God's kingdom.*

The work of the tireless servant Paul was surrounded by and interwoven with many women. They were involved in his mission and, like links in a chain, were indispensable co-workers. Some men, I fear, have not realized what great works and fruit God has brought about in his kingdom through women. In all centuries, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries. When it was apparently completely irrelevant to God whether women were allowed to teach and lead publicly or not. You can turn it any way you like: *problems arose when the "lords of creation" insisted on their male-dominated interpretation of Scripture and virtually rendered God's purpose for the ministry of women ineffective (Luke 7:30).*

39. There is also the assumption that the teacher Gamaliel had and taught a more positive image of women than his colleagues, and that Paul adopted this as well.

In this chapter I give some examples of how the unmarried Paul names women in his letters. At first this is not about fundamental or doctrinal matters concerning being a man and being a woman; I will come to that later. It is about real women with whom Paul had to do. "If one starts from the number of women who were connected with Paul in shared ministry, it seems to have been normal for women to be actively engaged in proclaiming the gospel and in the ministries that existed in the young churches. *Basically, Paul uses the same language to describe female and male co-workers."*[40]

Well known in this respect is the list of greetings in chapter 16 of the letter to the Romans, where women are mentioned not only by name but with attributes of their ministry. Those who hold that women are excluded from public leadership offices read these texts differently than I do. Decide for yourself how it might be meant. Coming from the creation account, and worked out in further chapters of this book, my reading – the equality of the sexes in the public ministry of the church as well – is not only possible but in some cases unambiguous.

4.1 Lydia

The first European Christian is a woman, the purple-cloth dealer Lydia in the Roman colony of Philippi. She makes her house available to Paul, his companions and the first Christian church in Europe. She is not only a recipient of Pauline instruction but a dialogue partner of Paul. She is the sole mistress of the house. She urges Paul and his companion Silas to stay with her:

> [Acts 16:14-15] And a certain woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God, was listening; the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And when she had been baptized, and her household, she urged us, saying: If you judge that I am faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay. And she persuaded us.

40. Tucker, Liefeld, 436, in Kuen, Alfred, Die Frau in der Gemeinde, 1998

> [Acts 16:40] When they had come out of the prison, they went to Lydia; and when they had seen the brothers (or: the brothers and sisters gathered at Lydia's), they encouraged them and departed.

"This indicates that her house then quickly became the crystallization point of a house church as well. The churches met in houses. And not only Lydia, but other women too appear as those who made their houses available to the churches. And in this there also lies a natural leadership role of these people – a leadership role in the church as hosts, women and men, who then might also have led the respective churches and might also have presided over the worship services."[41]

4.2 Phoebe

> [Romans 16:1-2] I commend to you Phoebe, our sister, who is also a *servant of the assembly in Cenchreae*, so that you receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and help her in whatever matter she may need you; for she too has been a *helper* (Greek: prostatis) of many, and of me myself.

The greeting formula, beginning with Phoebe, identifies her as the person who carried the letter to the Romans from Corinth to the capital of the Roman Empire. There she presumably read it aloud in the church (or house churches) and explained it in response to questions. She is a deacon of the church of Cenchreae, a port suburb of Corinth. She receives from Paul a highly responsible task that goes beyond the service of a mail carrier.

"I want to emphasize that this observation in Romans is not and cannot be the end of the discussion about women in ministry. There are other texts, contexts and interpretations that we must deal with. But I point out that Paul apparently did not seem to have a problem with women playing a kind of speaking role in the churches. If he really had reservations, then it was really very, very strange to send Phoebe to Rome. My conclusion is that Paul's praise for the deacon Phoebe, her position as his benefactor (patron of the church) and her role as

41. Sabine Bieberstein, New Testament scholar in Eichstätt, interview on Deutschlandfunk, 2013

letter carrier and as his representative in the Roman churches indicate that women were part of the teaching life of the church, and Paul expressly encouraged them."[42]

"One can assume that Phoebe was simply the central woman of the house church of Cenchreae, who possibly made her house available, who sponsored the celebration of the Lord's Supper, Communion. That Phoebe was responsible for all this, since she also worked as advocate or patron of this church – all this can be said on the basis of Romans 16."[43]

Paul calls her *prostatis*, which the Elberfelder (German Bible translation) renders as *Beistand* (helper, support). But this word, which occurs only once in the New Testament, at this point, also means *to preside, to stand at the head.* "We can reasonably assume that Paul, a Hellenistic Jew raised in the Diaspora, was thoroughly familiar with the Greek concept of the prostates as the first, master, defender or presiding official of the city. This would mean that when the Christian leaders in Rome received Phoebe, they were aware that she was a Christian leader where she came from."

According to Romans 12:8, leading (presiding) is a gift of grace in the body of Christ and is therefore definitely not exclusively a matter for men. Women have this gift just as men do. Presiding is part of the task of the elder (1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 5:17/3:4, 5, 12). That women should be elders or presiding leaders ought not to seem strange in view of these words of Paul either. One will never be able to carry out with diligence the ministry of presiding over and caring for the church, and the work in word and teaching that belongs to it (1 Timothy 5:17), if one has to be silent in the assembly or is not allowed to speak or lead in public.

"She is a prostatis, a woman who presides; she is also called diakonos, and this is where it starts: is she a servant, is she a church assistant, how is this translated?" Exegetes argue about this to this day. The Einheitsübersetzung (German Bible translation) of the New Testament simply speaks of a "servant of the church of Cenchreae." "... The interpretation, or the history of the reception of

42. Bird, 37

43. Heininger, Bernhard, Würzburg, ibid.

this term, has gone like this: when a man like Paul calls himself diakonos, he is a servant of the Word, that is, an apostle, an upright, free man who simply serves the Word. *But when a woman is called that, she is a church assistant in the sense of: she only helps*."[44] Phoebe belongs to the large circle of those who work together with Paul in spreading the message of Christ. Paul calls her sister, which characterizes his personal esteem and the relationship between the two. As the bearer of the letter, Phoebe was the first contact person when the Roman church had questions. She was familiar with Paul's trains of thought and can thus be regarded as the first interpreter of the text.

Paul entrusted Phoebe, a woman, with what is perhaps the most important document of Christianity. That is not just an indication; it is proof that he made no distinctions between the sexes as regards ministry and role in God's kingdom.

4.3 Prisca

> [Romans 16:3-5] Greet Prisca and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus (who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the assemblies of the Gentiles), and the assembly in their house.

The *married couple Prisca and Aquila*, the most frequently mentioned, are perhaps Paul's longest-standing and closest co-workers in his missionary work. They were Jewish Christians. Although with married couples the man was always named first, the New Testament names Prisca, the wife, first four times (out of six mentions). Why? Because she went ahead and led in ministry. Perhaps because she was more gifted than her husband. And yet both worked together as team partners, of equal worth and equal rank, in unity. Each knew the strengths and weaknesses of the other. As a woman, Prisca was also strategically important, because women were mostly reached by women, not by men. Both of them, Prisca first, instructed Apollos. Taught by Paul himself, trained in questions and answers during many hours of making tents together, both were well equipped to instruct others. Here Prisca, a woman, deserves special mention.

44. Sutter Rehmann, Luzia, Basel

Her husband stood behind her, in the second row, but without there being any hierarchy as a result.

4.4 Junia

> [Romans 16:7] Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives and my fellow prisoners, *who are outstanding among the apostles*, who were also in Christ before me.

Another missionary couple is singled out by Paul. The earliest interpreters of the New Testament, the Church Fathers, speak of Junia with high esteem. John Chrysostom (AD 344–407) writes about Junia: "To be an apostle is something great. But to be famous among the apostles – consider what great praise that is. How great must the wisdom of this woman have been, that she was found worthy of the title apostle."

In some translations, however, one still reads to this day another name instead of *Junia*: *Junias* – a man. But the name Junias demonstrably appears for the first time in the 13th century – in Giles of Rome, an Augustinian hermit and a student of the Doctor of the Church Thomas Aquinas. *So why did Junia become Junias? Because in the worldview of many Christians there cannot or must not be a woman apostle.*

In scholarship the view has meanwhile prevailed that Junia, the female form, must be the original Pauline one. "In the middle of the last century it was established that the male name Junias hardly exists in antiquity, that is, it is not attested, while the female name Junia is frequently attested. What turned Junia into Junias can probably only be explained on the basis of a mistaken understanding of office. Andronicus and Junia are described in Romans 16:7 as outstanding among the apostles, and it has been a difficulty, or is a difficulty, to count Junia among the apostles."[45]

The arguments and publications for and against a woman apostle Junia are countless. If she was one, then not in the sense of the Twelve or of a Paul, but

45. Heininger, Bernhard, ibid.

as a strategic and effective missionary. Even if she should not have been an apostle, the esteem for her must have been enormous. In ancient culture that was not usual. *It shows how the healing effect of the gospel also spread to the question of the sexes. But also how hard a male-dominated church world finds this matter.*

"It is possible that Andronicus and Junia, perhaps a married couple, were apostles in the sense of someone sent out by a church like a missionary, like Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:25 and Titus in 2 Corinthians 8:23. Such people, however, are usually designated by the church they come from as 'apostles of the churches' or 'your apostle,' or even, like Phoebe, as 'servant (deacon) of the church of Cenchreae.' Alternatively, Andronicus and Junia may have been apostles in the sense that they were witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus and were commissioned at that time for the ministry they were now exercising outside Palestine (1 Corinthians 15:6-7). This is supported by the fact that Paul says they 'were in Christ before me,' so that they were converted in Palestine sometime around AD 30–32. The only other occurrences of the word 'apostle' in Romans describe Paul's commission to go to the Gentiles (Romans 1:1; 11:13). Eldon Epp recently stated: *'It remains a fact that in the earliest generation of Christianity there was a woman apostle who was expressly called so, and today's Christians – laity and clergy – must face this (and eventually will).'"*[46]

4.5 Mary, Tryphena and Tryphosa, Persis

> [Romans 16:6] Greet Mary, *who has worked hard for you.*
>
> [Romans 16:12] Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, *who work in the Lord.* Greet Persis, the beloved, *who has worked hard in the Lord.*

What comes to mind when Paul speaks of work and ministry? Paul sums up his whole ministry, everything he did, as *work* (e.g., 1 Corinthians 15:10; 16:10; Galatians 4:11; 1 Thessalonians 3:5; 5:12); evangelizing, teaching, admonishing; all ministries that often took place in public and were ministries of the Word. *What reason do we have to understand the ministry of these women differently from that of*

46. Bird, Michael, ibid.

Paul? They were courageous women who served Christ in their surroundings, in their individual situations. Not only at the stove or in the house, but also in the house church. There were no church buildings yet. But in the private house or under the open sky. Christians also gathered in public places, in workshops or inns. Or, as with Lydia by the river, also at baptisms, such women stood strong, just like their brothers in the Lord. What Paul praises is publicly visible and audible work for the kingdom of God.

All in all, Paul mentions 10 women in Romans 16 if we include Phoebe of Cenchreae. If we include the women from Paul's other letters, the number of women he mentions rises to 18. Paul valued the ministry of women, and he regarded many of them as partners in ministry. He never called them pastors or elders, but he never called his male ministry partners pastors or elders either. Paul never referred to his co-workers in terms that suggested power, authority or prestige. He understood that they were his brothers and sisters and that they, just like him, were commissioned by Jesus Christ. That was his understanding of ministry and working together.

4.6 Euodia and Syntyche

> [Philippians 4:2-3] I exhort Euodia, and I exhort Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, I ask you too, my true companion, help them, *who have contended at my side in the gospel.*

To contend in the gospel can mean nothing other than having also proclaimed it. And in such a way that they also met with opposition in public.

These two women had disagreements. That had a direct impact on the fellowship. This was not a side issue; it struck at the heart of the church. From which it can be concluded that they had certain leadership or management functions. Paul names them in the same breath as Clement and other co-workers. Like a team in which two individual players had to be admonished not to give up on the team spirit.

Perhaps they belonged to the overseers (*episkopos*) and servants (*diakonos*) whom Paul greets and addresses at the beginning of the letter to the Philippians. This reading poses no problem if one is convinced that there is no hierarchical subordination of the woman to the man and that women and men work together as equals in the church.

4.7 Chloe

> [1 Corinthians 1:11] For it has been reported to me about you, my brothers, by those of Chloe's household, that there are quarrels among you.

Perhaps one can say that Paul writes expressly at the very beginning of the first letter to the Corinthians that he had heard from Chloe's people what conditions prevailed in Corinth. For that means: this Chloe plays an important role, a public role, in the church. It is quite possible that she was a leader and had sent the delegation to Paul.

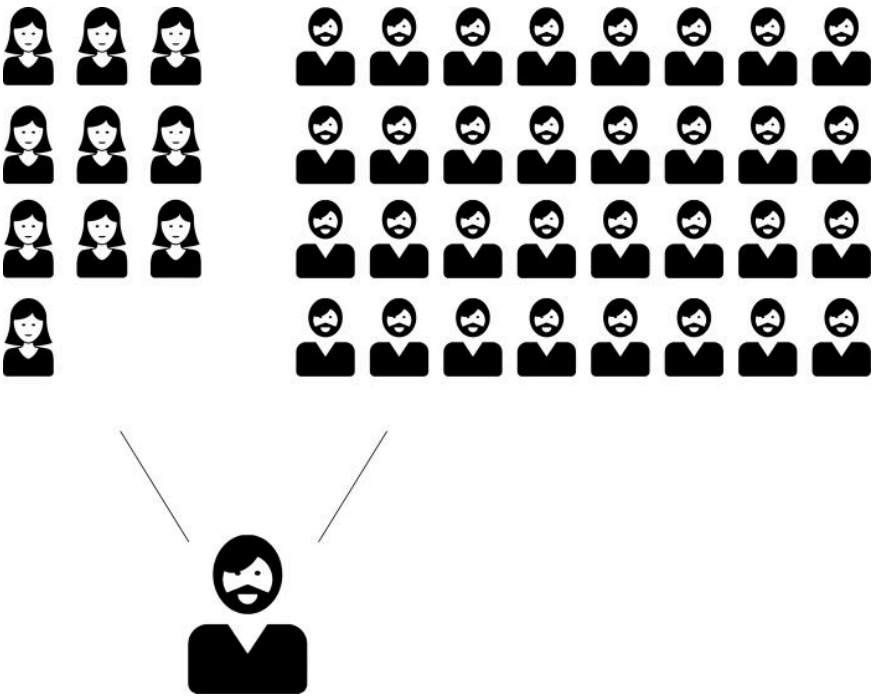
In any case, she was a woman who was not only a good acquaintance of Paul, but whom he mentions because she had a special significance among the Corinthians. With Paul, one does not acquire such significance through wealth, gender or good connections, but through service to the believers.

4.8 Nympha

> [Colossians 4:15] Greet the brothers in Laodicea, and Nympha and *the assembly that is in her house*.

It stands to reason that the hostesses of a house that could accommodate a house church also took on leadership tasks. It is not compelling, but quite possible. It is remarkable in any case that a woman invited the brothers and sisters in the faith. As a hostess she may have been widowed. If she was married and her husband was also a believer, it is all the more striking that she and not he is named as host. Similar to the order of Prisca and Aquila. In the family house of

antiquity, the woman was often the manager, who, though under her husband, acted there with great independence. It is remarkable that Colossians also contains the so-called household code, as it were the house rules of the patriarchal family: [Colossians 3:18] "Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord." Nevertheless, Nympha is the one who invites.



In the New Testament Paul mentions by name 39 people as his co-workers. 10 of these are women. He speaks about all of them in the same way, without making any distinction. The renowned theologian F. F. Bruce, a theologian respected worldwide from the Brethren movement (Open Brethren), remarks: "*(Paul) seems to make no distinction between men and women among his co-workers. Both men and women receive praise for working together in the service of the gospel, without any hint of an underlying difference between the one or the other with regard to status or function.*" Perhaps there would be still more women to name, and their names and attributes to examine in more detail. *But by now it should be obvious that Paul, for his*

time, was a revolutionary friend of women who tore down hierarchical walls. One who had been to school with Jesus, although he had not personally experienced the earthly Jesus. But he used many opportunities to learn as much as possible about him. From Peter and from his co-worker Luke he will have learned much about Jesus. Including his behavior toward women. If he had only male co-workers in his traveling team, as far as we know, he nevertheless, as these texts show, made no distinctions that would have put women in the second row. What was decisive for him was how faithful they were, how gifted and how willing to serve. Gender did not count for him!

4.9 Paul, the Nursing Mother

Paul was a trendsetter. Against the trend of his time. The Greco-Roman ideal of masculinity, which diligently secures, defends and lives out the hierarchical order of society, finds no positive echo whatsoever in Paul. For the church, this patriarchal and power-oriented behavior, which wants the weak to remain weak and consolidates its own position of power, is a great danger. This behavior lay behind almost all the tensions and divisions in Corinth. *Questions of power still play a role among men today, often ranking above matters of substance. Here the mere presence of women, e.g., of the wives of leading brothers or elders, could have a wholesome effect.*

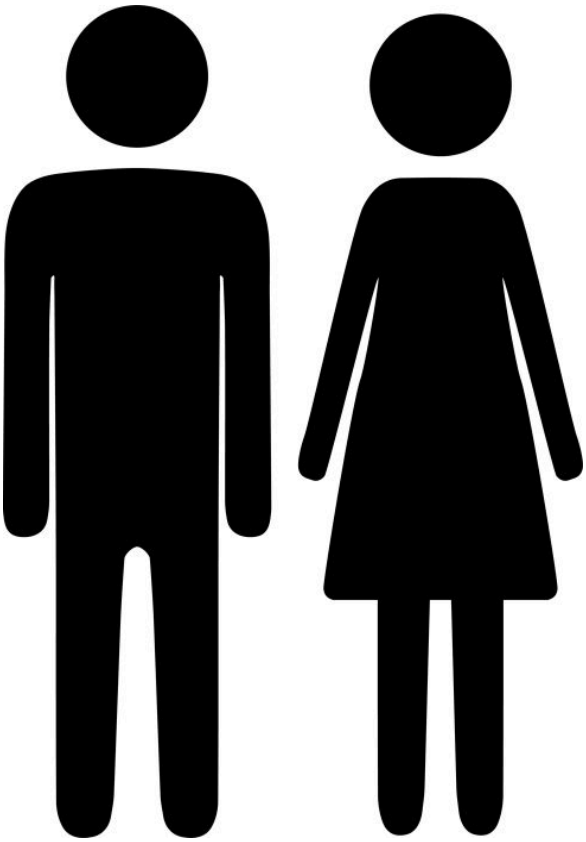
Paul presents himself several times as the one to be imitated, just as he is an imitator of Christ (1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:6). He is a man who is not a good speaker, a fool for Christ's sake, a woman nursing a child, a father who brings shame on his children, and a celibate man (1 Corinthians 1-7). Such a man would necessarily have held a subordinate position in the society of that time and would consequently have been excluded from institutions and positions reserved for men.

"From Paul's point of view, institutions of patriarchy represent oppressive structures of the present age and are not representative of the way the people of God are to live. ... Men are to be fools, not dominant speakers; they are not to exploit their status in Roman courts, but to appoint men of lower status to

settle disputes, to submit their bodies to their wives, and to adapt to the eating habits of the weak. The point of such practices is to prevent the factionalism that threatened to tear the Corinthians apart, by ending behaviors that create the competition and the striving for power and status that was rampant in Roman Corinth. *Paul creates a specific, Christlike male identity that he knows will undermine the kind of status and power games that were the norm in urban Roman contexts. Paul's goal is the unity of the believing community.* To achieve this unity, Paul directly challenges hierarchical orders that place some members of the community above others, by calling those members of the community who could profit from such systems to deliberately embody identities that identify them with members of the community of lower status. *The pervasive connection between power and masculinity required Paul to address the kind of masculinity that the men in Corinth were striving for.*"[47]

On the question of the role of the man in ancient society, Tom Holland, the well-known British writer, makes the following observations: "The sexual economy (of the ancient world) rests on the absolute right of free Roman men to have sex with anyone they want, however they please." He goes on to say, with regard to the general behavior of men in power: "In almost every respect this is a world that is unspeakably cruel to our way of thinking." *Into this world, in Holland's view, come Paul's letters and Paul's thinking with great impact, disrupting in particular the dominant world of men.*

47. Being Subordinate Men: Paul's Rhetoric of Gender and Power in 1 Corinthians, Brian J. Robinson, Lanham, 2019, 214



5 Man and Woman in Marriage

From the creation account I have concluded that there is no hierarchical subordination of the woman to the man. The Old Testament does not demand this. But when you then read the letters of the apostles, it is pointed out more than once that the woman should submit to the man. From this – even if it is some thousands of years later – one could after all discern a hierarchy that is now to be lived out in marriage. How are these instructions to be understood? For this, a look back at the marriage and family life of the first century is necessary. Much of what I have already described and quoted about the relationship of man and woman in history will be vividly brought to mind here once again.

5.1 The Ancient Household and Its Rules

Oikos (Greek: οἶκος) was, in ancient Greece and Rome, the household and economic community that formed the center of life. The oikos included the family as well as servants and slaves, the land, the buildings, and all movable property – much like the Roman villa. The head of the family was the lord, the kyrios, who ruled patriarchally over his wife and children, and often also over the adult sons living in the oikos and their wives.

The household was the living space and the ancient form of what we call family. Not a nuclear family with one or two children, but an extended family with parents or parents-in-law and unmarried relatives. The size of a household naturally depended on its financial means. The vast majority of people were poor and lived at or below subsistence level. Even so, their social family structure was that of the ancient household, even if they lived in mud huts.

The ancient household was the backbone of ancient society. To preside over the household and manage it was the task of the master of the house, the *paterfamilias*. The house (domus) – described by ancient authors as the nucleus of society and a city in miniature – also became one of the most important metaphors for

the early Christian churches. For example, when the church or congregation is called a house or household over which God presides as master of the house (see the letters to Timothy and the letter to Titus).

So the house is the epitome of the ancient family, a real house and at the same time an image of God's house, the church. It was in these houses that the Christians held their gatherings.

Acts and Paul often speak of *the house*. We must understand our idea of what a house is within the cultural setting of Paul's time, not through the lens of our own time.

There were women who headed their households, many of them widows. They became hosts of house churches and as such also held leadership functions.

The ancient house was a sacred place with a household altar at which sacrifices were offered to the gods every day. The well-being of the human community in the house depended on the care (cultus) of its relationship with the deities, which was meant to secure peace with the gods. The house was the woman's domain, and she performed these cultic acts as a priestess. Imagine the difficult situations that arose when a woman became a Christian but her husband did not.

Why do these historical facts matter for our subject? Because the apostles speak their instructions into these ancient structures of relationship. We do not know them in every last detail, and we no longer live in them today.

The household, that is, the (extended) family, is described in the New Testament as a given. It is judged neither good nor bad. It is an age-old "cultural product." It developed this way over thousands of years, with many advantages and disadvantages. This is where the gospel breaks in.

5.1.1 Household Codes in the New Testament

"A household code in the New Testament denotes a rule of status, function, or role for the members of an ancient Christian household in their relationship to one another. The term coined by Martin Luther (second appendix to the Small

Catechism, 1529) serves in Luther Bibles, in the form 'Die christliche Haustafel' (The Christian Household Code), as a subheading for Ephesians 5:21-6:9 and Colossians 3:18-4:1. The term is used for New Testament texts of an ethical character that relate to groups of persons in the household, sometimes also in the church (as the 'household of God,' 1 Timothy 3:15), but not in the social and political sphere."[48]

Passages about how husbands and wives are to behave in marriage, or how they are to understand their roles in relation to each other, belong to the so-called household tables or household codes. *The New Testament teaching on marriage stands in the context of the question of how whole households should view their new positions in relation to one another, now that some or all of them are Christians.* There are numerous examples of this in the New Testament and in early Christian writings:

Ephesians 5:21-6:9; Colossians 3:18-19; 1 Timothy 2:8-15 (men-women)

1 Timothy 6:1-2 (slaves-masters)

Titus 2:1-10 (older men, older women, young men, slaves)

1 Peter 2:18-3:7 (slaves, wives, husbands)

In later Christian writings, including the Didache, they are developed further in other directions: Didache 4:9-11 (fathers, children, masters, slaves); Barnabas 19:5-7 (fathers, children, slaves, masters); 1 Clement 1:3 (leaders, young people, women), 21:6-9 (leaders, elders/adults, young people, wives, children); Ignatius to Polycarp 4:1-6:2 and Polycarp to the Philippians 4:2-6:1 (wives, widows, deacons, young men, virgins, elders).

Such elementary teachings for social groups also appear in non-Christian texts, perhaps most clearly in Aristotle's Politics and then in Arius Didymus as well as among street philosophers (Ps.-Charondas, Ps.-Zaleucus).

"McKnight notes that these household rules speak differently to different readers. For some they unambiguously support patriarchal structures; they confirm the hierarchical view that the father and husband is the head of the household,

48. WiBiLex, Das wissenschaftliche Bibellexikon im Internet (in German)

by which they explicitly mean that he has authority over all persons in his care. To others they show something different. '*While some discover in these passages the establishment of patriarchalism, others see that this very structure is being dethroned, or at least has the chance of being dethroned.* So it seems, as so often in the Bible, that these household codes tell us something of the ancient perspectives of the writers and something about ourselves when we read them! ... *We should all agree that the interpretation of the household code brings our own social assumptions along with it."*[49]

For it was nothing new for a Christian wife at that time to hear that submission was expected of her. But I imagine that the instruction to husbands, read aloud so that everyone could hear it, that is, the whole house church, made considerable waves throughout the household. Now she and those around her knew that this behavior was also expected of him, the paterfamilias. Here the Christian revolution takes place.

5.1.2 The Effect of Christian Household Codes

"Scot McKnight points out that the Christian household codes had a concrete purpose. They 'were designed to promote socially respectable behavior as a platform for social security, apologetics, and evangelism' (1 Peter 2:13-3:7, especially 2:12, 14; 3:2).

Christians are to "live as free people, but not use their freedom to do evil; live as God's slaves" (1 Peter 2:16). *Christians were suspected of proclaiming a subversive message, and so they were put to the test. And since in Greco-Roman moral philosophy the household was understood "as the basic unit of civilization," the influence of suspect religions on the family was closely watched.*

In the household codes, the letters contain elements of subversion, turning away from and reversing the understanding of rank at that time. Subordinates are addressed directly in the letters. This is a distinctly Christian innovation, apparently unique in an ancient setting. The New Testament household codes address women, slaves, and children directly alongside their husbands, masters,

49. Peppiatt, Lucy, pp. 87-88, Rediscovering Scripture's Vision for Women: Fresh Perspectives on Disputed Texts, 2020, IVP Academic, Downers Grove, Illinois

and fathers, which indicates that the author recognizes both their agency and their dignity.

Hurtado writes: "*We should not hastily disregard what even such a modest acknowledgment of dignity meant in this ancient setting for those who were otherwise unable to change their situation*. What is not obvious to the modern reader is that the Christian household codes regard subordinate groups as moral agents 'who are capable of and responsible for responding to exhortations addressed to them.' *Remember that whole households worshiped together and that letters were read aloud to the assembled congregation. The lower ranks heard the instructions to their superiors, and vice versa. This is really the key to why the Christian household codes were subversive; they contain within themselves the reversal of the customary ranks accorded to men, women, slaves, and children, and of the expectations placed on them."*[50]

5.1.3 The Household Code in Ephesians 5

Under the heading of the ancient household order or household code, I quote two well-known Bible interpreters who capture beautifully the overturning, revolutionary power of the gospel for these old structures.

Michael Bird interviewed Lynn Cohick about her new commentary on Ephesians in the well-known NICNT series and asked her, among other things, this question:[51] *What do we do with the household codes today? Should we strive to follow them literally, or do we gloss over them as an attempt to Christianize pagan social ethics?*

"We should obey Holy Scripture – of course! The question is what Paul is asking for. This is where the term 'literal' comes into play. We cannot literally obey the Scripture that contains the regulations for slavery, because slavery is prohibited (although I realize that slavery still occurs, for example in the trafficking of women). We implicitly acknowledge that Paul does not insist that societies must have slavery; rather, he addresses a need: how the church should treat its members who are slaves and slaveholders. We have to find out what he wants with

50. Peppiatt, Lucy, pp. 87-88, Rediscovering Scripture's Vision for Women: Fresh Perspectives on Disputed Texts, 2020, IVP Academic, Downers Grove, Illinois
51. www.patheos.com/blogs/euangelion/2020/07/lynn-cohick-on-ephesians/#disqus_thread

regard to human relationship and character/virtue, and then apply this in our context. From the section on slavery I take it that Paul's statement – God shows no favoritism – strikes at the heart of relationships of domination and abuse. Slavery was built on domination, the use of force, and intimidation. All of this is unacceptable to God, for he regards all as of equal worth.

Pagan social ethics was hierarchical, with a rule of domination for the socially superior, the rich, the dominant, and a deficit of social standing/respect for the poor. A female slave owner had authority over her male slave. In this case ownership trumps gender. *Because of the multilayered, complex social hierarchy in the Roman world, everyone had to submit to someone else, and the key was to make sure you did it correctly. Today we see 'submission' as a negative word, but that was not so in antiquity.* When Paul asks all believers to '*submit to one another*' (Ephesians 5:21), he wants them to respect one another as fellow believers, and not on the basis of the social value that society happened to grant the believer. A husband who loves his wife self-sacrificially, as Christ did for his church, was revolutionary for the Gentile world. Paul introduces mutuality, togetherness, and reciprocity into marriage, since the husband sees his wife as if she were his own body. Implied here is that the wife also sees her husband as if he were her own body. Paul writes this in 1 Corinthians 7:1-4, where he states that the husband does not have authority over his own body, but his wife does. *Once we recognize what kind of mutual, self-sacrificing love should mark marriage, and recognize that at that time everyone submitted to someone as part of the culture of the day in order to honor others, we can take a fresh look at that disputed passage which literally says: 'Wives to their husbands as to the Lord' (5:22).* The attentive reader will notice that I have forgotten the verb, but actually it is Paul who leaves out the verb. Or more precisely, he carries over the verb from the preceding verse, which calls on all believers to submit to one another out of reverence/awe for Christ."

5.1.4 The Reason for Mutual Submission

Craig Keener, a renowned theologian and exegete, begins somewhat ironically when he writes about the household code in Ephesians

5[52]: "Sometimes Paul gets a bad reputation. The slave narratives are full of the feelings of former slaves who loved Jesus but hated Paul, because slaveholders regularly quoted Ephesians 6:5: 'Slaves, obey your masters.' What the slaveholders did not quote was the rest of the passage, which goes on to say: 'Masters, do the same to them' (6:9). That is, if slaves must obey their masters, then masters must also obey their slaves!

Did anyone in the first century take Paul literally on this point? Probably not. *But that does not change the fact that what he actually said expressed one of the most radical views against slavery in his day. He did not speak of overthrowing the institution by force;* even the failed slave revolts of his day had never attempted that. But he spoke of an ethic that went beyond mere theory.

Some early Stoic philosophers had argued for human equality, but the Stoics had retreated from this, and those who could afford it owned slaves. Paul agreed with the Stoics in principle: he affirmed that slaves and slaveholders have the same Lord in heaven (Ephesians 6:9). *But his instruction, 'do the same to them,' goes beyond theory into practice.*

This is no accident, no slip of the tongue by Paul or of his scribe's pen. Paul frames his entire section of the household code with mutual submission. What are household codes, you ask?

In his work on statecraft, the Greek thinker Aristotle had a large section on the role of the family. In it he instructed the male head of household to rule his wife, his children, and his slaves. Later thinkers adopted the same scheme, often in the same order. *Because Rome suspected religious minority groups of undermining these traditional values, such groups often took pains to affirm their belief in Roman values.*

Paul presents a series of household codes in the same order as Aristotle: the relationship of the male head of household to wives, children, and slaves. It is possible that Paul is thinking like a member of a religious minority – after all, he

52. www.cbeinternational.org/resource/article/mutuality-blog-magazine/case-mutual-submission-ephesians-5. The website www.cbeinternational.org offers good resources on the role of men and women in the church. The motto of this website is: Women and men lead together, serve as equals.

is writing from Roman captivity and is probably in Rome (Ephesians 3:1; 4:1; 6:20).

Yet Paul changes the standard formula. Instead of addressing only the men who held slaves, he also addresses the women, children, and slaves who made up a larger part of the church. (In Paul's urban churches the slaves would have been household slaves, who had more freedom and more often than other slaves had the chance to be set free. Nevertheless, they were still slaves.)

Moreover, he never instructs the male head of the house to rule. Instead, he is to love his wife and serve her by sacrificing his life for her (5:25). He is not to provoke his children (6:4), and he is to treat slaves as fellow servants of God (6:9).

Most important, Paul frames his entire catalog of instructions (5:21-6:9) by calling for mutual submission: submitting to one another (5:21), even toward slaves (6:9). *This places submission in a new context: the example and teaching of our Lord, who invited all of us to serve one another* (Mark 10:42-45; cf. John 13:14-17, 34-35; Galatians 5:13-14).

Some men today like to quote Ephesians 5:22 ('Wives, submit to your husbands') out of context, much as the slaveholders quoted Ephesians 6:5.

But in the Greek there is no verb in 5:22. It simply says: 'Wives to your husbands.' Of course it does not say: 'Wives, do whatever you want with your husbands.' Greek grammar assumes that we carry over the verb from the preceding verse, and that verb is 'submit.' But since the verb is carried over from 5:21, it cannot mean something different from what it means in 5:21. *The wife's submission is merely one example of mutual submission; just as the husband sacrifices his life for his wife.*

Some object: 'But submission is explicitly only for the wife!' Ah, but the command to love is explicitly only for the husband (5:25). Yet we understand that all Christians should love one another (5:2) and that all Christians should submit to one another (5:21). *Even if Paul does not try to cover every circumstance, he does give us a general principle for how we should live with one another: looking out for each other's interests, listening to one another, and loving others more than ourselves."*

5.1.5 Instructions for Christian Life – Today

So the so-called household codes cannot cover every life situation and give concrete instructions for it. But there are instructions that apply always and everywhere. "We think about these household codes as the Bible giving a framework for living as Christians in society. But it may be that for many they are simply irrelevant, because they bear no resemblance to their own life situation. If a person lives alone, is a single parent, or lives with a community of friends, as is often the case in the West, then the household codes will contribute nothing to their communal life. Moreover, we assume that Christians will not own slaves. So there will be no slaves, and perhaps no husband, no wife, and no children. There may be only men or only women in the household, as has been the case for centuries in monastic communities. In these contexts Christian life will be shaped not by the household code but by the wealth of '*one another*' behaviors. There are 59 such verses in the New Testament, in which all Christians are called first and foremost to 'love one another,' to forgive, to encourage, to live in peace, to bear with one another, to submit to one another, to pray for one another, to share everything they have with one another, and not to hate, slander, lie to, bite, or devour one another. *The married Christian and the Christian parent are also bound by these 'one another' verses and must first of all be shaped by the exhortation to 'mutual love."*[53]

5.1.6 The Woman in the Ancient Household

To make the reality of life in the ancient household tangible, the following description of women, especially female slaves, is sobering: "It is also important to point out that in examining the lives of women in house churches we have found evidence both of women's leadership, participation, and involvement in community life at all levels and of women's powerlessness and suffering. Early Christian women did not escape many of the terrible fates and situations that women faced in this period. Our attention has turned especially to the plight of

53. Peppiatt, 88 ibid.

the most powerless women in the system, whether Jewish, Christian, or other: the female slaves. Society was founded on slavery and could not exist without it. *Most households, however modest, were based partly on slave labor. The sexual availability of slaves to their owners, and to anyone to whom their owners made them available, was taken for granted.* Christian female slaves of childbearing age must often have found themselves in nearly impossible situations, since they were taught to live by a Christian moral code and it was often impossible for them to do so. For example, we cannot rule out that for some of them chastity and faithfulness to their own children and to the father of their children were impossible, and that for some desperate female slaves who were members of church groups, especially if they were owned by non-Christians, the act of exposing an infant seemed a necessity for survival. We would hope that life would be different in a believing household, but there is no solid evidence that it was, and there is ample evidence that whole households often did not convert to the new faith together. There were probably many Christian slaves in predominantly non-Christian households whose life of faith was hard indeed."[54]

Uncoerced and willing submission or subjection to Jesus Christ and to everyone who is his disciple shows what Jesus is like. God's own nature is revealed when the slaveholder submits to the slave and the husband to the wife – and vice versa. *But then, where submission is mutual, the reason for it cannot be a difference in hierarchy.* In the world (of that time) that is the norm and the attitude required. Not so in God's kingdom. That is why the wife's submission to her husband has nothing to do with a hierarchical relationship. What marks this submission is that one takes on an attitude of submission despite equality, and not because a hierarchy demands it anyway.

I close with the observation that this ancient era not only feels infinitely distant historically, but that we in the West, in Germany, live in such a different, freer, simpler, safer, indeed in many ways blessed time. How do we read the household codes for ourselves? Can they be put into practice literally today? How do we apply them?

54. Osiek, Carolyn, 2006, A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity, 127

5.2 The Head and Submission: Ephesians 5

When Paul went to Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy, he came into contact with cultures that viewed women in a way quite different from what is familiar to us in the West today. So we must make the effort to see Paul's statements about marriage, family, and the role of women in the light of their situation and treatment at that time.

The classic text for the husband's headship is Ephesians 5. Clearly and unmistakably Paul says that the husband is the head of his wife and that she is to submit to him:

> [Ephesians 5:22-33, translated from the German Elberfelder Bible] Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the assembly; he is the Savior of the body. But as the assembly is subject to Christ, so also the wives to their husbands in everything.
>
> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the assembly and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of water through the word, that he might present the assembly to himself in glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she might be holy and blameless. So husbands also ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but he nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the assembly. For we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will be one flesh." This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and to the assembly. Nevertheless, you too, let each one of you love his wife as himself; and let the wife see that she fears her husband.

To the Colossians Paul writes:

[Colossians 3:18-19] Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

5.2.1 The Head

In Ephesians 5 the human head (Greek: *kephale*) is, in a figurative, metaphorical sense, the organ that leads. In this passage, as elsewhere in the letter, the head stands for superiority, exaltedness, rule.

It is remarkable that this function of the head – to govern, to lead, and to decide – is not mentioned or demanded with a single word. If we pick out the concrete instructions to the husbands, we understand which functions define headship and which do not:

1. Nevertheless, you too, let each one of you love his wife as himself.
2. He is the Savior (Deliverer) of the body, like Christ.
3. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the assembly and gave himself up for her.
4. So husbands also ought to love their wives as their own bodies.

Most of the verses in this passage are about the husbands, only 3 about the wives. That Paul does not describe or demand the authority of the head is surely connected with an intention. He did not simply forget it. More on this below.

5.2.2 Family in Antiquity

This chapter 5 and the beginning of chapter 6 are about husbands and wives. Then about fathers and children, and about slaves and masters. These people – one could add the grandparents or parents-in-law, unmarried siblings, and aunts and uncles – make up *the house*, the extended family (see chapter 5.1). Society was not shaped by nuclear families as it is today. The whole household lived

under one roof. As a patriarchy. The father, in any case a man, held the position of preeminence in the household. Not only over his own wife.

This social fabric of the (extended) family is not a revelation of Paul's but what was normal in his time. *He does not design a new or better family model, but a new "model of behavior."*

The hierarchical order of rank described here is not the ideal model – even if he compares it with Christ and the church – but the consequence of the Fall. Patriarchy is part of the fulfillment of the words of judgment spoken to the woman, that the man would rule over the woman.

The comparison of Christ and the church with husband and wife is a teaching image, an analogy. An image that holds the husband accountable when he is compared with the head, with Christ. And an image that does not put hierarchy first when it comes to the relationship of Christ and the church, and of wife and husband. This image is about unity, sharing, provision, and above all about love.

Perhaps this analogy has a second layer that was more important or more fitting for the time it was written than for today. On the one hand, this image takes over the role distribution of that time, but in order to redefine it at the same time.

5.2.3 Take It Literally?

Can we transfer a *hierarchical head-body image* literally to today? Is Paul describing here the norm for married and family life? I compare how he describes children and slaves in the context of the household. He says:

> [Ephesians 6:1-4, translated from the German Elberfelder Bible] Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and your mother," which is the first commandment with a promise, "so that it may go well with you and that you may live long on the earth."

> And you fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and admonition of the Lord.

These words have important things to say to us today. But it is fair to ask up to what age children, then and now, are under the authority of their parents. The father had much greater authority over his children than is the case today. Today children are raised to be independent. *It is remarkable that love is not spoken of in this relationship either. Neither for the parents nor for the children.*

As far as slaves are concerned, too, the situation has, thank God, completely changed, but this is not expressed in this text:

> [Ephesians 6:5-9, translated from the German Elberfelder Bible] Servants, obey your masters according to the flesh with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; not with eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart and serving with goodwill, as to the Lord and not to people, knowing that whatever good each one does, he will receive this from the Lord, whether he is slave or free. And you masters, do the same toward them and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in the heavens and that with him there is no partiality.

Who can live these words literally? To apply them as timeless to today's employer-employee relationship is bound to fail. It cannot be done! Slavery as in antiquity no longer exists. Here too Paul does not take action against the injustice of slavery, but addresses the attitude of those involved, who have become new people through the gospel. Christians do not shape their working relationships by these instructions alone. They will also take other words of Jesus and words of God as a standard for today.

Something similar applies to our conduct toward our governments. Paul and Peter call for submission to these authorities. Even when these forms of government and those who govern are anything but ideal. Just as far from ideal as patriarchy, as slavery, and as the way children were treated in antiquity.

When Paul gives instructions that apply within social structures such as family and work, he can only start from what he knew and what was normal in his time. He did not write to Christians in the 21st century! Nevertheless, it is God's word, which is a divine norm for us.

These texts are silent about the fact that the situation is not ideal. Things that are important from today's point of view are not addressed. We have to apply them to today's situation. All Bible readers and all who are faithful to the Bible carry it over into our time without realizing it, even those who think they take everything literally.

Let us come back to the instructions to husbands and the conduct of wives. Here too, just as with masters and slaves, it is not possible to transfer it literally to today.

Anyone who wants to put these instructions into practice would have to bring back the conditions of antiquity. *Our understanding of marriage today, even that of conservative, Bible-believing Christians, is so far removed from antiquity that it is downright dangerous to claim that this applies one-to-one today.* For which wife is "subject to her husband in everything"? Which wife *fears* her husband? More than mere respect is meant here. We cannot talk our way out by toning down or prettifying certain words and somehow making them fit for the 21st century. If you want to put it into practice literally, then fully and completely, as it stands. Perhaps that is possible and necessary in strongly patriarchal cultures, even if it never corresponds to God's ideal. There many women are trapped in inherited family traditions. They often cannot exercise their basic rights, and their children are at the mercy of patriarchy.

From this text, if it is interpreted literally or biblicistically, follows a hierarchical submission of the wife to the husband. That does not do justice to the whole biblical picture, nor to an application to the conditions of life today.

5.2.4 Contextualization

This word is viewed with suspicion by conservative Christians. But it means nothing other than the work of thinking through how we can live out God's

thoughts today in our very different time. *You could call that faithfulness to the Bible.*

When it comes to the wife's subjection in everything, Paul does not describe in more detail what that means. No individual case and no example is described. How are we to understand this? Must the wife accept domestic violence? Must she be ready for sex at any time? Does the husband decide everything? We will agree that there are limits, *and that "in everything" cannot mean everything, then or now.* The fact is that a wife in antiquity who did not submit to her husband (whatever that might have meant in detail) was a bad witness for the gospel.

Paul has a clear message for the husbands. Words never heard like this before: unconditional, loving devotion to the wife, nourishing and caring for her as for oneself. *Where this was followed, patriarchy could develop into a "patriarchy of love." In the practice of married life, love is the end of submission.* For love forces nothing, but lives in mutual agreement. A loving husband will not override his wife's will. In the end, that is also how the husbands will behave who believe in a hierarchical submission of the wife. *Mutual love and respect surpass submission or subjection!* In this text Paul takes a first big step out of patriarchy. Just as the abolition of slavery would not come for a long time, the same is true of marriage, which for a long time to come was not lived on equal terms.

Contextualization is always called for. The Bible gives instructions for situations that no longer exist today. It does not and cannot give instructions for situations that exist only in our (post)modern time. Back then there were no retirement homes, no democracies like today's, no internet, no highly developed, life-prolonging medicine, etc. How do we act in these areas? We try to take our bearings from Scripture, from Jesus, from the command to love our neighbor.

5.2.5 Once More: The Head

The head is a metaphor, a comparison that Paul applies to the relationship of the marriage partnership. The word head can mean source, origin, or the mouth of a river. Mostly the literal head. But also precedence and being placed above.

In Ephesians Paul describes what the head is all about. In 1:22 the risen Christ, raised to the throne, is the head over all powers and beings in the universe:

[Ephesians 1:22-23, translated from the German Elberfelder Bible] God has put all things under his feet and has given him as head over all things to the assembly, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Christ as head over all has the highest place of honor there can be. To this head the church has been given as his body. *Not that he rules over the church as head – no, but the church shares his place with him over all things. In the unity of head and body it is "the* (whole) *Christ."* Just as Eve was taken from Adam, and he became complete only together with her, as one flesh, in order then to fulfill the creation mandate together.

In 4:15-16 the body grows toward the head and receives spiritual provision and building up from the head (out of him, the head; see also Colossians 2:19):

[Ephesians 4:15-16, translated from the German Elberfelder Bible] Let us grow up in all things into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, well joined together and connected by every joint of supply, ... brings about the growth of the body for its own building up in love.

This metaphor emphasizes how the head provides for the body. *The image of the head does not emphasize hierarchical submission in the relationship of Christ and the church, nor in the relationship of husband and wife. It is a model for the husband to be what Christ is for the church: her provider, not her ruler.*

Incidentally, washing the woman with water was slaves' work. Paul goes extremely far in exchanging the roles: now the head is even like a slave, performing washings in the water bath (5:26).

Back to the reality of life in the first century: at that time women were much younger than men. Some were married at the age of 12. Because of his age the husband naturally held the stronger role. If submission was expected in this cultural and social setting, that was nothing new for women in general. And with a large age difference, the husbands automatically became the head, practically their lord.

That is different for us today. When a married couple masters life together in *mutual* love and submission and starts a family, there is no need for the *one-sided* submission of the wife. I have put this question to married couples several times. *They could not answer the question of what exactly this submission, as Paul describes it in Ephesians 5, could mean today or in their marriage.* It would be too simple to limit it to far-reaching decisions that the husband ultimately makes and for which he also takes responsibility. No, the couples I asked make decisions, especially the far-reaching ones, together before the Lord. Sometimes the one follows the other, and sometimes the other way around. This attitude and this way of proceeding do not violate the image of head and body.

Selfless and sacrificial love, just as Christ loved the church, is the new standard of the gospel. This is what makes the difference, which like a seed was meant to break open the concrete of patriarchy in Christian marriages, slowly but unstoppably. This is new. It is heaven breaking into a fallen world. At the same time, in his instructions Paul leaves patriarchy standing and explicitly does not criticize it. So for that time the image of the head as authority fits the situation of the family household and of marriage. *Even if it is not the ideal of creation as described in Genesis 1 and 2.*

A life as head, as husband, means to lead, to take responsibility, to stand up for his wife, to be there for her. To share everything with her. That is not hierarchy! It is a partnership of two, a team. *Being the head without hierarchy is not only possible, but is the concept and the path of its practical realization.*

The "head role," being the head, "headship" after the example of Christ, is love, provision, protection – going ahead. It is a strength you can entrust yourself to, and a togetherness that leads not to passivity but to activity and likewise to mutual self-sacrifice.

In any case, a rigid, one-sided image of head and body cannot be applied in the same way to every marriage, because people are too different. The *head-and-body metaphor speaks first of unity, of togetherness, and not least of love.*

5.2.6 Conclusions

On the one hand, Paul depicts the patriarchal picture of marriage and family without criticism. On the other hand, he revolutionizes it. *The de facto authority in patriarchy is transformed into the command of love, so that the old way is left behind.* If the husband loves as Paul says, a one-sided subjection of the wife will be no issue. For the love of Christ also requires the husband to submit and to live out respect toward his wife.

After all, he introduces this section, or links it with what comes before, *by saying to everyone: Submit to one another (in the body of Christ)! That had never been heard before.* These words cannot be emphasized enough.

Then Paul describes the role of the head not as ruler, leadership, or authority. He gives no room to this image as it is often explained at first glance, as superiority. *The head does not rule. It loves unconditionally and sacrificially.*

Paul is not describing here an ideal picture of marriage and family for all time. He brings something completely new into an existing culture. *The gospel is a seed that creates something new. Liberation from the consequences of the Fall.* Liberating changes do not happen quickly. They can be suppressed for a long time or destroyed again. It happens step by step. One step after another, in the best case, something new and better grows up. Freedom to live as equals has to be learned. Social structures thousands of years old do not heal in a decade.

So it should not surprise us that we hear from Paul and Peter that women are to submit. That was normal in their time anyway. The husband was the lord. The one who decided. An institution. *Had the women who came to faith given up this customary attitude, it would have caused offense. The gospel would have been brought into disrepute. That had to be prevented.*

Today we are grateful that we can elect our government democratically. Also that there is no more slavery. That there is protection for employees. That men and women have equal rights. That corporal punishment is banned and children

are protected. Ultimately these are results of the gospel, the fruit whose seed Jesus, the Twelve, and Paul sowed 2,000 years ago.

A hundred years ago *Katharine Bushnell*, a physician and missionary in China who also had command of the biblical languages, wrote: "We may take courage. Up to very recent times a slave class was looked upon as a necessity and slavery as legitimate. Some men were born, it was supposed, to be slaves; others to be their masters; and the world could not go on without the two classes. That misconception was exploded, and the world goes on quite comfortably. So long as slavery existed, men thought they found warrant for it in the Word of God. But the number who thought so came to be a decreasing number. Just so, the number of those who imagine they find, in the Word of God, warrant for the dominion of the male over the female, is an ever-decreasing number."

Her voice soon went unheard. All the more gratifying that her book has appeared in German at the same time as this book (Reformatorischer Verlag H. C. Beese, Hamburg, see the end of this book).

Submission that is demanded, and that women comply with, leads them to give up responsibility that they are able and willing to bear. Under the dogma of submission, women can become resigned and passive people whose abilities and callings never come to fulfillment. *Yet the call to be strong and "manly," to live courageously and actively in faith, applies to them too: in the family, at work, in the church, and in God's kingdom* (1 Corinthians 16:13).

As a painful side effect of the doctrine of submission, domestic violence and sexual violence must, sadly, at least be mentioned. This teaching can certainly serve as a pretext or cover for the use of violence by husbands who have not understood what their role as head for the wife should mean.

Even in conservative Christian marriages there is, God help us, domestic violence and sexual rape. Here the biblical view of equal worth and equal rank could bring healing. It could lead women out of their often hidden torment.

5.3 Being Submissive

Because submissiveness is pointed to again and again, it deserves one more chapter of its own.

The instructions to women are clear and are repeated several times: they are to submit to their husbands! The term hypotassō means to submit oneself, to subordinate oneself, to comply, to be subject, to obey.[55] Precisely because this instruction occurs several times in the same words, I take it up once more, even if I repeat myself in my conclusions. The woman's place in this order is not only a marriage issue; it reaches into the gathering for worship. Silence and submission evidently belong together (1 Corinthians 14:34), as do the prohibition on teaching and the instruction to learn in submission (1 Timothy 2:11). More on this later.

A word study would show in which contexts this word occurs: as a call to an attitude, as a result, and also as an enforced situation. All powers were *subjected* to Christ. We were once *subject* to the fear of death. Christians are to submit to those who labor in God's kingdom for others and for themselves. Christians are to submit to the governing authorities. Christian female and male slaves are to submit to their masters (or mistresses), the younger also to the older, *and ultimately everyone toward sister and brother*. There is a broad range of application, but in human relationships the basic idea remains: to regard another person more highly and to place oneself under them.

This makes clear that submission is not something foreign to Christian women and men, but a virtue that is practiced and at the same time contested, one that could be called a fruit of the Spirit (even though it is not directly listed as such). Ultimately, human life together only works through submission. And that is not possible without humility and without the help of the Holy Spirit. In humility we are to value others above ourselves (Philippians 2:3). The ultimate example is Jesus. At the same time, I do not resist authority, without which society would not function either.

55. Bergmeier, R., "ὑποτάσσω", in H. Balz – G. Schneider (edd.), *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Verlag W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 2011, 976.

Governments, employers, teachers, parents have authority by virtue of their office or their role. Does this also apply to the relationship of man and woman, in general and in marriage? With regard to Christian women, these words stand before us:

> [1 Corinthians 14:34] The women are to be silent in the assemblies, for it is not permitted to them to speak, but they are to submit, as the law also says.
>
> [Ephesians 5:22] Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.
>
> [Colossians 3:18] Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.
>
> [Titus 2:5] to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to submit to their own husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.
>
> [1 Peter 3:1] Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives,
>
> [1 Peter 3:5] For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands:

It is striking that this kind of exhortation does not occur in this form in the Old Testament. Nor with Jesus. In early Christianity it must have been something important. Were the women of that time so rebellious, so seditious, so hungry for power? Were they waiting for their chance? No, research into ancient history cannot confirm this. In addition, women in antiquity were in the subjected role anyway. What is the purpose of emphasizing something that was normal anyway, something that did not surprise Christian women or force them into anything foreign to them?

One might ask what this submission consisted of. Instructions from the husband in the household? There the women worked fairly independently; the house was their domain, while the husband was out in public. Hence the

reference to domestic work in Titus 2:5. In 1 Timothy 5:14 Paul writes that the younger widows should manage their households, and he uses the term "oikodespoteo," which means nothing other than to be master of the house. Does it perhaps mean subjection in sexuality, being available at any time? When people today demand that these instructions be followed literally, that is, according to their original sense, I ask the same question: What does this submission consist of in a marriage today? How can this mode of relationship be described, and how could it be lived in the 21st century in the Western world? I repeat: with the same clarity with which it is demanded, not toned down or adapted.

In her book with the strange title "*Befreit durch Unterordnung*" (Liberated Through Submission)[56], Bunny Wilson, as the title suggests, makes a committed plea for the wife's submission to her husband. For her, submission to the husband even in obviously wrong decisions is the godly way, which can be corrected through faith and prayer. In many case studies she describes what this looks like in practice. She herself shares her experiences of marriage and how God spoke to her and showed her what is right and what is not right in this difficult and contested attitude. Not infrequently, understanding of the Bible and experience merge into each other. Now, we all bring our experiences and what we have lived through with us when we read the Bible. My whole book, too, did not come about without my life experience and my "image of women," and so it is not neutral or pure teaching of Scripture. Everyone who speaks on this subject brings a coloring of their own. But for me the decisive question is what submission is based on. I quote Wilson: "Every now and then, when my wife and I disagree, she says to me: 'I think you should submit to me, because I submitted to you last time. The Bible says in Ephesians 5:21: "Submit to one another in the fear of God.'" What am I supposed to say to that?

I am relieved that I am not the only wife who has tried to use Ephesians 5:21 to get her own way. I remember the first time I used this verse with my husband; he then searched the Bible for an answer. Let us look at the verse your wife

56. Wilson, Bunny, 3rd edition 2020 ("Befreit durch Unterordnung"), CLV, Bielefeld

refers to and the verse that follows it: 'Submit to one another in the fear of God! Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord' (Ephesians 5:21-22).

Submission in a marriage does not work in exactly the same way as mutual submission in the body of Christ. In the body of Christ we submit to one another by practicing principles of Scripture. *In marriage we submit to our husband as a person in authority.*

In Ephesians 5:21 God is the only authority. In Ephesians 5:22 the wife is subordinate to her husband. God gives the husband authority over the wife, and he also holds him accountable." (p. 77)

This nuanced understanding of "submit," however, cannot be drawn from the text. She regards the husband, by virtue of creation, as an authority over the wife. In addition, for her the words of judgment to Eve, *your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you*, are a God-willed distribution of roles. The woman by nature wants to rule but is to bow to her husband's rule. The man failed to rule in the garden so as to stop sin, and since by nature he tends not to rule, he is given the task of doing so.

My first question about this interpretation would be: Is there a design flaw on the Creator's part here that has to be corrected? Or, just as fatal: Were there already sinful inclinations before the Fall?

This understanding of the creation account, as I have already shown, sets the course for the basic understanding of roles throughout the Bible. Whoever sees Adam as head and leader will interpret even the words of judgment as words of blessing and read this understanding of roles into everything. Whoever wants to follow this path consistently must face the reality of marriages between the most varied types of people. If the wife is strong and the husband weak, submission can lead to disaster. I plead for living out mutual submission, and for naming openly the sinful tendencies of different characters in a marriage and fighting them together by God's Spirit.

In Eden I found a human couple who complement each other, of equal worth and equal rank, without any hierarchical gradient. Without greater authority for

the man.

But don't these instructions of the apostles actually establish a hierarchy?

I am convinced that a hierarchical gradient is a consequence of the Fall. There is nothing to gloss over here, and it cannot be Christianized either. The gospel has made all believers sons of God. Women too. And so it has set them free from the fallen culture of creation. The believing husbands should be the first and foremost to recognize this. *That is why they, and not the wives, are called to selfless love – and precisely not to rule.* Quite apart from this, ruling here should be understood not negatively but positively, just as it is to be understood in the creation mandate. *In fact there is not even a positive mandate for the husband to rule, to lead, or to go first.*

In ancient culture it was important that the new faith in the Messiah not lead women, now aware of their freedom and equality, to behave in a way that called the culture of honor and shame into question. Women were not to form a counterculture to the normal culture of marriage, household, and family order. As the foundation of society, that order was sacred and not to be attacked. The gospel was at stake!

I compare this with Paul, who for the sake of the gospel, to win people for Christ, became like a Jew to the Jews and like a Greek to the Greeks. He was willing to pay a price to win and convince people, by restricting his freedom in Christ. So too here, when it comes to the submission of women. Incidentally, this is exactly Peter's point: to win the unbelieving husband through submission.

In an honor-and-shame culture, behavior that could bring dishonor on the husband among those around him was to be avoided at all costs. In honor-and-shame cultures people place great value on harmonious relationships that respect all hierarchies. Part of this, presumably, was that a wife who publicly contradicted or corrected her husband violated this principle of honor.

The instruction to wives to submit is not grounded in a hierarchical difference between man and woman, for no such difference exists in creation. It is about voluntary submission. For Christian women in antiquity, the command to submit was a way of working together for the gospel. The husband who loves makes submission obsolete

anyway. But outwardly, toward ancient society, these instructions and their observance were protection against discrimination and persecution. It was an attitude meant to end, from the outset, any suspicion of destroying the family.

For us in the 21st century, who do not live in an honor-and-shame culture, this instruction cannot be put into practice literally. In the Western world people take their bearings from a system of law and order. For marriage the command of love applies: being there for each other, togetherness, and mutual submission in the Lord. Criticism is voiced openly, in love and at the right moment, and every effort is made not to hurt anyone.

In response to my arguments for equality, I often hear questions like this:

"The argument that men have preeminence over women seems so simple and clear in the New Testament. But your [opposite] position seems very complicated, with references to the Greek language and all the commentaries and so on. Isn't the simplicity of the male-dominance position strong evidence that it is the right position?"

Answer: Not at all. The simplest interpretations of Holy Scripture are sometimes right, but sometimes very wrong. After all, it is quite easy to point out that the New Testament frequently, clearly, and unmistakably commands us to greet one another with a holy kiss.

Greet one another with a holy kiss. (Romans 16:16) Greet one another with a holy kiss. (1 Corinthians 16:20) Greet one another with a holy kiss. (2 Corinthians 13:12) Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. (1 Thessalonians 5:26) Greet one another with a kiss of love. (1 Peter 5:14)

These are all direct commands. The commands are clear. We do not preach, teach, or practice them, even though the argument for adopting this practice is simple. What is there not to understand?

The reason we do not concern ourselves with the holy kiss (or, for that matter, with the prohibition of braided hair and gold jewelry, or the rule to wear a veil) is *that such commands run counter to our culture today and would not serve their original purpose today.* We struggle with the role of women because until recently our culture

refused to grant women the same opportunities and the same recognition as men. Our older brothers and sisters grew up in this culture, and many (including women) approved of and accepted unequal rights for women. That is why they find the traditionalist arguments comfortable – and therefore "simple." [57]

One more example showing that very few, however faithful to the Bible they may be, do everything the Bible tells Christians to do. My concern here is not how obedient we are, for we all stumble often. It is whether we even notice certain commands or practices and consider doing them. In 1 Corinthians 7:5 Paul describes an agreement between spouses to abstain from sex in order to devote themselves to prayer. Anyone who insists on following Scripture literally may be asked when and how often he has openly made this agreement with his spouse.

Finally, a reference to direct words of Jesus, who said when he washed his disciples' feet: "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." (John 13:14-15)

In the Western world and culture this is a practice that even Christians who take the Bible seriously and literally contextualize for themselves and do not practice.

5.3.1 Conclusion

Margaret Mowczko writes: After spending some time over the years looking at what the verb hypotassō ("submit") means in both early Christian and non-Christian documents, I've come to the following definition.

"Christian" submission (i.e. submission between fellow believers including believing husbands and wives) is "*humble, loyal and loving deference, cooperation and support.*"

Like humility and meekness, being submissive should be a normal Christian trait. And ideally, it should be mutual or reciprocal.

57. Guin, Jay, p. 157, Buried Talents, *In Search for a New Consensus, 2014, Alabama*

Katharine Bushnell writes 100 years ago in her epoch-making book "God's Word to Women" (see the book recommendation at the end of this book):

"The true sense of the word describes the Christian grace of yielding one's preferences to another, where principle is not involved, rather than asserting one's rights. Schleusner's Greek-Latin Lexicon to the Septuagint declares that this verb does not always 'convey the thought of servile subjection.' Jesus, as a boy, was 'subject to His parents,' yet we know that He did not even consult them when He was 'about His Father's business,' (Luke 2:49, 51).

Two men cannot be long in partnership in business unless willing to be 'in subjection' to each other. *They must yield preferences; they must 'in honor prefer one another;' they must harmonize their views, one to the other, or else they will soon be obliged to separate.* They cannot better the situation if a question arises and one assumes the right to command the other. To obey orders like this is not 'subjection' but servility, and man refuses to be servile, for that would be degrading to character.

In Ephesians 5:21, the Apostle says, in exhortation to all believers, without regard to sex, 'Subjecting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ' (R. V.). Peter says to all believers, without regard to sex, 'Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility,' 1 Peter 5:5. These passages clearly enjoin 'subjection' upon men, yet all feel instinctively that they cannot mean that men must pass under the arbitrary control of each other when they become Christians.

Yet after all this, when we come to the three instances where the Apostle exhorts wives to be in subjection to their own husbands, one is considered almost heretical who questions whether this exhortation to 'wives' means absolute obedience. The word 'subjection,' as we have shown, has not been interpreted as obedience where the relation is that of man to man, nor where the 'subjection' may mean of man to woman, as in 1 Corinthians 16:16. Furthermore, each time where the relation of wives to their husbands, of children to their parents, and of servants to their masters is prescribed, a careful distinction in the use of words is made. The word 'obey' is generally used for servants and always for children, but the word 'subjection' always for wives. If the sense is the same,

why such care in the choice of a different word? As to the duty of wives, see Ephesians 5:22; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:5. As to children, Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20. As to servants, Ephesians 6:5; Colossians 3:22.

The Old Testament sense in which 'to be in subjection' is sometimes used, is highly suggestive and instructive. Psalm 62:1 reads in the English, 'truly my soul waiteth upon God; from Him cometh my salvation.' At verse 5 of the same Psalm, we read: 'My soul, wait thou only upon God.' In Psalm 37:7 we find the words: 'Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him.' The words 'wait' in the first passages, and the word 'rest' in the last are all three represented in the Greek version by the single word hupotasso, 'be in subjection,' while the literal sense of the Hebrew original word is 'be silent unto.' Compare this with 1 Peter 3:1, 2, where wives are exhorted to win unbelieving husbands by 'subjection.' Surely Peter is not here exhorting wives to blindly obey unbelievers, for if heathen, they would at once remand them back to the worship of the gods; if Jews, back to Judaism. Rather, they are to win them away from these by their 'manner of life,' 'without the word,'—actions speaking louder than words. 'Coupled with fear,'—such fear of God as would cause these women, so gentle, quiet and patient in daily life, to be as adamant in their truth to God; and the husbands so overawed by their quiet maintenance of principle, whereas they are so ready to yield to their husbands when principle is not involved, that the husbands dare not try to compel their wives to violate conscience, and thus are themselves gradually led into the Christian faith."

"Submissiveness is not a gender role. It is not even a role. It is an attitude and a behavior for all brothers and sisters in Christ, with mutual submission as the ideal. Mutual submission was not a foreign concept in the church of the first and early second centuries, and it should be the norm in the church today."

Armin Wunderli

If we lived what is written in the Bible, we would need no emancipation, for then men and women would have equal rights. Danny Silk

We will not get it unless we want it: unconditional equality.

Veronika Schmidt

6 Man and Woman in the Church

The worldwide church does not make the best impression. Besides devotion, prayer, and obedience, this also has to do with wrong convictions that have far-reaching effects. So many underestimate how much damage a wrong view of the gender question does. In the lives of many people affected, in the church in general, and in its outward impact, that is, in the power of its missionary witness.



If you follow a hierarchical dogma of man and woman, it does not apply only to marriage. It then automatically applies to the roles in the church as well. Not only in gatherings for worship, but in church life as a whole. After all, we are always in the house of God, which is the church!

In chapter 6, which is to deal with the participation of women, from being heard all the way to leading, the spheres of marriage and church overlap. If this

were about a creation order, these spaces or spheres would not be distinguished. Both spheres are located within the visible creation.

This chapter deals with the controversial texts from 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 and 1 Timothy 2. That is, with the head covering, the silence, and the teaching of women.

What actually prompted this book was the role of women in the church. Since this is repeatedly linked to the creation order, the extensive groundwork was necessary in order now to come to this area.

These texts and their interpretation determine the roles of men and women in the churches like no others. When you study these texts, you notice one thing: they are difficult and seem contradictory. When you read commentaries that grapple with the Greek text and try to work out its meaning for then and now, it is confirmed that the meaning is not clear-cut. Or better: there are various possible interpretations.

These texts make clear that we cannot master the text by thinking we know, in black and white, what it means and what it does not mean. That would be biblicistic, one-dimensional, and even arrogant. I too present only possible explanations, more than one.

One thing, however, is important to me: *I reject any interpretation that contradicts the picture of woman as I found it in Genesis 1 and 2 and as I have seen it in the way Jesus dealt with women.* To interpret such texts to the disadvantage of women, in a legalistic sense, full of fear of doing something wrong, does not correspond to the spirit of Scripture and to the gospel. Paul would never say anything other than what Scripture, the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, says.

We have to learn that Scripture is not clear to us everywhere. It certainly was clear to its direct, immediate recipients in the 1st century. In their living conditions and cultural setting.

Today we are learners, on the way under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and throughout our lives we can change our views, insights, opinions, and

convictions. We know in part. We do get things wrong at times and have to correct ourselves.

A change of perspective is part of life. Whoever thinks he has understood the meaning of these texts once and for all, and so thinks he is standing firm, should be careful that he does not fall.

It always frightens me a little when these texts are interpreted almost mathematically, and their meaning is presented with great conviction, as if one had grasped the only valid truth, and then demanded as a clear rule for church life.

In the following chapters I will set out various explanations. This has nothing to do with arbitrariness. Nor does it mean – as the constant accusation goes, especially from "Bible-believing" Christians – reinterpreting God's word and adapting it to one's own wishes.

For me, being faithful to the Bible means exploring the meaning of the word with a clear mind. Questions to the text are allowed and help us move forward. And in doing so, humbly placing oneself under this word, with a basic trust that one has God's reliable word before one. Not proclaiming one's own interpretation as the truth, and interpreting Bible verses not in isolation, but in the context of the letter, of the New Testament, and of the whole Bible. I assume that there are no contradictions. If there are, or if it looks that way, then there are explanations for them (or none).

6.1 1 Corinthians 11 – Head, Hair, and Veil

This (half) chapter, 1 Corinthians 11:1-16, is one of the key texts cited to support a creation order of man and woman. Here, it is said, the leading role of the man is clearly spoken of, and it can also be recognized in the woman's head covering.

From the conservative, Bible-believing camp I hear *how unambiguous and clear this text is*. It is difficult, they say, only for those who want to resist the clear

instructions of the Word. By regarding it as culturally bound to that time and no longer valid today.

On the other hand, there are the sisters who do not keep to any rules about covering and cutting their hair, but then struggle with a troubled conscience. In contrast to those who keep to them to the letter, or believe they do.

For all faithfulness to the Bible, at its core this is, as so often, a matter of interpretation (hermeneutics). For over 40 years I have been trying to understand this complex text. I have read a great deal about it. I have come across explanations and patterns of behavior ranging from the reasonable to the hair-raising.

A detailed exegesis of this passage is not possible here, even though this chapter is the longest in the book. *There are many interpretations of it that complement, but also contradict, one another. My thoughts, too, are only one possibility.* Perhaps it will help you as a reader to get more out of this difficult text than before. No one can or may be convinced that he has the true interpretation and then derive rules of conduct and outward forms from it.

How will I proceed in the next steps?

(1) First I list some aspects that can be helpful in reading the text.

(2) Then I try to determine the scope of the text.

(3) After that comes a detailed look at the meaning of the term head.

(4) More background needs to be brought into the topic of head covering in Corinth.

(5) The sign of authority on the head is a key verse, but it has a different meaning than many assume.

(6) An explanatory paraphrase of the text, the way I would explain it briefly.

(7) The present-day relevance for the 21st century needs to be clarified.

6.1.1 Guidelines and Pointers for Interpreting the Text

Many are not reading this Pauline text for the first time. What follows are some aspects that can open up a new approach. They are the result of working with this text and of many studies. They can help us not to fall into the familiar reading that understands the text through the lens of the hierarchical subordination of the woman (or women).[58]

Above all, the text places importance on how everything is to be done to the glory of God, not to the glory of the men or of the women.

It is about highlighting the glory of God in the worship service, with men and women behaving and dressing in such a way that attention is not drawn to themselves.

(Some) men were the cause of Paul's instruction, by demanding that women leave off their head covering.

Cultural and social customs and manners are being addressed. Therefore shame and dishonor are not to be understood theologically, with regard to God, but in terms of social sensibilities.

So it is not about timeless, universal commands of Paul, even though he cites the creation account.

Freedom in Christ stands in tension with not being a cause of offense to one's surroundings by accepting restrictions.

It is about covering the hair (not simply the head), and it is not about full veiling either.

It is not about the hierarchical creation order in which the man stands above the woman. It is not about the subordination of the woman to the man. Both pray and speak prophetically, as equals in rank and status; both have gender-specific outward rules of conduct to observe.

Ultimately Paul is speaking about all women and men, not only about married people, even though the head-body metaphor applies only to them. Praying and prophetic speaking are done by all, married women, female slaves, and widows.

58. A detailed version of this study can be found on the homepage: www.hans-joerg-ronsdorf.de

Outward things such as clothing or hairstyle are never prescribed by the gospel. They are in the worship of the Old Covenant, but not in the New Covenant, which the Corinthians celebrated in the Lord's Supper.

In a pagan environment, Paul is looking for a way in which it is possible to live evangelistically without giving offense to the people of their respective culture.

It is not about rules of conduct for men and women in the 21st century.

Before going on here, read the text now with the assumptions named here in mind. Even if you have seen it differently until now, simply allow it for once as a possibility in your thinking, in order to take a different perspective, one you do not have to be convinced of right away.

6.1.2 The Scope of the Text

For what place or what setting does this text apply? In verses 4 and 5 Paul writes about men and women who pray and prophesy. Does that apply to the gathering, that is, to the assembly for worship? This is rejected by advocates of the "silence of women" in the worship service. In their view, most translators and interpreters who relate it to the gathering are mistaken (already in the headings to this passage). What is strange is that it is precisely they who "recommend" the instructions on head covering for the gathering, even though this text is supposedly not meant for it.

There are two assumptions for not relating this text to the gathering:

1. In the following text, from verse 17 on, the topic changes and from then on refers explicitly to the *gathering* of the church. The word for *coming together* is mentioned several times from verse 17 on. In verses 18, 20, 33, 34, but not before or in the passage 11:1-16.

2. Further on in the letter to the Corinthians, in 14:34-36, women are to be silent in the gathering. This categorical command of silence (discussed in detail in chapter 6.2) is said to assign Paul's statement in 11:5 to all sorts of occasions, but all of them outside the gathering.

Neither argument is as plausible as it seems:

- Would the covering (if it is required today) then be completely irrelevant for the gathering?
- Does the statement that the man is the head of the woman not apply to the gathering? After all, the command of silence is justified with submission (14:34).
- For what occasions, then, is chapter 11 valid at all? People point to the many opportunities open to sisters outside the gathering. Of course there are such opportunities, but none of them is mentioned anywhere in this letter. *In 1 Corinthians (chapter 14), praying (with one exception) and prophesying take place for Paul exclusively in the gathering.*
- Do the principles of the Lord's table (ch. 10) not apply to the gathering for the breaking of bread just because the act of coming together is not mentioned before 11:17?
- The collection on the first day of the week took place in the gathering, even if this is not explicitly mentioned (1 Corinthians 16:1-4).

Covering or not covering, as a visible sign for others who are present, presupposes an assembly for such an instruction. *Otherwise visible signs are pointless*. In 1 Corinthians a gathering of people, or of believers, is always the gathering of the church.

6.1.3 Three Pairs with One Head

Paul begins with three pairs, each with one head. First: *The head of every man is Christ*. Then: *The head of the woman is the man*. Finally: But *the head of Christ is God*. For a long time I saw universal levels of hierarchy here, in this order:

God

Christ

Man

Woman

If I understand the term head directly as superior *authority*, then this sequence of hierarchy, or ranking, results. The question is whether Paul intends this. Does head mean authority here?

In this arrangement the woman stands at the very bottom. In this model she has no connection to Christ. Her husband (or the man in general) seems to be a kind of mediator. But every reader will confirm that the man cannot stand between the woman and Christ. The order of the ranking does not match that of the text, so it is not intended that way and is not usable.

If women are to have a sign of authority over them (v. 10), how is this recognizable in the man, who also has an authority over him? By what outward sign is it recognizable in Christ that he is subject to God? He may have had long hair, like a Nazirite, which in this text is called a disgrace.

Each pair stands on its own. In each one an explanatory, clarifying, or corrective comparison can be seen. The pairs stand as explanatory examples *side by side. Not as a chain of command.* The order could indicate, among other things, that Paul first addresses the men who were demanding that women take off their head covering.



This scheme breaks free from rankings. Hierarchical order is not the key to this chapter.

6.1.4 What Does Head Mean?

This question is not as simple as is sometimes claimed. Rather, it is hotly debated among scholars.

In German, the word *head* (*Haupt*) in a figurative, pictorial, or metaphorical sense is quickly associated with authority. In our everyday German: *Hauptmann* (captain, literally "head man"), *Hauptzollamt* (main customs office), *Hauptstraße* (main street), or the like. Intuitively, shaped by our language, we connect it with authority, supremacy, leadership, being superior, someone who bears responsibility.

What did *head* mean at that time? It did *not generally mean authority*. Not even where it had this meaning in other contexts. If Paul wants to express authority, then more in an enlightening way. *For the men are made to see that, before they think about their authority over the woman, they must first keep in mind their submission to Christ.* That should determine their relationship to women and their attitude toward them. Finally, as its perfect form, even the relationship of God to Christ must be the model. This relationship is shaped more by unity and equality than by the question of authority.

Eckhard J. Schnabel writes: "Paul is not concerned to establish the ordering of the woman and the 'authority' of the man, but to show that all – every man, every woman, and Christ too – have a 'head,' that is, are assigned to a person of

preeminent standing and owe this person *loyalty*."[59] Loyalty means faithfulness that is grounded not in a hierarchy or in being placed under someone, but above all in a relationship and connection.

Head (Greek: kephale) also means *origin*. Here are four reasons why the word in 1 Corinthians 11 does not have (only) the meaning of authority or leader:[60]

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint), head is translated with *kephale*. In Hebrew, as in German, (rosh) can mean "head," "leader," or "ruler." In the cases where *rosh* meant a person in a leading position, the translators in most cases did not use *kephale*. Instead, they usually used the Greek *archôn*, which means something like "leader" or "ruler." *The Hebrew word can also mean beginning or origin.*

A further indication shows that *kephale* in ancient Greek did not usually mean "leader." The Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon contains no definition of *kephale* that comes close to "leader" or, in sense, to an "authority." R. Cervin notes that lexicons of the works of individual pagan ancient Greek authors such as Xenophon, Herodotus, Plato, Thucydides, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Polybius, Diodorus Siculus, and others contain no definitions of *kephale* that come anywhere near "leader." *"Head" in the sense of "leader" is practically unattested in pagan Greek literature up to the 4th century AD.* Christian dictionaries, on the other hand, render this word as authority. Although the lexicons of the New Testament give the definition "leader" for *kephale*, it is important to note that only God (1 Corinthians 11:3), Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:15-16; 5:23; Colossians 1:18-19; 2:9-10; 2:18-19), men (1 Corinthians 11:3), and husbands (Ephesians 5:23) are mentioned with the word. Only by Paul. If he uses *kephale* with the meaning of leader or chief, why does he not use the word elsewhere in his letters for people in positions of leadership or in government?

Several Greek-speaking Church Fathers of the early church took *kephale* in 1 Corinthians 11:3 to have the meaning "origin" or "beginning" or "source," even though some of them wrote at a time when *kephale* could occasionally mean

59. Schnabel, E. J., *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther*, Witten; Gießen 2018, 597.
60. Compiled by Margaret Mowczko, Sydney: www.margmowczko.com

"leader" or "a person in authority." Moreover, these Church Fathers believed anyway that men had a greater measure of authority than women and that men were superior to women. *But they did not use 1 Corinthians 11:3 to support this position. These men and others were concerned that, if kephale in 1 Corinthians 11:3 were understood as "ruler" or "authority," this would lead to a distorted Christology.* Instead, they understood *kephale* in the sense of "beginning" or "source."

Greco-Roman society was patriarchal. We have many works in which Greek authors wrote about the rule of men and of husbands. *But no other author apart from Paul and the Christian authors who followed him used the word "head" when writing about the relationship of a husband with his wife, or about men and women in general.* Outside Christian literature, *kephale* is never used in ancient Greek in a male-female context.

I suggest reading *kephale* in 1 Corinthians 11:3 in the sense of "origin" or "beginning," or, as some say, "source." In detail, the explanation looks like this:

"The origin of every human being is Christ," that is, Christ is God's agent in creation. In 1 Corinthians 8:6 Paul emphasizes that Jesus Christ is the one "through whom all things are."

"The origin of the woman is the man" (that is, Genesis 2:21-23). The woman [ishah] is "taken out of the man [ish]."

"The origin of Christ is God" (that is, the Christ is "the Messiah," and the origin of the Messiah is God). In the language of later centuries: "The Son proceeds from the Father." Christ comes from God.

In 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 there are several allusions to the creation account of Genesis 2 and to the origin of man and woman (11:8-9; 11-12). *So in context it is plausible that 1 Corinthians 11:3 alludes to creation and to origin.*

We cannot say definitively what the full meaning of head is. Is it ambiguous, or does everything apply in exactly the same way to each "pair"? In what respect is the role of the man as head of the woman the same as the position of God as head of Christ? To that extent, restraint is called for, and we must weigh how

far this verse 3 can be a guiding idea or a heading for the whole paragraph that follows.

The man's being head means more than authority, if one insists on understanding the term that way. It means origin and source just as much. I myself would conclude from this, as I have already shown in chapter 5.2, that it also emphasizes unity and being connected. Also the head's function of providing for and protecting the body, of carrying and supporting.

Perhaps there were also Jewish influences that Paul is countering. In the light of the Genesis account, and not the other way around, Paul seems to be correcting here the misinterpreted, or Jewish-interpreted, creation account. From it, Judaizers in general, and in Corinth in particular, had justified the subordination of the woman and attached outward things such as covering and long hair to it.

Paul refutes this in the spirit of the creation account: The woman is nothing without the man (husband). And in the same way the man is nothing without the woman (wife). They complement each other. And how did this come about? The woman came from the man. And how did it go on? Every man is born of a woman. *How could the creation account be summed up better and brought to the point? And their equal worth and equal rank be put so plausibly?* Both, man and woman, come shaped from God's hand, as perfect complement and counterpart. With roles that are on the one hand different, but in real life often interchangeable, and that are not determined by gender.

In addition to this equal rank of man and woman, there is also Paul's earlier teaching in ch. 7:3-5:

"Let the husband render to the wife the marital duty, and likewise also the wife to the husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise the husband also does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a time, so that you may have leisure for prayer; and come together again, so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."

With this statement Paul turns the ancient attitudes and ideas about sexuality upside down. The wife does not have to be at her husband's service one-sidedly whenever he seeks sexual satisfaction. The wife does not belong to the husband. They belong to each other. In sexuality they respect each other. Sexuality is not a one-way street. It is a duty, since man and woman have sexual needs that God himself has placed in them to be fulfilled. Sex is an act of mutual agreement that serves the satisfaction of both partners. *Here too Paul clearly underlines that both sexes are equals.* Otherwise he would not say that the wife has authority over her husband's body. Since sexual intercourse is a bodily matter, the body is emphasized, but in the end it stands for the whole person. That the wife has authority (power, dominion) over the husband is often overlooked, because people assume that the woman should not rule over the man but submit. This is an important lesson for a healthy sex life in marriage. It was not in keeping with the times back then. But that is the creation order.

6.1.5 Head Covering in Corinth

If we do not look into the custom of head covering and/or veiling, there is a danger of transferring this Pauline text one-to-one into the present. And doing so with a one-dimensional, black-and-white hermeneutic that in the end becomes the justification for a narrow legalism, as I have experienced myself.

M. Auerback summarizes the argument for veiling: "*Icons, statements, have meaning only in a culture that knows what they mean."* "But in traditional biblical studies, most have assumed that veiling means 'submission' in 1 Corinthians 11:3–16 *without delving into understanding the meanings that veiling had for women in the ancient Eastern Mediterranean culture* or in its continued widespread use in a number of modern cultures." [61]

Bruce Winter states that at the time of the Roman Empire "it can be confidently concluded that the veiled head was the symbol of the modesty and chastity expected of a married woman." [62]

61. Westfall, p. 26. Westfall, Cynthia Long. Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ. Baker Publishing Group, 2015
62. p. 27

"However, now we have access to women's narratives from cultures practicing women's veiling that tell another story. We find that there is a strong current of pious fundamentalist women in Islam and Judaism who choose to veil for reasons that sound quite similar to Paul's rationale in 1 Corinthians 11:3–16. However, we are not completely dependent on later anthropological parallels that run the risk of being anachronistic. *The story of women who refuse to remove the veil and the reasons for wearing it may be traced back to Assyrian culture*." [63]

"*Paul's concern appears to extend to any woman in the congregation who would prophesy and pray, including slaves, freedwomen, the unmarried, and widows.* The Roman matron's[64] dress code signified her rank as well as 'her status and role as a sexually mature woman in Roman society.' *On the other hand, an unveiled head signified sexual availability, so that a woman slave or a freedwoman was prohibited from veiling*." [65]

"The regulation of veiling was the prerogative of men; they would be the ones who would most naturally see the need to set a policy. *In Roman practice, both men and women covered their heads to pray. Paul apparently taught men in the churches to pray with an uncovered head … contra Roman practice (1 Cor. 11:4), so the men may have thought that what is sauce for the gander would be sauce for the goose. However, while a man's uncovered head was a sign of his humility before God, a woman's uncovered head was not a sign of a woman's humility before God; rather, it sent out a signal about her sexual availability that could be tantamount to solicitation.* But cultural ideals about what was proper could be abandoned by someone in favor of priorities that were ostensibly theological." [66]

"It is usually assumed without question that Paul was correcting the Corinthian women. *However, the passage is more coherent if it is assumed that the Corinthian women were refusing to remove their head coverings or veils*, but were being pressured or encouraged to remove their veils by those in authority, men in the house church,

63. p. 29
64. In the society of the Roman Empire, a woman married to a Roman citizen was called a matrona. Her place was mostly in the house, caring for family and household. She was under the protection and guardianship of the head of the household, either her father or her husband. Wikipedia
65. p. 29
66. p. 31

or possibly even their own husbands. This is a type of scenario that is being played out repeatedly in cultures that veil." [67]

"This not only signaled that such women were sexually available, but also maintained the social order and a distinction between classes. … *Paul's support of all women veiling equalized the social relationships in the community; inasmuch as such veiling was in his control, he secured respect, honor, and sexual purity for women in the church who were denied that status in the culture.*" [68] Veiling made social differences of high and low visible, that is, a class distinction such as can be observed for 1,800 years, right into modern times.

"[In] Middle Eastern culture a woman of the proper class covered her head to signal devotion and modesty. Her covered head also directly signaled her own honor, and the honor of her family—particularly her paterfamilias (the head of the ancient household), *the source of her identity.* Paul draws upon the complex meaning of the symbol to make a theological argument for veiling based on the creation account." [69]

E. Schnabel writes: "The wearing of a head covering by women (not only in religious contexts) had a self-evident plausibility in the Roman-Hellenistic cultural sphere. Roman statues, above all portraits of the women of the imperial family, as well as funerary reliefs, depict married women with the stola (*palla*) drawn over the head or with the *vitta*, the woolen head or hair band, which were regarded as symbols of modesty and chastity. Women did not *have* to wear a stola in public. Wearing the stola, however, symbolized their chastity. The marriage legislation of Augustus stipulated that prostitutes were forbidden to wear the stola of the respectable wife, the *matrona*."[70]

It was common to cover one's head. With little effort, Roman women could pull their wrap or outer garment, the palla, over their heads from behind, which also all but covered their hair. This can be seen in countless ancient depictions.

67. p. 32
68. p. 33
69. p. 37
70. Schnabel, E. J., 602–603.

"This study disproves the presupposition in biblical studies that the veil symbolized a woman's submission to her husband. Wearing the veil was not a private symbol, but rather a public practice regulated by law and custom, and men as well as women were expected to submit to the custom. *Briefly, the veil represented a woman's honor, status, and protection.*" [71]

"It was (and is) common for women to resist removing their veil because it symbolizes honor and protection. It is more likely that women who were not allowed to veil in public would want to wear a veil in the community to symbolize that they were made righteous by Christ. *Paul's direction for all women to veil was countercultural and favorable toward women. The practice of all women wearing the veil equalized social relationships in the Christian community.*" [72]

The point of going into such detail was to show that these outward signs were deeply rooted in the culture and society of that time. In order not to endanger the witness of Christ and the gospel, it was necessary to find a way between freedom in Christ and adapting to social norms. On the one hand, that meant adapting (women cover themselves). But also, countering the culture, the covering of all women, in order to demonstrate equality in Christ. Likewise the rejection of covering for men, because it could have meant conforming to idolatrous cults. This principle must be upheld today as well. Adopting ancient social norms does not help us in the 21st century. Rather, such outward forms would cause irritation, as is unfortunately the case.

6.1.6 Having a Sign of Authority on the Head?

Verse 10: Therefore the woman ought to have a power on her head because of the angels.

Many translations have added a "*sign* of power or authority" here! But the text says only power, authority, or right. This addition is not surprising since, as mentioned at the outset, this Pauline text was understood as confirming the hierarchy of the man over the woman. That influenced the (almost exclusively male) translators. *In other words: this addition is an interpretation.*

71. p. 42
72. p. 44

Rather, this verse should be rendered like this:

Therefore the woman ought to have authority over her head because of the angels.

(so Schnabel, Westfall, Bushnell, Keener, Schirrmacher, and others)

Paul points out that in the Christian community it is the woman's right to veil herself, which transforms the symbol. It is thus expressly not a sign of submission or hierarchical subordination. This could mean that a woman should be able to exercise her own judgment in matters of women's clothing, because she is destined to judge the world and the angels, as he already said in 1 Corinthians 6:2-3. "*By wearing the traditional head covering, the wife demonstrates her control over her head by accepting her faithfulness to her husband as well as her personal social status. The erotic signals that women send by uncovering in the public setting of the church assembly are avoided. The relationship of man and woman is preserved, and the woman's articulation of the reality of God in prayer and prophetic speech remains authentic*."[73]

"Consequently, male and female are explicitly interdependent in Paul's theology of origins. In the context of 1 Corinthians 11:3–16, Paul diplomatically mitigates any inappropriate independence of women as a result of his support of their desire to veil."[74]

6.1.7 Present-Day Relevance

God's word is timeless. Not one word will pass away. But there are things that belong to a particular era and are addressed to that era.

By covering themselves, the women were not to draw attention to themselves, not to display the glory of their hair, and not to distract the men (and perhaps some women too). God's glory was to be extolled and praised. God's glory, his presence, was the center of the gathering. Today, too, nothing in the worship service should exalt the human being; no one should draw attention or honor to himself or herself.

73. Schnabel, E. J., 610–611
74. p. 73

Women were not to take anything away from God's honor through their outward appearance, through their emphasized or dressed-up beauty. *This is the ethical principle of the text, which still applies today. No speaker, no preacher, no one giving a testimony or a mission report, no singer, no instrumentalist, no person at all should – today just as then – draw attention to himself or herself through clothing.*

"As far as the practice of head covering is concerned, it has long ceased to be customary in Western societies for women to signal their status as faithful wives by means of a head covering. In Islamic countries, and thus in churches in Islamic regions, this is different! If Christian wives in such a situation are active in the church without a head covering, it is precisely because they also move about in the public life of the city in which they live without a head covering. *The absence of a head covering sends no signals. When some Christians demand that wives should still wear a head covering today out of 'obedience to Scripture,' then the instructions of the apostle Paul are precisely not understood and implemented 'obediently': Paul is not concerned with the head covering, but with the deliberate disregard and mockery of traditional conventions that are important and fundamental for society as a whole.*

When women in the churches of Western Europe wear a head covering, this is not the conformity Paul called for toward a convention that symbolizes a wife's chastity and solidarity, but a behavior that is precisely *not* conforming. In the West, marital solidarity and modesty are hardly symbolized anymore by a particular way of dressing. This happens rather verbally, i.e., through concrete statements about the value of marriage and of one's spouse."[75] And of course with a wedding ring, which unmistakably shows that its wearer is in a committed (marriage) relationship and is neither free for a new relationship nor out for sexual adventures. The wedding ring offers only limited protection against that; what matters is the sign.

Anyone who nevertheless thinks he should prescribe a head covering for women today (or women for themselves) has not yet grasped the freedom of the gospel to which we are called.

75. Schnabel, E. J., 624

6.1.8 Explanatory Paraphrase

What follows is a rendering of the text in my own words. This is how I would explain this complex text briefly and concisely. It is not a translation of the Greek text but a paraphrased version, the way I understand it and would explain it, from the point of view of the writer, Paul:

It is important to me that you Corinthians realize that the origin, that is, the head of every man, is the Christ, the Messiah. Through him you men were created. And as men you are related to him. This becomes visible in the gathering. I mention you first, because you are demanding that the women not wear a head covering when they pray and prophesy.

The head of the woman is the man. She was created from his side in order to become one with him. He the head, she the body. The man is her origin, and she too is related to him, which becomes visible in the assembly.

We see this relationship in Christ as well. His head is God. He begot him in eternity and as a human being, his Son, who is equal to him.

If a man in Corinth prays aloud to Christ or God in the assembly, or if he speaks prophetically, and he has his head covered, that is a disgrace. He is giving honor to himself, not to Christ. For the idol worshipers cover their heads when they sacrifice to the idols. Uncovered, the man shows humility and gives honor to the Most High, the invisible Christ.

With the women it is exactly the other way around. Women who pray and speak prophetically in the assembly and do not cover themselves bring shame on their head. They dishonor themselves and their husband, that is, their head. For they draw attention to themselves instead of to God and Christ.

If anyone demands that the women need not cover themselves, just like the men, he is not thinking it through. For you know very well that in Corinth an uncovered woman is regarded as shorn and is like a woman who prostitutes herself or who is out for sexual encounters. If she does not veil or cover herself,

then logically she should also have her hair cut off or have herself shaved completely.

I know that this is not what you intend with your demand! But in the society in which you live, that would be the consequence! So do not risk becoming a cause of offense for people who come to you and see how the usual custom of women being covered in public is rejected.

The men are not to veil themselves in the assembly, in the presence of God. For the man is the image of God and the reflection of his glory.

The woman is also God's image, but beyond that she is also the reflection of the glory of the man. Her beauty is that of her husband, with whom she is one.

How could she become his glory? Certainly not because he was created from her, but because she was formed from him, from his side.

And she is not the glory of the man because he was created for her sake, but the other way around. She was created for his sake, because he was alone and needed help. And as a woman she was desirably beautiful to him.

Therefore, because the woman has such worth and is of such great benefit to the man, she is to decide for herself about her head, whether she covers it or not. No one may dictate this to her. Neither her husband nor the leaders of the church may dictate to her that she must not wear a head covering (or that she must wear one).

But in her independence and freedom of choice, let the woman bear in mind that she is not separate from or independent of the man. In the church she does not exist without the man, and the man does not exist without the woman either. God's idea was always the togetherness and partnership of man and woman. In the unity of head and body they act together, in agreement, in consultation, peaceably, submitting to one another, complementing each other.

What does it mean that the one does not exist without the other? Remember once again the creation of the first human couple. In the beginning the woman came out of the man. From his side. Related to him, in order in turn to be one

flesh with him. But think further: since then every man comes from a woman. Without the man there would be no woman, and without the woman there would be no man. Both are equal in dignity, equal in worth, and equal in standing, the perfect complement in their difference. All this was God's idea. He is the head from whom this came forth.

In view of this I ask you: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God publicly but unveiled and uncovered? No, you will agree, it is not, in view of the customs in Corinth and in the Roman Empire.

There are, after all, manners and customs that are like laws of nature for people. If a man, contrary to the manners and customs, wears long hair, that is regarded as a disgrace. Here too, with the women it is exactly the other way around. The long hair of women is their glory, their natural adornment, which is also perceived as such. The long hair is given to her like an adorning veil or mantle, so that she may be the glory of the man.

This adornment, which seems so desirable to men, she is to cover in the assembly. This is not the place to appear with this glory, just as the man is to demonstrate his humility with an uncovered head. For it is about the honor and glory of God and of Christ. He is the one who invites us to an audience with the King of all kings.

If anyone in Corinth wants to argue about this and calls this custom of head covering into question, he should realize that this is the case nowhere. As you want to prescribe for the women that they not wear a head covering. No church practices anything like this; therefore keep to what usually applies to head covering, what is honorable and gives offense to no one.

6.1.9 Conclusion and Summary

The language of the passage and Paul's conclusion suggest that someone wanted to either restrict or prohibit veiling in the Corinthian house churches, but that all women, some women, or an individual woman wanted to veil. First, Paul briefly summarizes the creation account, stating that woman's creation out

of and for man is the reason why woman is man's glory. Man is her head because she is created out of him, and her head consequently reflects or in some way expresses his glory. In the Genesis account, she was also his glory because she was specifically made to attract him, in contrast with all the animals (Gen. 2:18–23).[76]

The Pauline texts contain a theology of gender *that is realized in how Paul explains the creation account with terms and symbols of the Greco-Roman culture and the idioms of the Greek language.* Through applying the metaphor of "head" to Adam, Paul indicates that Eve has multiple identities … Women are the image of God, the image of Adam, and "the glory of man" as well. *Paul's description of woman as "the glory of man" does not indicate subordination or a lesser glory, but rather refers to an additional glory: the power of her beauty over men.* Neither can we project male priority into Paul's brief narrative in 1 Timothy 2:13–14, which states that Adam was formed first (v. 13). Instead, Paul teaches mutuality from the creation passage, because Paul depicts man as a beneficiary of benefits and needing the woman's help in terms that the culture would understand; however, *woman was formed from man so that in the creation account the man functions as the head of the woman (her source of life) in Greek idiom;* but then subsequently every man comes from woman so that woman is also the origin of life, which is what the name "Eve" means in Genesis 3:20.

Therefore, through God's design, female and male are not independent of each other. There is no compelling reason to interpret Paul as contradicting, reinterpreting, or qualifying the authority of women in the creation account in Genesis 1:27–28 or in his use of the Greek idiom "head." Both male and female were created in God's image, and both were created for dominion that Paul indicates is exercised in terms of mutuality and reciprocity within appropriate cultural paradigms.[77]

76. p. 98
77. p. 105

6.1.10 Another Reading of 1 Corinthians 11

About 25 years ago I heard for the first time that in this text Paul is not presenting his own thoughts, but citing or quoting those of men in Corinth, and refuting them. This is called the quotation theory or quotation thesis. In German it was worked out by Thomas Schirrmacher. For a long time I was skeptical. For the result is what the title of his book says: *Paulus im Kampf gegen den Schleier* (Paul's Fight against the Veil).[78] So not a plea for covering, but the rejection of these outward forms. It is a 180-degree turn in meaning. A "game changer," as it is also called. This thesis is a completely different perspective on this text.

Through English-speaking theologians who hold the same thesis independently of T. Schirrmacher, I came back to his interpretation. I consider this thesis quite convincing. Even knowing the many kinds of criticism that have been raised against it. Schirrmacher himself responds to criticism in the 5th edition of his book. This interpretation is not proven, but which one is?

It does not spring from the historical-critical method, since it already existed before this method appeared. It is not about criticizing the Bible, but about understanding the line of thought. Not about devaluing the text, but about placing it within the teaching of Jesus, of the apostles, and of the Bible.

Examples of Quotations

To arrive at the possibility at all that in 1 Corinthians 11 Paul is quoting, at length, the puzzling demands of some Corinthian men, I will cite similar examples from 1 Corinthians. Several times he refers to ideas, opinions, and events in Corinth. Chapters 1-4 are about factions, with one party declaring him their leader in his absence, which leads him to ask whether he was crucified for them. Chapters 5-6 are about church discipline, chapters 6-7 about marital love,

78. Paulus im Kampf gegen den Schleier, Thomas Schirrmacher, Eine alternative Auslegung von 1. Korinther 11,2-16, 5th expanded edition, VTR, Nuremberg, 2002 (first edition 1993), with a foreword by Hans-Georg Wünch, director of studies and lecturer in Old Testament at the Theologisches Seminar Rheinland, who advocates this quotation reading.

chapters 8-10 about food sacrificed to idols, 12-14 about the gifts of the Spirit, and 15 about the resurrection. He deals with a great many disputed topics, wrong views, and wrong conclusions. Along the way one notices the occasional ironic remark.

More than in other letters, Paul names wrong ideas in order to correct them. He had probably learned most of them from a letter the Corinthians wrote in reply to his first letter to them (5:9), which we no longer have, and from a delegation from Corinth. It is a completely normal procedure to quote something or to render it freely in order then to comment on it or refute it.

One example of a quotation is 1 Corinthians 7:1: *It is good for a man not to touch a woman*. Many have declared this to be Paul's view. For at least three reasons this is questionable: The sentence begins explicitly with what the Corinthians had written to Paul. Then it is about touching, which means sexual intercourse, as it was expressed in the Greek language. Paul is not against sexual intercourse, as the Corinthians, or some of them, believed. He regards it as a mutual duty in the marriage of husband and wife.

In 10:23 it says: *Everything is permitted*. Here Paul is not describing Christian freedom, but the view of the Corinthians, which is wrong. *Never is everything permitted*. This quotation, too, although much shorter, is not marked as such. The context makes it clear.

It is generally recognized that in 1 Corinthians Paul quotes either freely or from a letter: 6:12, 13; 7:1; 8:1, 4; 10:23; 15:12. Not every quotation is always marked as such, but is plausibly inferred from the context. After all, the Corinthians knew exactly what it was about – which is harder for us to find out today.

The two main arguments against the quotation theory are that Paul does not mark the quotations beyond doubt as such, and that in chapters 11 and 14 they are too long compared with other quotations. Whether a quotation is long – just look at the long lines of thought about food sacrificed to idols in chapters 8-10 – depends on the complexity. It could not have been rendered more briefly without the risk of a misunderstanding.

The objection that a long quotation cannot be God's word is a fallacy. Much is reported in the Bible without its being the truth, even words of the devil, which are false beyond doubt. What always matters is that it is reliably passed on.

These preliminary thoughts were meant to show that it is possible in principle to read 1 Corinthians 11 in this way.

6.1.11 Alternative Translation of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

First read the text in a familiar translation, the one you use most. Then read this alternative translation, as Schirrmacher proposes it, and compare it sentence by sentence.

(2) Now I praise you that you remember me in everything and hold fast to the traditions just as I delivered them to you.

(3) But I want you to know that the head of every man is the Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of the Christ is God.

Now, from verse 4 to 9, perhaps also to verse 10, follows the wrong view of the Judaizers, which Paul quotes or renders freely:

(4) Every man who prays or prophesies with something hanging down from his head dishonors his head.

(5) But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonors her head; for she is one and the same as a woman shaven bald.

(6) For if a woman will not veil herself, then let her hair also be cut off.

But since it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaven bald, let her veil herself.

(7) For a man indeed ought not to veil his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of the man.

(8) For the man is not from the woman, but the woman from the man;

(9) for neither was the man created for the woman's sake, but the woman for the man's sake.

Now Paul refutes these demands, contradicts them clearly, and in effect reduces them to absurdity:

(10) Therefore the woman ought to have authority over her head, because of the angels.

(11) For after all, in the Lord neither is the woman without the man nor the man without the woman. (12) For as the woman is from the man, so also the man is through the woman; but all things are from God.

(13) Judge for yourselves! It is proper for a woman to pray to God unveiled!

(14) Nature does not teach you that if a man has [long] hair, it is a disgrace to him, (15) but if a woman has [long] hair, it is an honor to her! For her hair has been given to her instead of a veil.

(16) But if anyone thinks it right to be contentious, [let him consider:] we have no such custom, [and] neither do the churches of God.

Alternatively, one can include v. 10 in the indented text and then translate it as a quotation:

(10) Therefore the woman ought to have a power on her head, because of the angels.

Lucy Peppiatt also regards verse 6 as a word of Paul, in which he thinks the demand for covering through to its end and notes the grotesque contradictions of the Judaizers, in order then to continue with the quotation.

This reading clears up a number of difficulties in the text. I am aware that, compared with 2,000 years of church history, this reading is at most 200 years old, or was first considered then. Is it wrong for that reason?

For those who believe, for example, in a rapture of the church before the tribulation, exactly the same applies, since this thesis is not older either. If we and countless other Christians study the Bible daily, it should come as no surprise

that there can be new insights that help us further or can solve long-standing puzzles.

6.1.12 Conclusion

For those who have never read 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 this way, this reading is a relief. Liberating insights follow from it: Today a woman does not have to cover or veil herself when she prays and prophesies in public. She can cut her hair as she likes, because she can decide about it herself. A man can have long hair if he wants to. Paul himself very probably had long hair at times (Acts 21:24). Nature, whatever it means, is never the teacher who shows us how we can please God.

At a deeper level still, the text yields neither a ranking nor an order of rank that places the man over the woman or the woman under the man. Neither in general, every woman and every man, nor is a believing married couple presented here with a difference in authority.

This means that questions of conscience and the demands of church leaders or "leading brothers" can be answered clearly, and the burden of responsibility, or of a human law, can be taken off the sisters.

There are *historical explanations* that come to the clear conclusion that today covering no longer plays any role. *One can arrive at this without the quotation thesis, as I have shown above.* Depending on manners and customs (in antiquity, or into the 18th or even 19th century), women gave offense who, for example, spoke uncovered and in public.

It is indeed about not giving offense. This does not concern anything that makes up the core of the gospel. There are adaptations in the sense in which Paul becomes a Gentile to the Gentiles and a Jew to the Jews (9:19-23), in order to win them. He pays a price by giving up freedom in order to win people for Jesus. So it may be that, for these reasons, there is a voluntary (not theological!) adaptation to, or retention of, customs in which the people concerned live and are rooted. These customs and outward forms, which may rest on a wrong

understanding of roles, are, so to speak, accepted and tolerated. And because of the freedom of the gospel, they may change and dissolve. In Germany and most Western democratic countries this situation does not exist. There, "pious customs," dress codes, and outward forms are not part of secular culture, but of a Christian culture that has been handed down from the distant past into the present and is continued, on religious grounds, within its own milieu. Without worldly influence or compulsion. When such Christians meet non-Christians, this can cause unnecessary irritation.

A brother of the conservative school of thought stresses that the outward forms are better not observed at evangelistic events, for example, so as not to "be an obstacle with an appearance and behavior that are incomprehensible to them."[79] *My answer: Everything that is an obstacle to the gospel must be avoided. What a contradictory dilemma, if the Bible (supposedly) lays down rules that can at the same time be an obstacle to God's gospel.*

There is only one thing that may be an obstacle or stumbling block: the cross of Jesus Christ! That is where minds part ways. Not over outward forms, not over rules about speaking, dress, and seating.

It is a great obstacle if women were forbidden to speak and take part in the worship service. More on this in the next chapter.

"The fact that we have mistakenly used what we took to be Paul's words (but which are not) to silence women in the church must be regarded as one of the greatest tragedies in history."

Danny Silk

Yes, there really are two Bible texts that for generations have decided whether woman may be or not be.

Veronika Schmidt

79. Herbert Briem, Die Kopfbedeckung der Frau, 2018



6.2 Not Speaking, but Keeping Silent

Among free-church Christians there is only a small proportion of churches in which women are silent in the worship service. Since I grew up in this church world, it still occupies me today, often emotionally.

I never understood what God's idea could be in having women keep silent in the gatherings for worship, except for singing and saying the shared "Amen." Nevertheless, because the Word of God says so, that is what people do. As a

man I am only indirectly affected. I cannot even have a say in what it feels like not to be allowed to say anything in the worship service for your whole life.

Today my impression is that as a man I am not only indirectly affected. *I am affected doubly and directly.* On the one hand, I share responsibility for the answer and the reasons I give when I interpret, teach, and preach the Bible. And there has to be a very good reason for silencing half of the body of Christ in the most important event of the church worldwide, namely in its gathering. I am affected because half of the gifts cannot benefit me in the gathering. Blessing is lost.

If this understanding is a mistake, if God does want to hear the voice of women there just as much as that of men, then that is a real problem and no small matter. Bearing the responsibility for this, in view of the judgment seat of Christ, should be well considered.

I myself spent decades in such assemblies. I internalized it, considered it right, defended it, and demanded it of others. Once, in my youth, a sister prayed aloud at a conference; she did not know this tradition. I and others were deeply shocked. So startled, as if a bolt of lightning from heaven were about to strike us. Later this sister was "set straight."

I have already made clear that silent women are never God's will. My concern is not to get around this uncomfortable statement stubbornly and creatively instead of simply and humbly obeying it. Unfortunately, that is the persistent and monotonous accusation of those who advocate silence. No, it is not that simple. *There are good and sufficient reasons why the sisters in Christ should not be silent.*

This is the text in question:

> [1 Corinthians 14:34-36] *The women are to be silent in the assemblies, for it is not permitted to them to speak, but they are to submit, as the law also says. But if they want to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for a woman to speak in the assembly. Or did the word of God go out from you? Or has it reached you alone?*

6.2.1 Questions

We should think about this text anew once more. A lot is at stake. Please just follow my train of thought and bear with it for once, even if you see it quite differently. If these last verses of 1 Corinthians 14 did not exist, would your thinking ever come anywhere near a command of silence? Is there such an instruction anywhere in the whole of Holy Scripture? That is not a "feminist leading question." *It should give us pause that such a far-reaching instruction is not mentioned, or even hinted at, at least once anywhere else.* This is not about teaching and the prohibition on teaching in 1 Timothy 2:12. Those statements do not belong in the context of my question (although this text is often brought up immediately as an argument). It is about women's audible participation. About a prayer, an account of an experience, a song, a prophetic word, a Bible reading, or a sermon.

In the immediate context of the letter there are precisely *opposite statements*. The most striking one, already addressed in the previous chapter, is Paul's statement that women "pray and prophesy" (11:5). I have pointed out, and I repeat myself, that "praying and prophesying" are characteristic of the gathering, as described in detail in chapter 14. The veil or head covering required in ch. 11 only makes sense in the gathering, when men are present. This text is not about grace at meals, not about women's groups or children's hours. The latter probably did not even exist yet.

For Paul it is completely self-evident that women take part. He expresses this several times in chapter 14. Read the whole chapter with this question in mind.

For men and women, for brothers and sisters, the following applies:

> Verse 5: I would like *all* of you to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy!
>
> Verse 12: seek that *you (all)* may abound for the building up of the assembly.
>
> Verse 23: So if *the whole assembly* comes together in one place and *all* speak in tongues …

> Verse 26: What then, brothers? When *you* come together, *each of you* has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation; let all things be done for building up.
>
> Verse 31: For you can *all* prophesy *one by one*, so that all may learn and all be encouraged.

Addressing them as brothers means everyone: brothers and sisters. It would be unmistakably better to translate it as *Geschwister* (the German word for brothers and sisters together, siblings). 1 Corinthians begins many paragraphs with the word brothers (*adelphoi*), which undoubtedly addresses brothers *and* sisters. Not only the men. As a rule, women were included in the masculine plural. That is how the "generic masculine" is used in German today. *Kontoinhaber* (account holders, a masculine plural), for example, are men and women. For sisters by birth there was the word *adelphai*. Without digressing at this point, I point to the word of Jesus in which all the women and men disciples are addressed together and summed up with exactly this word: "*But you are all brothers!*" (Matthew 23:8b). In addition, all women are now also "sons of God" (Galatians 3:26). Unless the context means only men beyond doubt, all the sisters are included. *Brotherly love* will surely include the sisters too.

In addition to these clear statements, the endowments, that is, the gifts of the Spirit (see ch. 12), the gifts of grace, are distributed to all members – *not according to gender*. In no text on this subject is there a distinction that would suggest that this criterion, being a man or a woman, has any significance in the distribution of gifts or in giftedness. At Pentecost, in keeping with the promise of the prophet Joel, the Spirit was poured out on all flesh, *on sons and daughters* alike (Acts 2:17).

6.2.2 Puzzlement at the End of the Chapter

After Paul has spoken in 11:5 of women who pray and prophesy publicly, and in chapter 14 up to this point has not mentioned the women separately or excluded them but included them, a puzzling statement now follows. *The women are*

to be silent. It is repeated three times in these two verses. So everything that went before does not concern them. Had Paul forgotten it while writing and is now adding it at the bottom? Or is it the climax at the end of his teaching? No, Paul was a brilliant and gifted writer. Every word was in the right place and well thought out.

They, the women, according to the text, are to be silent and submit, as the law also says (14:34). When the law is named, which is supposed to contain and justify both instructions, to be silent and to submit, one will sit up and take notice. *Is that the way Paul speaks?*

No such law exists in the Mosaic Torah. Neither on submission nor on silence. *How could a law of the Old Testament be such a concrete instruction for the New Testament gathering anyway?* In verse 21 of this chapter you can see how Paul refers to the law: with a quotation that anyone can look up in Isaiah 28:11-12. Why not here? Because it is not the Mosaic law.

It is argued that the whole Mosaic law, or the whole Old Testament, is to be understood in this direction, even if not concretely or literally. That cannot be substantiated either. For such a far-reaching restriction on women it is simply too thin. *No one who argues this way would accept a judgment against himself that was so vaguely or thinly grounded.*

Some even think that Paul means here the word of punishment in Genesis 3:16, where it says that the man will rule over the woman. As far-fetched as that is, if it really were so, then the command of silence would be a direct punishment of the Fall. That is, a punishment that implies that it was not so before. In the church of the New Covenant (!) this punishment ought surely to be, indeed would have to be, lifted.

6.2.3 The Quotation Reading

Here we may be dealing with a quotation. Then 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 reads like this:

> *'For God is not [a God] of disorder but [a God] of peace, as [is the case] in all the churches of the saints.*

What follows is what the Judaizers want to push through and introduce. Paul quotes, or formulates himself, what they are demanding:

> Your women are to be silent in the churches, for it is not permitted to them [by you] to speak, but they are to submit, as the law also says. But if they want to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home, for it is shameful for a woman to speak in the church.

Paul now contradicts this clearly and ironically:

> Or did the word of God perhaps go out from you [men, or Corinthians], or come to you alone?"

It is not Paul's idea that women have to be silent. He would be contradicting himself. *May we men knowingly overlook a contradiction like this and then apply it to the disadvantage of women?* Would we tolerate something like that in our everyday lives?

It was probably Jewish men who wanted to oblige the women of the Corinthian church to veil themselves and, here, even to be silent.

Schirrmacher on this: "Robert W. Allison has also dealt with the question of the appeal to the law in 1 Corinthians 14:34. He comes to the conclusion that the Old Testament law contains no call for women to be silent. The conclusion of 1 Corinthians 14:34, however, corresponds entirely to the rabbinic exegesis of Genesis 3:16, which we have already encountered at the outset from the Talmud and which is also reflected in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, but which contradicts the teaching that Jesus and Paul drew from the Old Testament.

Joyce Harper and John A. Anderson assume that the appeal to the law corresponds to the complete prohibition on women's speaking in the Talmud, and that here it is not Paul appealing to the law, but Jewish teachers wrongly appealing to their interpretation of the law.[80] *They quote the Talmud with the words: 'It is a disgrace for a woman to let her voice be heard among men.'*[81]

80. Joyce Harper. Women and the Gospel. C. B. R. F. Occasional Paper 5. Christian Brethren Research Fellowship: Pinner (UK), 1974. pp. 14-15; John A. Anderson. Women's Warfare and Ministry: What Saith the Scriptures? David Waldie: Stonehaven (UK), 1933. pp. 20-26.
81. Joyce Harper. Women and the Gospel. op. cit. p. 14 (Megillah, a tractate of the Talmud).

S. Aalen sought to support the same view by pointing out that the phrase 'it is not permitted' is a rabbinic formula[82] with which rabbis permitted and forbade things."[83]

There are further indications that these words come from Jewish thinking. For example, the well-known historian Josephus: "The woman, says the law, is inferior to the man in all things. Let her therefore be submissive, not for her humiliation, but so that she may be guided; for authority has been given to the man by God." (Against Apion 2.201)

"Taken as a whole, the position of women in religious law can best be expressed by this constantly repeated formula: 'Women, (Gentile) slaves, and children (minors).' Like a Gentile slave and a minor child, a woman has a man over her who is her master; this likewise limits her participation in worship, because from a religious point of view she is inferior to a man.

We therefore have the impression that Judaism at the time of Jesus also had a very low opinion of women, as is customary in the Orient, where the woman is valued above all for her fertility but is, as far as possible, secluded from the outside world, subject to the power of her father or her husband, and where from the religious standpoint she is inferior (subordinate) compared to men."[84]

A few more statements whose spirit can be found again in the words Paul quotes:

A woman's voice is forbidden, because it arouses sexually. Talmud, Berakhot 24a

A woman's voice is indecent nakedness. Talmud, Berakhot

"The woman need not be instructed in the Torah; she is unfit to give testimony, her words are hardly reliable, she is inclined to run about, she is grudging toward guests." (Strack-Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch, IV, 1226)

82. S. Aalen. "A Rabbinic Formula in I Cor 14,34." pp. 513-525 in: F. L. Cross (ed.). Studia Evangelica II. Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 87. Akademie-Verlag: (East) Berlin, 1964.
83. Quotation from Thomas Schirrmacher, page 110
84. Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus (Jerusalem zur Zeit Jesu) by Joachim Jeremias, p. 375.

More could be cited about how things stood for women in Judaism and in the Orient at the time of Jesus and the early church. Not even the Old Testament's high regard for women was maintained. That is, among other things, a consequence of Hellenization, which brought Greek ideas about the nature of woman into Jewish thought.

Could Paul leave these misogynistic ideas unmentioned? Perhaps they were so far-fetched to him, perhaps also not so influentially widespread in Corinth, that he turns to them only briefly, but must still have addressed them to be on the safe side. Clearly, almost ironically, Paul confronts these Judaizers. Are they the ones from whom God's word goes out? Do they set the rules for how worship is to be shaped? Which, of course, cannot possibly be. *What is striking is that this statement, in its masculine form, is addressed to men and not to women, who would actually be the ones addressed. It could also be translated:*

Or has it reached you men alone?

To anyone who obliges women to be silent today, the same words of Paul apply: Have you received a divine revelation about this? Can one simply defy the apostle's instructions?

In no assembly of early Christianity were the women silent. The assembly was not a continuation or a new version of the synagogue, where women (apart from a few exceptions) were silent and had separate seating. The synagogue was only to a limited extent the model for the assembly. There, for the most part, the male-dominated hierarchical order prevailed. In view of Galatians 3:28 (in Christ all distinctions have become irrelevant), that could never be allowed to enter the church. That is what Paul is fighting for.

6.2.4 A Roman Law?

The historian Beth Allison Barr derives her conjecture that this is a rendering of Roman thought from a quotation of the consul Cato.[85] "When 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 is read as a quotation representing a Corinthian practice (which D. W. Odell-Scott argued for in 1983, Charles Talbert argued for in 1987, Thomas Schirrmacher in 1991, Katharine Bushnell already 100 years ago, and Peppiatt has argued for again more recently), *Paul's purpose seems clear: to distinguish what the Corinthians were doing ('women be silent') and to clarify that Christians should not be following the Corinthian practice ('What!'). While I cannot guarantee this is what Paul was doing, it makes a lot of (historical) sense.* First Corinthians includes several non-Pauline quotations already, and the wording of verses 34–35 is remarkably close to Roman sources. As Marg Mowczko observes, 'The view that 14:34–35 is a non-Pauline quotation is one of the few that offers a plausible explanation for the jarring change of tone which verses 34–35 bring into the text, as well as the subsequent abrupt change of topic, tone, and gender in verse 36.' If Paul is indeed quoting the Roman worldview to counter it with the Christian worldview, then his meaning is the exact opposite of what evangelical women have been taught. *Could it be that, instead of telling women to be silent like the Roman world did, Paul was actually telling men that, in the world of Jesus, women were allowed to speak? Could we have missed Paul's point (again)? Instead of heeding his rebuke and freeing women to speak, are we continuing the very patriarchal practices that Paul was condemning?'*[86]

85. "At home our freedom is conquered by female fury, here in the Forum it is bruised and trampled upon, and because we have not contained the individuals, we fear the lot. … Indeed, I blushed when, a short while ago, I walked through the midst of a band of women. … I should have said, 'What kind of behavior is this? Running around in public, blocking streets, and speaking to other women's husbands! Could you not have asked your own husbands the same thing at home? Are you more charming in public with others' husbands than at home with your own? And yet, it is not fitting even at home … for you to concern yourselves with what laws are passed or repealed here.' Our ancestors did not want women to conduct any—not even private—business without a guardian; they wanted them to be under the authority of parents, brothers, or husbands; we (the gods help us!) even now let them snatch at the government and meddle in the Forum and our assemblies. What are they doing now on the streets and crossroads, if they are not persuading the tribunes to vote for repeal? … If they are victorious now, what will they not attempt? As soon as they begin to be your equals, they will have become your superiors."

86. Barr, Beth Allison. The Making of Biblical Womanhood (p. 62). Baker Publishing Group.

6.2.5 By No Means!

I would like to point out a peculiarity in verse 36. It says: *"Or did the word of God perhaps go out from you [men, or Corinthians]? Or has it come to you alone?"*

Paul begins these two questions, which follow the statement about being silent and submitting, with the particle ἤ. The particle "ἤ *often serves to introduce rhetorical questions to which a negative answer is expected*: Mt 7:9 'Or is there perhaps a man among you …?'; 12:5 'Or have you perhaps not read …?'; cf. Mt 20:15; 26:53; Lk 13:4; Rom 3:29; 6:5; 7:1; 9:21; 11:2; 1 Cor 6:9, 16, 19; 9:8; 10:22; 2 Cor 11:7; 13:5; Jas 4:5; *double question 1 Cor 14:36*."[87]

"Likewise in rhetorical questions of a negative character ... ; surely one does not gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Mt 7:16; cf. Mk 4:21; 1 Cor 1:13; Jas 3:12. ... In general, ἤ is often found in interrogative sentences — α. to introduce and append rhetorical questions (Just., D. 2,4 and elsewhere; Ath. 8,3 and elsewhere) ...; or do you perhaps think that? Mt 26:53. ...; or is God perhaps the God of the Jews only? Rom 3:29. ... or do you perhaps not know? 6:3; 7:1; 1 Cor 6:9, 16, 19; cf. 10:22; 2 Cor 11:7." [88]

The equivalent of ἤ in our language would be "What?", "Nonsense!", or "By no means!": By no means are the women to be silent in the gathering for worship. It is an emphatic contradiction on Paul's part.

6.2.6 Further Explanations

If one rejects the quotation reading, one still has to explain why the command of silence is supposed to apply generally. If these are supposed to be Paul's words, then one would have to resolve plausibly the contradictions already mentioned.

87. *PEPPERMÜLLER, R., "ἤ", in H. BALZ - G. SCHNEIDER (edd.), Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Verlag W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 2011, 276.
88. BAUER, W., in K. ALAND - B. ALAND (edd.), Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur, Walter de Gruyter, 6th ed., Berlin; New York 1988, 693–694.

It would have to be clarified reliably what "speaking" by the women is meant. Is it disruptive chattering, the weighing of prophecy, (constant) questions (that interrupt), disorderly, disruptive speaking? Teaching? Publicly (and disrespectfully) correcting one's husband? *Whatever commentaries you study, there are, just as with 1 Corinthians 11, almost as many explanations as interpreters.*

More than once I have been told, in person and in writing, that we must keep praying for clarity on this. Today I reject this (pious) attitude at this point. For in this matter millions of prayers have already gone up to heaven, but obviously have not been answered. The questions have remained. So have the uncertainties.

One explanation worth mentioning is that of Armin Baum, who does not hold the quotation reading. His perspective is "culturally sensitive" and historical. Women in antiquity were not allowed to speak up in public. That was the task of men. Jewish theologians were convinced that the woman has no business speaking in the man's place. Thus in the Acts of the Apostles only men spoke in public. Women, on the other hand, could be active only in the private sphere. Because of this ancient custom, Paul forbade women to speak in public or even to ask questions. But why? In order to behave in a "culturally sensitive" way. *Paul's reasoning is not theological (e.g., a creation order), but takes into account the customs of that time.* It was shameful for a woman to speak in public. She could thereby bring the gospel and the Christians into disrepute unnecessarily. Until about 200 years ago (!) this prohibition on women speaking in public was normal. Today, as we know, all that is different.

Armin Baum explains aptly: "But, one might ask: With such an approach to difficult Bible passages, does everything not start to slide? Can't all the instructions of the New Testament be 'contextualized away' in this manner? That is not the case. For the method of contextualization is intended only for instructions that are given a cultural justification. For instructions that are given a theological justification, it is out of place."

Michael Bird explains this instruction of Paul like this: "The most likely explanation of 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 is that Paul is dealing with how wives related

to and interacted with their husbands during public worship. Note how 14:33a and 14:40 focus on order and decency in gatherings. Paul is not issuing a general ban on women speaking in church at all, for 11:2-16 and other texts instead refer to women speaking in church. *It is a particular kind of speaking, and not the possibility of wives speaking, that Paul forbids.* Most likely Paul has in mind wives doing something like interrupting a speaker to ask their husbands questions during prophecies or speaking in tongues, or else talking over someone in order to be heard. Perhaps women even questioned or contradicted their husbands in front of the church on matters of prophecy or the interpretation of Holy Scripture. If women are really interested in learning and in discussion, that is more than fine, but the home is the right place for it, rather than being disruptive or quarrelsome."[89]

In this interpretation, Paul's words would read as expressed in this paraphrase:

> As in all the churches of the saints, wives in the churches should not speak in a way that is regarded as rude or immoral. It is not permitted to them to speak [in this way], but they must submit, as Genesis 2 says [about wives being suitable complements to their husbands, not their public critics]. If they want to learn something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is a disgrace for a woman to speak [rudely or immorally] in the assembly. Did the word of God originate with you [and not with the Jews]? Or are they the only people it has reached [the gospel has reached many people who regard women questioning men as highly immoral]?

Another example from the history of theology showing that this Pauline passage is interpreted in different ways: Philipp Jacob Spener wanted to put the passages into practice as precisely as possible. That is why the women in his gatherings had to sit in a separate room. There they were allowed to listen in, but could not take part in the conversations. The somewhat younger Moravian Church (Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine) of Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf went the opposite way: The women had a great many opportunities to be active in the church. The Pauline passage was interpreted in light of its historical setting.

89. Wunderli, ibid.

6.2.7 Probably Not from Paul

As indicated in the preface, this section 6.2.7 was added because there are (at least for me) new insights that have to do with old manuscripts. Philip Barton Payne has worked intensively on this topic and, like a number of other textual scholars, has recognized the following peculiarities:

In some manuscripts verses 34 and 35 stand where they stand in our Bibles, but in other manuscripts they stand after verse 40.

A relatively long text was moved. That is very unusual and allows the following conjecture: These verses were inserted later. They were written in the margin, and the next copyist would usually insert them, because they had perhaps been forgotten before. He decided where they were inserted.

This thesis is strengthened by a discovery in Codex Vaticanus, one of the most extensive and most important codices from the 4th century. There these verses are in fact marked as an insertion:

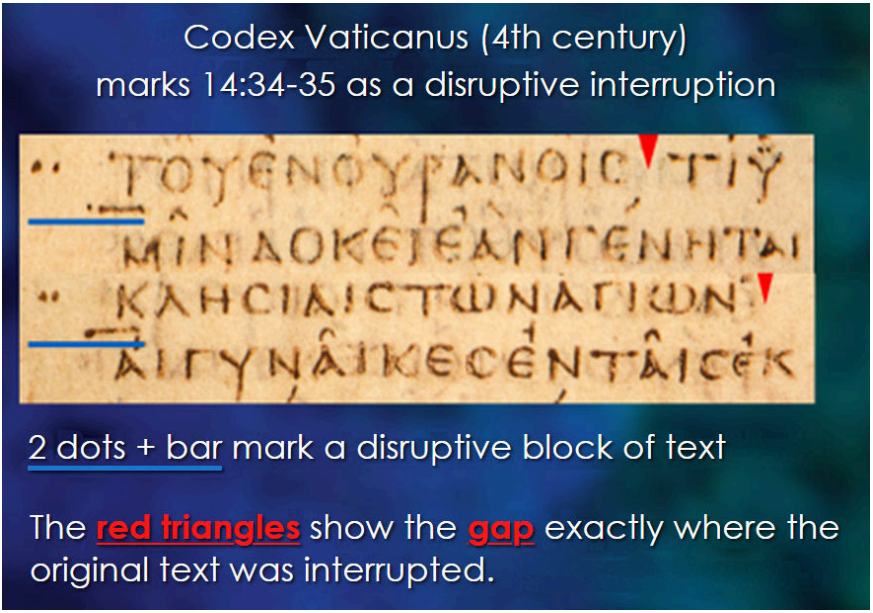


Image source: Bibliothèque nationale de France

On this I quote Philip B. Payne, who has done groundbreaking research on it: "*Seven reasons from manuscripts and nine reasons from the words in these verses convince me and many others that they were not in Paul's original letter but were added later.* I'll now summarize just three.

First, the obvious meaning of these verses contradicts statements throughout this chapter that 'all' may teach and prophesy and chapter 11's rules for women prophesying.

Second, no other passage nearly this long occurs in manuscripts of Paul's letters in two separate locations this far apart without an obvious reason.

Third, the oldest Bible marks these verses as a spurious later addition.[90]

First, these verses contradict many other statements in this chapter.

To avoid contradiction, many say that Paul silences only *disruptive chatter* or, first proposed in 1962,[91] only *judging* prophecies. But these narrow interpretations don't fit this passage's unqualified demands for silence repeated three times for maximum emphasis. Furthermore, if verse 34 prohibits only judging prophecies, v. 34 permits speech that verse 35 prohibits. After all, asking questions out of a desire to learn is totally unlike judging prophecies and is rarely disruptive. These interpretations make Paul contradict what he had just written.

Second, these verses follow verse 40 in every 'Western' Greek manuscript, but in most other manuscripts they follow verse 33.

Here's the famous 6th century 'Western' Codex D. This image's first full paragraph is the end of chapter 14. Its next paragraph is verses 34 to 35. Its last paragraph begins chapter 15.

The two locations of verses 34 to 35 strongly suggest that someone wrote them in the margin and later copyists inserted them either after verse 33 or 40. Let me explain:

90. Codex Vaticanus B, which is widely regarded as the most reliable New Testament Greek manuscript.
91. W. Klein, "The Church and the Prophets," *ATR* 44 (1962) 8.

The fundamental principle in determining the original text of Scripture is: 'the text that best explains the emergence of all other texts is most likely original.'

No manuscript of any letter by Paul moves any other large block of text nearly this far without an obvious reason and no early reader criticized this text's location.[92] But it was common for scribes to copy text in the margin into the main text.

For example, the fourth century Codex Vaticanus has 20 instances of old text in the margins of Matthew. All but 3 are in the main text of virtually every subsequent manuscript.

Greeks believed strongly that women should be silent in public congregations.[93] So it's hardly surprising that a reader sometime *before AD 200* added in the margin the 'conventional wisdom' these verses express.

The only explanation of these verses' two locations that fits known scribal conventions is that someone first wrote these two verses in the margin of a manuscript, and later copyists inserted them either after verse 33 or verse 40.

Common sense demands that something customary—inserting text from the margin into the main text—is more likely to occur than something so extraordinary that no other instance is known—moving so much text so far away with no obvious reason.[94]

Third, our oldest Bible, Codex Vaticanus, widely praised for its accuracy, marks these verses silencing women in church as a spurious interruption.

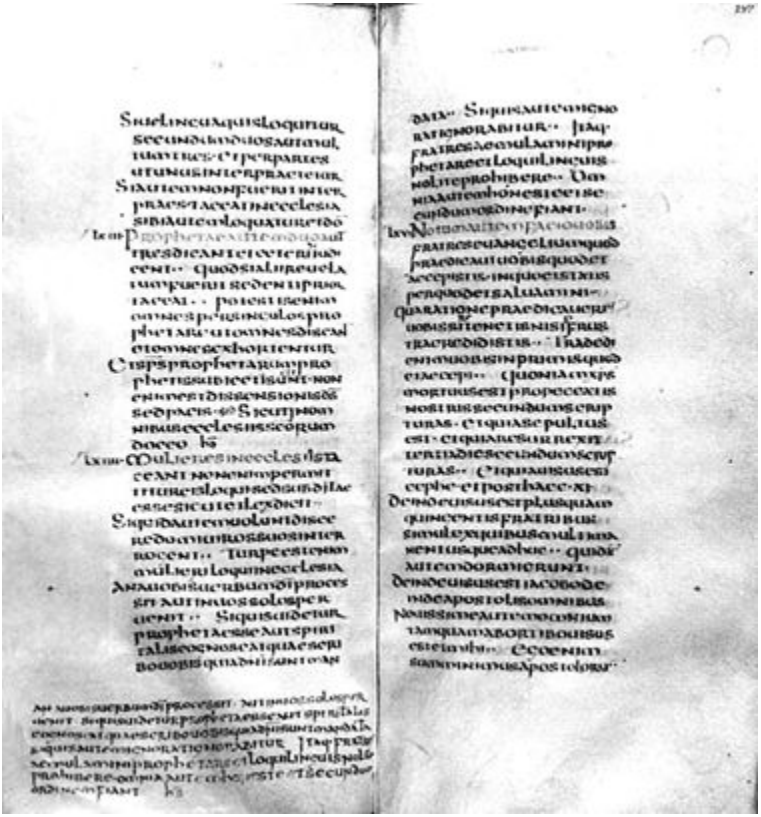
It is true, however, that verses 34-35 occur somewhere (that is, after verse 33 or 40) in all surviving manuscripts, which requires an extraordinarily early insertion. But it is not only Vaticanus that marks them as spurious. Bishop Victor had a corrected text written in the

92. Ulrich Schmid, "Conceptualizing 'Scribal' Performances: Reader's Notes," in The Textual History of the Greek New Testament: Changing Views in Contemporary Research, ed. Klaus Wachtel and Michael Holmes (Atlanta: SBL, 2011), 49–64, at 62, 50, 58: "Readers . . . react[ed] to what they read by adding comments in the margin. . . . Some of these notes could have been copied into the text by scribes who had to copy such an 'embellished' [manuscript]. . . . The inclination of scribes, at least in the view of the ancients, seems to have been toward the inclusion of marginal material into the main text."

93. E.g. Plutarch, Aristophanes, Aristotle, Sophocles, Democritus, Aelius Aristides, and many rabbis.

94. This is called "transcriptional probability." This is [a] unique case. The key reason we recognize it as marginal text does not undermine the reliability of any other text.

lower margin of Codex Fuldensis that omits these verses, and the non-Western text MS 88 omits them after verse 33 but inserts them after verse 40 with symbols indicating that they should follow verse 33. Since these verses do not occur in Victor's textual witnesses to 1 Corinthians, Dan Wallace's claim 'that these verses occur in all witnesses to 1 Corinthians' is not true (https://bible.org/article/textual-problem-1-corinthians-1434-35). Textual scholars assign different manuscript sigla to different texts within one and the same manuscript. 14:34-35 does not occur in all the texts distinguished by these separate manuscript symbols. *It is not true that the text of 14:34-35 is 'supported' by all manuscripts.*



In *Codex Fuldensis* (the original is kept in Fulda), the text without verses 34 and 35 was written at the bottom as a correction or footnote. The copyist in the middle of the 6th century evidently had a text without these verses in front of him.

A brief excursus: Codex Fuldensis

Codex Fuldensis (F) is a Vulgate manuscript that contains the text of the 23 canonical books of the NT as well as the Diatessaron and the Letter to the Laodiceans. It is one of the oldest dated manuscripts of the New Testament and the only early NT manuscript known to have been edited by a significant scholar, Bishop Victor of Capua. It is the second important witness to the text of the Vulgate and the most important and oldest witness to the complete text of the Diatessaron. The codex is an important, if not the most important, piece of evidence in the discussion about the authenticity of the text of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.

It was written in the years 541-546 in Capua on the instructions of Bishop Victor. It was also personally checked and corrected by him. At the end of the Apocalypse stands the date May 2, 546, written by Victor himself. Victor checked the text of the codex a second time, and therefore there is also a second date – April 12, 547.

Codex Fuldensis – German Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

On the basis of his false premise, Wallace objects "that they must have crept into the text at the earliest stage of transmission ... into the original document." That something like this is possible can be seen from the rapid adoption of the

verb 'submit' in Ephesians 5:22,[95] which shows that the addition of these verses 34-35 even well into the second century could easily explain their presence in all surviving manuscripts."

"The famous Roman Catholic scholar Joseph A. Fitzmyer[96] notes that 'the majority of today's interpreters' conclude that this text [14:34-35] is a later addition. The textual scholar Kim Haines-Eitzen states this for 'almost all scholars today.'[97] Gordon Fee, probably the most renowned evangelical textual scholar, argues that these verses were not in Paul's letter but were added in the margin of a manuscript and inserted by later copyists either after verse 33 or after verse 40.[98] My book *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, 226-227, lists fifty-five studies that conclude that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 was not in Paul's original letter. On pages 227-53 *seven external reasons*, and on pages 253-65 *nine internal reasons*, are given why the text does not come from Paul, and on pages 265-67 objections to a gloss are answered. All in all, in my opinion, the text-critical evidence speaks strongly for this being a gloss, probably written by a reader before AD 197."

95. As virtually all Greek editions show, the earliest manuscripts of Ephesians 5:22 have no verb submit. Jerome's commentary states that in Greek manuscripts, verse 22 never repeats the verb submit from verse 21. The UBS text states that it is "almost certain" that submit was added later. The first manuscript with any form of "submit" somewhere in verse 22, Codex Sinaiticus, was written about AD 360. But after it, every surviving manuscript includes "submit." Since no later manuscript removed submit, it is not plausible that submit was removed from all the earliest manuscripts. Paul actually wrote, "submitting one to another out of reverence for Christ, wives to your own husbands …" Consequently, the wife's submission depends for its verb on "submitting to one another." The reciprocal pronoun requires reciprocating submission. It cannot, therefore, refer to submission to superior rank. Rather, submit here refers to "submission in the sense of voluntary yielding in love," BDAG 1042. Colossians 3:18 specifies that a wife should submit "in all ways that are appropriate in the Lord." The reason the Bible gives for a wife's submission is not a divinely-instituted gender hierarchy, but "in order that God's Word not be blasphemed" [Titus 2:5], to act in ways that do not offend cultural norms. Cf. "so that, even if some of their husbands do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct … Husbands in the same way [submit yourselves to your own wives], dwelling together wisely, recognizing her as a weaker feminine [BDAG 208, gynaikeios, "feminine."] precious vessel, and assign them the honor they deserve as coheirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that your prayers won't be hindered" [1 Peter 3:1, 7].

96. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, First Corinthians, AB (New Haven: Yale, 2008), 530

97. Kim Haines-Eitzen, The Gendered Palimpsest: Women, Writing, and Representation in Early Christianity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 62

98. Gordon D. Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 699-708

6.2.8 Final Assessment

I quote another author who has worked on this topic very intensively, from his book *Men and Women in Christ*:

"Some readers may feel that deleting verses 34-35 is simply too convenient. That is understandable. *We are rightly taught to be extremely skeptical of proposals to remove difficult texts from the Bible.*

It is important to stress that we are not dealing here with arguments for inauthenticity that rest on internal evidence alone. If the problem with these verses were limited to the fact that they do not agree with their context, that they contain an obvious error regarding the content of the Old Testament, and that no interpretive solution has been found that gives them a satisfactory sense, we would leave them in the text, acknowledge our limits, and hope for new light in the future.

Here the external indications must also be explained. How is it that these words are found in different places in different manuscripts? Something went wrong, but what? As we have seen, the most likely solution for this feature of the external evidence is that verses 34-35 do not come from Paul but from an early marginal comment that was taken into the main text.

This is further confirmed by Bishop Victor's notes in Codex Fuldensis, which point to the existence of a text in which these two verses are missing entirely. And if Payne's view of the evidence from Codex Vaticanus is correct, that is a further confirmation.

When we add up the external and internal evidence, the case for rejecting these two verses is clear. Deleting them is not an ideological maneuver; it is a matter of following the evidence. In principle this is no different from the rejection of other additions (such as the ending of Mark, John 5:3-4, and Acts 24:6-7), which appeared in the text, were included in our Bibles for a time, and were then removed when examination of the available evidence led to the conclusion that they were probably not authentic after all.

At the very least our Bibles should contain a footnote, something along the lines of: Manuscript evidence suggests that verses 34 and 35 may be a later addition that does not come from Paul, and should therefore be omitted. It would be better to set verses 34-35 in italics or to place them in a footnote, together with an explanation that the nature of the discrepancies in the manuscripts suggests that their authenticity is doubtful. *'The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul' (Psalm 19:7).* I do not propose this here as a criterion of authenticity. But if some readers have felt guilty that their souls have not received much refreshment from 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, they can perhaps now come to terms with the fact that these verses may not belong in the Bible after all."

Let me close this chapter as follows: I already knew this view when I wrote this book, but I did not dare to call this text into question. Now, however, the facts are such that it is hardly possible any longer to understand these two verses as God's inspired word.

That makes a glaring difference. Why? Because all attempts at explanation (except the quotation thesis) founder on the fact that it is an absolute command of silence. In all interpretations the attempts at explanation collide with the clarity of this demand. But this demand does not come from Paul; it corresponds to worldly thinking. How tragic! After all, those who stand up for women are accused of feminism and of conforming to the world.

Can it be that the enemy, the adversary and the one who throws everything into confusion, has succeeded in smuggling something into the Bible that has had fatal consequences for the women of the church and for the church as a whole throughout all the centuries?

How can we get out of such a tragic situation? How serious is this false assumption, to this day? Here it is necessary to take a clear position once and for all and to face the facts.

To conclude this chapter, read the Corinthian text without verses 34 and 35 and see how coherent and meaningful it stands that way:

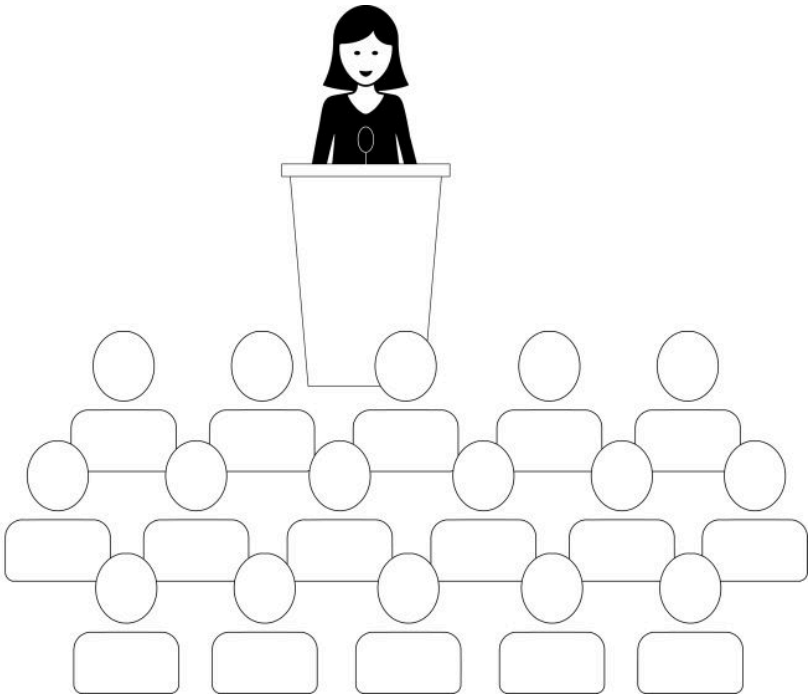
"For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the assemblies of the saints. If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant. Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done decently and in order." [1 Corinthians 14:31-40, translated from the German Elberfelder Bible]

There was and is no command of silence for women in the assemblies of Jesus' church! You can arrive at this without any knowledge of Greek and without the quotation thesis. *Can it really be that the apostle who had many women as coworkers, whom he names, on whom he relied, who contended at his side in the gospel, forbade these very women to open their mouths?*

In conclusion I ask: Who has the greatest interest in the sisters being silent? In half of the body of Christ falling silent? In the women not complementing the men in the gathering? *It is the old serpent, the adversary and destroyer, the father of lies and a murderer from the beginning.* Only his enmity toward the woman can be the reason for such blindness, for which the men in leadership and teaching will have to bear the responsibility.

The church which silences women will be found to silence the Holy Spirit. Katharine C. Bushnell

I see in God's Word that Jesus, conceived by a woman without the involvement of a man, did not silence women but, on the contrary, called on them to speak. That he approved of a woman sitting at the rabbi's feet and learning, as Paul sat at Gamaliel's feet. And that he let a woman perform an important priestly service on him and received from her his anointing for his burial. Women were the last at the cross and the first at the tomb. 5 of the 7 "words from the cross" are attested and handed down only by women (Roman soldiers excepted), and the most important milestones of salvation history were attested by women alone. Jesus deliberately met the women after his resurrection and gave them the commission to tell his brothers that he had risen. What more could he have done to make it clear once and for all that the complete equality of woman in God's redeemed church is his original and unchangeable intention?	
Christian Beese	



6.3 May Women Teach?

If you read the book of Acts, after 18 chapters you come to this passage: "He (Apollos) began to speak boldly in the synagogue. But when (the married couple) Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately" (18:26). The way of God – that is salvation history and its center, the Messiah. "Explain" can be understood as "teach" or "instruct."

Paul calls on *everyone present* at a Christian gathering: "What then, brothers? When you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a *teaching*, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation; let all things be done for building up." (1 Corinthians 14:26). This applies to brothers and sisters (in Greek there was no word for sisters in this sense).

People (brothers and sisters) are to instruct others, so that they in turn can instruct others too (2 Timothy 2:2). In this sense older women are to be "teachers of what is good" (Titus 2:3). The place and setting of this instruction are neither prescribed nor restricted.

Jesus wants his disciples, men and women, to teach: "Go now and make disciples of all nations, and baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to keep everything I have commanded you!" (Matthew 28:19-20)

Today there are women teachers at every school, Christian schools included. At every university, in every field, theology included, there are women professors. Countless books by women, with teaching content both secular and Christian, are read by men. Last but not least: a woman was Germany's chancellor for 16 years. Today many women hold all kinds of leadership positions. Still too few, for many. But that is another topic.

From today's point of view the reason for this is banal: women are just as intellectually capable as men. Or they surpass them. That is no surprise. They can teach and instruct just as well, and not seldom better than men.

A hundred years ago things were different. Women were just as gifted and intelligent back then. But in a male-dominated world they were excluded from university learning, and even more so from teaching. One could turn to this historical topic; I am looking at the church, at the evangelical and conservative church world.

At the beginning of this chapter, too, I start with a question: After reading the Bible, especially the New Testament, would you come to the conclusion that women may not teach?

Probably not. However, you would have to leave out one short passage, namely 1 Timothy 2:11-15. Precisely this one text, *and not a single other*, contains such an instruction – one you cannot pass over if Holy Scripture is the norm of our faith and life. I asked the same question when we dealt with the silence of women in the worship service. In 1 Corinthians 14 I found that this short

paragraph, as the only reference, cannot possibly silence half of the body of Christ when it gathers.

So it is also strange that many men, church leaders, and elders forbid women to teach. This applies to the worship service, but also outside the meetings. And if they may teach at all, then only women or children. The range of applications is wide; here I have mentioned one form, the one I grew up with.

I will shed light on the only Bible text for a prohibition on teaching. First, a note: this text is complex in its original language and by no means unambiguous. That is the finding of many exegetes and experts in the original languages. Can it have such far-reaching consequences and restrictions for Christian women, and thus for the body of Christ?

6.3.1 The Text 1 Timothy 2:8-15

> I desire, then, that the men in every place pray, lifting up holy hands, without anger and doubtful reasoning.
>
> Likewise also that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel with decency and propriety, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly clothing, but – as befits women who profess godliness – with good works. *Let a woman learn in quietness in all submission. But I do not permit a woman to teach, nor to rule over the man, but to be quiet, for Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and fell into transgression. But she will be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and love and holiness with propriety.* [1 Timothy 2:8-15, translated from the German Elberfelder Bible]

Before I go through the text, some general and historical notes will be helpful.

6.3.2 The Historical Situation in Ephesus

The first letter to Timothy is addressed personally to Paul's closest coworker. At this time Timothy is in Ephesus and serves the house churches there. Why Paul did not write directly to the church, as in the letter to the Ephesians we know,

we do not know. That letter was not only written earlier, it is also completely different. Paul turns to Timothy with many instructions and warnings. He writes of fables, endless genealogies, teachers of the law, people without conscience, deceitful spirits, teachings of demons, ascetics, widowed women, opponents of the sound words of the Lord Jesus Christ, and much more. This letter deals with concrete problems that were a serious danger to the church in Ephesus. Added to this was the issue in the text above: men had to be kept from quarreling and motivated to pray, and women had to be called to restraint.

Ephesus was a melting pot of various religions, of cults, sorcery, and magic. Luke reports on this in Acts 19. Central, and known and revered far beyond the city's borders, was Artemis of Ephesus, the (Greek) goddess, daughter of Zeus and firstborn twin sister of Apollo. This goddess was served with great enthusiasm and expense. A temple was built for her that, as the largest building of its time, was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Sacrifices were made to her. Festivals and processions were held in her honor. The Ephesian Artemis, so people believed, had the power to create new life. And to take it. She could help in childbirth and ease the pain. She was the protector of virgins, both male and female.[99] The Romans also called her Diana.

In this metropolis of the ancient world, the cult of Artemis was present in almost every area of private and public life. Its influence reached a degree we can hardly imagine today.

Nevertheless Paul was able to work there for three years and evangelize the whole Roman province of Asia. A large number of house churches had come into being. But in this environment they were also confronted with this cult and others. *Those who had come to faith could not shake off their past at the push of a button.* Possibly the fables and myths Paul addresses also concerned the Artemis cult and its world of thought and teachings, even if he does not name it explicitly. Syncretism – combining and mixing Christian faith with idol cults and their practices and teachings – was not uncommon, and its forms were sometimes more, sometimes less evident. So the goddess Artemis was also associated with

99. See: Paulus an die Epheser, Nacherzählt, Erklärt, für heute (The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians: Paraphrased, explained, for today), Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf

Eve. Irenaeus connected the false teachings in Ephesus with Gnosticism, or at least with its forerunners. Tertullian understood the myths and endless genealogies in this direction. Besides Jewish references, these may also have to do with Gnosticism and its countless aeons and their sequences or origins. Early "Christian" Gnosticism blended the Torah and aspects of Judaism with various Greek and Roman cults, which in turn were fed by the religions of the Near East. *Irenaeus writes that the Gnostics interpreted and retold the creation story and also the Fall in their own way. Eve was the female, spiritual power that breathed life into Adam's soul. In other versions of creation, Eve had preference and precedence over Adam. The Artemis cult in Ephesus was dominated by women.* Eve had special status because she sought knowledge, through which one is saved (gnosis). Paul ends his letter with a warning against "what is falsely called knowledge" (gnosis), which some had professed and so had wandered from the faith (6:20-21).

Historical research on Ephesus continues. It is, as I have found out myself, a complex topic. But regardless of whether you accept this reconstruction or not, it is difficult to argue that the Artemis background makes no difference to the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:8-15. Yet that is what many proponents of hierarchy who advocate a general prohibition on women teaching would have us believe. *One way or another, this background must be taken into account in order to understand this passage.*

6.3.3 The Setting

Bible translations have headings such as *"Proper Conduct in the Worship Service."* Would a prohibition on teaching then apply only in the worship service, but not on other occasions? Yet Paul seems precisely not to be referring to the worship service. Rather, he seems to be addressing men and women in general, wherever they are and meet. The situation of married couples at home also seems to be in view. "There is nothing in 1 Timothy 2:1-8 that would narrow the context to a 'public worship service' without considering that worship services took place in the domestic sphere, not in a public place. So it is not clear that the rest of

ic setting. And the content of the rest of the passage hardly fits the context of a 'public worship service' either, especially the reference to the birth of a child."[100]

"Paul could be speaking of a woman teaching a group of men, or of women teaching groups of men, but it is not normal to speak of a woman teaching 'a man' in an assembly. Rather, the use of the singular signals a private interaction between a woman and a man. In Greco-Roman culture, private interactions between a woman and a man would most likely take place between family members, and there is much in the passage that points to a domestic context."

In addition: this is not a letter to a church but a personal letter. It rests on knowledge that we cannot reconstruct 100%. This fact should at least be considered.

Basically, one can certainly conclude from this that these are not instructions for the gathering of the church, even though the ethical lessons certainly apply to all occasions.

6.3.4 Praying in Every Place, Anger, and Adornment

> *I desire, then, that the men in every place pray, lifting up holy hands, without anger and doubtful reasoning.*
>
> *Likewise also that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel with decency and propriety, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly clothing, but – as befits women who profess godliness – with good works.*

The text before it, verses 1-7, is the background against which these words appear in the right light: Paul declares praying for all people to be one of the most important elements of Christian life. For Christians this is the important, indirect, and richly blessed way of influencing the world. *It supports and promotes God's greatest dream: all people are to be saved.*

100. Cynthia Westfall, Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ, 2015, 291

So this text puts the focus on prayer, which is part of God's mission to save the world. Paul is on fire for this, and he wants to (re)kindle this fire among the Ephesians – by their praying! The men are to leave anger and doubts behind. Not let themselves be kept from praying. Here Paul addresses men (*and women*) and emphasizes for both a conduct that advances the gospel and does not hinder it. Men and women are to give up their old, stereotypical way of life. The men, full of testosterone, want to compete and argue and be right. The women want to adorn themselves and place great value on outward appearance. But that is no longer to determine their lives.

When praying in public is spoken of here, the question is whether Paul wants

1. the men to pray in a certain way (v. 8) and 2. the women "likewise" (v. 9) to dress in a certain way,

or whether he wants

1. the men to pray in a certain way and 2. "likewise" the women to pray, namely in a certain way related to their clothing.

According to experts, both interpretations and translations are grammatically possible. *So is Paul's encouragement to prayer (2:1) meant only for men? No. Their prayers are not heard more readily, nor do they have more faith than women. Paul simply wants the whole church to pray.* Men and women are to pray wherever the opportunity arises, in every place, so that God's eternal dream comes true. The men without anger, and the women with decency and propriety.

The "Likewise also the women" is like an equals sign and refers to praying. So public prayer before or in the presence of men is permitted – more accurately, it is commanded.

The women's outward appearance has to do with the special situation in Ephesus. In the setting of the Artemis cult, women – especially the rich ones who could afford it – adorned themselves lavishly and conspicuously. That was no longer to be so in the house of God. Here one stands out through good works. It was important to distance oneself consistently from this idol cult, in

every respect. Of course a woman may adorn herself, but nothing should reflect this idol cult.

Transferring the ban on jewelry and hairstyles strictly and literally to our time is probably not practiced even by those who assume a prohibition on women teaching. Nor will all the men who pray aloud raise their hands. Expectantly and receptively raising open hands is a recognizable posture for intercession, looking expectantly to God. But you cannot make a rule out of this either. Folding one's hands, a common prayer posture among us, is not wrong and is also perceived as praying here.

6.3.5 Learning in Quietness and Submission

Let a woman learn in quietness in all submission.

This is the only sentence in the entire passage in the imperative. Few women had an education. *That Paul here honors virtually all women as learners is nothing short of revolutionary.* Education was not accessible to most women, neither wanted nor supported. It was a matter for men. Against this background, Paul's word takes on a different tone. More than that: it could be the key to understanding the prohibition on teaching correctly.

It cannot be ruled out that Paul means only one particular woman here, one who was causing problems in the church in Ephesus, since "woman" is in the singular. Sometimes Paul names the people who cause problems. Sometimes he does not name them. If it is about a specific woman, *then today such an instruction can only be applied to women who behave like the woman in question.*

Submission is usually justified with the creation order. As I will show below, that is not what this is about. *This is about an attitude of submission as the opposite of rebellion. You can only learn if you are receptive – if you take in the truth of the gospel, willing to learn, and lay aside old ways of thinking and fable-teachings.* That happens only in quietness. It is not about silence, but about an attitude of learning in which questions are allowed and helpful. But precisely not as an attempt at resistance, refutation, or opposition. That was a concrete problem in Ephesus – *not a general*

women's problem, as if all women across the board were made that way and needed to follow this instruction of Paul. To put it clearly: in this context it is about submission to the teaching of the apostles and of the gospel, not about submission to a man.

6.3.6 Not to Teach and Rule over the Man

But I do not permit a woman to teach, nor to rule over the man, but to be quiet.

This verse is a flashpoint at which Christians split into two camps. One sees here a general prohibition on women teaching; the other assumes a special, problematic situation in Ephesus. Do we simply take the word as it stands in German or another modern language, and keep it?

As Paul's closest coworker, Timothy would have known of any general prohibition on women teaching. That he was reminded of it here, after many years of working together, would be strange. This speaks rather for a special situation in Ephesus.

The following words about Eve and Adam are regarded as the reason for a prohibition on teaching. The reason is then a creation hierarchy. If a woman teaches a man, that would mean ruling over him. No matter how humbly a woman taught, perhaps even with a head covering, it would be forbidden, because it would be ruling. Is that really what is meant?

6.3.7 Is Teaching the Same as Ruling?

My basic question has always been: Why is *teaching* connected with *ruling* or authority? Do you know of any place in the New Testament with this connection? Do you know of an incident where teaching is at the same time called ruling? As a harmful act? Or even as a positive combination? Isn't teaching a service for others, in which you place yourself beneath the learners and hearers?

Teaching and doctrine are a theme of the letter: "teaching" and "to teach" occur 15 times, twice as often as in any other letter. Teaching does not seem to be

simply preaching; it has a strong, more binding character. Teaching sound doctrine is defense and protection, healing and building up of the church. But is that ruling? Or exercising authority?

"In 1 Timothy 4:11 – in the same letter, then – Paul uses the phrase 'Command and teach these things.' For 'command' the Greek has the word *parangello*, which also occurs in 1 Timothy 5:7 and 6:17. It means 'to order, to call upon, to command.' In 1 Timothy 4:11 it is used in connection with 'teach.' This connection also exists in 1 Timothy 2:12, but with a different word for 'rule.' So the meaning is not necessarily identical with 1 Timothy 4:11."[101]

The term "teaching authority"[102] exists in the church world. The question is who has the authority to make a doctrinal statement that is binding on others and cannot be contradicted. In matters of faith there is no arbitrariness. But can Paul have meant that here? *The correctness of a teaching surely never depends on the sex of the one teaching*. Does a man have teaching authority just because he is a man? Teaching is about the content, about the truth, not about a question of gender.

Apollos was mighty in the Scriptures (Acts 18:24) because he obviously had a pronounced gift of teaching.

To teach with binding force does not mean to rule. For that we would find a different word.

6.3.8 What Does "Rule" Mean?

The word for "rule" is not the usual word for "exercise authority": *it occurs only a single time, in this place*. That is why I am all the more cautious about accepting

101. Wunderli, 37

102. The church's teaching office *(magisterium ecclesiae)* denotes, in the churches, the teaching authority exercised by certain office holders and church bodies. The church's teaching office developed in church history in connection with the office of bishop, above all with the emergence of the monarchical episcopate. The result of this development was the primacy of the pope in Western Christendom, which took shape first in the sense of a *ius appellationis* and later came to a head in the dogma of infallibility of the First Vatican Council. Scripture and tradition are regarded as the basis of church teaching. In contrast, Martin Luther stated in 1523 "that a Christian assembly or congregation has the right and power to judge all teaching and to call, appoint, and dismiss teachers." The standard, he said, is the Bible alone. In the course of consolidating the Reformation, the judging of doctrine was raised to the level of the regional churches (Landeskirchen), and the confessional writings were added alongside the Bible as secondary norms. (Wikipedia)

this verse as the only basis for a prohibition on women teaching.

"The word for 'rule' ('authentein') is used only in this place in the New Testament.[103] The related noun 'ruler' originally meant 'murderer'[104], more precisely 'self-murderer' or 'family murderer'[105]. Later, in colloquial language, it took on the meaning 'lord,' 'master,' 'autocrat'[106]."[107]

The kind of *ruling* mentioned here is nothing positive or desirable. If, however, one views it positively, then men are to rule through teaching, but women are not. That would be the conclusion of this dogma, in which the man is in authority over the woman. When the man teaches, he rules over the woman and over all who listen and learn.

The ministry of the leaders, guides, or elders in the church, which includes teaching, is never described as "ruling."

Marilyn Smith and Ingrid Kern judge similarly: "Another point in this passage of the letter to Timothy is the use of the word *authentein*, which has been translated 'to exercise authority.' There is no agreement about the meaning of *authentein*, but one thing is certain: if Paul had intended to forbid women any exercise of authority in the conventional meaning of that word, he would most likely have used the usual word for it, *exousia*. Instead, Paul uses a completely different word, one that occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, to indicate that he means a completely different kind of authority here. The historian Josephus

103. As a hapax legomenon, the word is not even discussed in Kittel's Theological Dictionary. It is found, however, in many great classical authors writing in Greek; cf. N. J. Hommes. "Let Women be Silent in Church." Calvin Theological Journal 4 (1969) 5-22, here p. 18 and the literature cited there; a good summary of Hommes' article in New Testament Abstracts 13 (1969) 365.
104. C. D. Osburn. "Authenteo (1Timothy 2: 12)." Restoration Quarterly 25 (1982) 1-12.
105. N. J. Hommes. "Let Women be Silent in Church." op. cit., p. 18.
106. Ibid. Walter Lock. A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Pastoral Epistles (I & II Timothy and Titus). International Critical Commentary. T. & T. Clark: Edinburgh, 1936. P. 32 gives as the meaning of 'authentein' in vernacular Greek 'despotes' (= 'despot'), and as English translations: "a self-actor," "to lord it over," and others. Sir Robert Falconer. "1 Timothy 2 14,15: Interpretative Notes." Journal of Biblical Literature 60 (1941) 375-379, here p. 375, translates similarly: "a master, an autocrat." Joseph H. Thayer. Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament. Baker Book House: Grand Rapids (MI), 1977. P. 84 (no. 830) gives as the meaning of 'authenteo': "one who with his own hand kills either others or himself," "one who does a thing himself, the author," "one who acts on his own authority, autocratic," synonymous with 'autokrator,' "an absolute master."
107. Schirrmacher, 122

uses *authentein* to describe Antipater, the son of Herod, who was accused of murdering his two brothers and of attempting to murder his father (…) Accordingly, *authentein* means something like 'to rule' or 'to exercise absolute power' over persons with the intention of destroying them."[108]

In this context it is not about two separate things. Here they belong together; they condition each other and add up in a negative way: *teaching and ruling*. In view of the historical and religious situation in Ephesus, it is about teaching in a domineering manner. In a negative, dominant, even overbearing way, as happened with women from the Artemis milieu. Strictly speaking, it may even be about a situation like the one in the Artemis cult, which revolved around fertility and the giving of life. A domination of men in the sexual realm. Strange as that may sound, that was the environment into which Paul writes 1 Timothy. Then this sentence would read: I do not permit a woman to teach (falsely) and to dominate the man sexually.

So it is not about a prohibition on teaching publicly in front of men. Nor about a prohibition on a wife instructing her husband on occasion. Women back then lagged behind in education because they were virtually excluded from studying and learning. But if a woman had long been a disciple of Jesus, she would certainly teach her husband who came to faith later than she did.

In Ephesus it was perhaps about women who taught in a self-exalting and domineering way, following a Gnostic model. They claimed authority for themselves, seized it, as it were, in order to teach. Worse still, they taught false doctrines. Neither these women nor their teachings could be tolerated. In the house of God there is no place for such behavior and false teachings. *Just as little if men did it.* But in Ephesus a very particular woman, or a group of women, was the problem. *There is no reason to put all Christian women on this level!* The reference to the woman Jezebel (Revelation 2:20), who taught in Thyatira, fits this pattern: the problem there was not that she taught as a woman, but that she taught what was false.

108. In Wunderli: Smith/Kern 2005, 98; Bauer 1988, 1240

In this context, ruling cannot be explained as spiritual "leadership" or "authority." That is, as the leadership or shepherding function in a church. Jesus and Paul would not have understood that as ruling. The Christian way of *ruling* is to serve. And not to be the first, but the last (Mark 10:42-45). An attitude that becomes possible when you go ahead of others as a leader. Peter points out to the shepherds that ruling has nothing in common with shepherding:

"*Shepherd the flock of God* that is among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, and *not as those who rule over their possessions*, but being examples to the flock." 1 Peter 5:2-3

To be quiet does not mean to keep your mouth shut because you have to be silent. It means a certain behavior, namely: "to remain in peace," "to remain at rest," or "to keep order."[109] In the process of learning and listening to one another, this behavior is the standard for the women concerned – *but it would be just the same for the men if they caused the same problems.*

To sit quietly and attentively at Jesus' feet like Mary is the ideal posture for learning, for listening to the Teacher of all teachers.

6.3.9 Adam and Eve in Ephesus

> *... for Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and fell into transgression.*

With these words Paul seems to give the reason why a woman may not teach publicly. For "teaching" is not submitting, but ruling. That is how I often heard it. And always understood it that way myself. Though, to be honest, with a few doubts in the back of my mind. Can it be that a chronological order with a difference of a few hours (if you believe in 24-hour creation days) carries such weight? Adam and Eve are like twins, formed shortly one after the other. Should this short time establish such a prohibition on teaching for all women? And is it God's punishment that women may not teach because Eve was

109. Cf. ExWNT, vol. II, p. 311

deceived? No woman, ever since Eden, may teach because of it? Even if she is gifted for it?

Now at least the Jewish Christians had the Septuagint and/or the Torah. That was the Bible of the Christians before the New Testament canon existed. Paul is now repeating something everyone could read for themselves. *Why does Paul mention something so well known and clear? That Adam was created first and Eve was tempted.*

In addition, if you understand this text as just described, Paul would somehow be contradicting himself. In Romans 5, from verse 12 on, he describes Adam, who brought sin into the world and so, *as the first*, became the head of his family – the world community of all people, who are born in sin. Adam is responsible. God's answer and rescue is a new head who "adopts" us into his community: Jesus Christ.

Here in 1 Timothy one could think that Paul makes Eve the responsible head. There must be a special reason why he presents it this way here. And as already noted above, proto-Gnostic versions of creation were in circulation that claimed the opposite: Eve had been created first and Adam tempted first. In the Artemis milieu, women were more important than men in this influential cult. That could have been the justification for one woman or some women to teach in a dominant way, and to rebel against and contradict the teaching of Christ.

The reference to Adam and Eve is perhaps also a positive pointer. Not to Eve's weakness or Adam's superiority, but to the necessity of education, study, and submission to God. Eve was deceived perhaps because she had not been sufficiently instructed. Adam, on the other hand, sinned deliberately by disobeying God's direct command. "Let us not leave even more unexploded bombs and mines lying around for people to be confused by. Let us read this text as I believe it was meant, as a way of building up God's church, men and women alike. Just as Paul was concerned to apply this in a particular situation, so we must think and pray carefully about where our own culture, our own prejudices, and our outrage are leading us. We must do our best not to conform to any of the various stereotypes the world offers, but to the healing, liberating,

humane message of the gospel of Jesus."[110]

6.3.10 I Am Not Now Permitting

"I am not now permitting" isn't a permanent or universal prohibition on women leading and teaching (v. 12). Philip Payne and others have argued that "I do not permit a woman to teach" isn't the best translation of the Greek text. "I am not *now* permitting" is a better translation. "I am not now permitting" suggests a present and specific instruction for a particular and time-bound problem at Ephesus (not a permanent or universal prohibition on women teaching). Various scholars have shown that Paul's use of the present active indicative epitrepō with the negative ouk ("I am not permitting …") strongly suggests a specific instruction about a particular situation. In the vast majority of cases where epitrepō is used in the New Testament, and every time in the Greek Old Testament, the reference is to "a specific time or for a short or limited duration only."[111] So once the particular woman or group of women had understood, received, and learned the teaching, this prohibition on teaching would logically be lifted.

It cannot be repeated often enough: this is not a universal prohibition on women teaching based on a creation order of the first two human beings. That is not Paul's doctrinal statement. It is not an instruction to all churches of the world at all times, but is addressed to a special situation in Ephesus. It is not a prohibition on women teaching, but a command about attitude. These women are not to teach in a domineering way, but to learn humbly.

6.3.11 Salvation through Childbearing?

> *But she will be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and love and holiness with propriety.*

110. Wright, N. T., p. 27, Paul for Everyone: The Pastoral Letters, London, 2003
111. Hill, Graham Joseph, pp. 63-64, Holding Up Half the Sky: A Biblical Case for Women Leading and Teaching in the Church

These are strange connections if you do not know the historical background. What do teaching and learning have to do with giving birth? More than once I have been told that many Christians read the Bible but simply cannot know this ancient background. Hasn't God made provision so that this text can be understood without all the background knowledge?

We have been given an enlightened mind. The Holy Spirit is our teacher. Today we can have many research results on our screen within seconds. We have countless studies on these texts. Studies in the original languages on every conceivable possibility. Altogether, almost too many again to keep track of. Everyone who teaches must pursue such questions.

In any case, every Bible reader should engage with the background of the text. With the means and opportunities they find. At school we learn and practice how to handle texts and the questions we ask of them. So I can only speak for our time when we read the Bible. And I release no one from the duty to think a little more about the text, beyond a literal understanding. And to ask God earnestly to give clarity and the strength to obey. It should not depend on us – on my superficiality, my fear of new discoveries, my convenience, or too little reflection on the text.

In Ephesus, pregnant women entrusted themselves to the goddess Artemis when giving birth. She was powerful to make the birth succeed. But that was so wrong, just like the fable that Eve was created first and Adam was seduced first. The only rescue in childbirth, which is often life-threatening and painful, is one that God can give. He alone is our Savior and Helper. So Paul wants to say: shake off all these fables and myths and frightening expectations at last, throw them overboard, and entrust yourselves in everything to the one Savior God.

For this difficult verse I quote another possible explanation: "Another apparent problem arises with 'salvation through childbearing.' Did Paul teach that women are saved if they bear children?! This teaching is impossible to imagine! It would contradict his entire teaching, and so this simply cannot be what is meant here. It is much more likely that Paul is referring here to Genesis 3:15, namely that the offspring of the woman brings salvation. Since the women false teachers

whom Paul is admonishing here thought that salvation came directly through women, Paul makes clear that salvation does indeed come through women – but in reality through the offspring born of a woman, Christ (while the Gnostics considered the bodily – and thus also childbearing – primitive and outdated)."[112]

6.3.12 1 Timothy Today

"The question for us believers today is not how we can squeeze 21st-century men and women into the Greco-Roman ideals of masculinity and femininity. *The question for us is how we can be people of prayer in an attitude of holiness.* How are we to demonstrate this as people of today? I suggest that avoiding anger and discord is universal, so perhaps we should start there. Another question is how we, as people who 'profess godliness,' demonstrate this in good works. What kind of good works would that be in our present context?

And note the 'they' at the end of chapter 2 in verse 15. *The 'they' refers to the men and women to whom this passage is addressed.* The whole of chapter 2 forms a contrast to the blasphemous behavior of Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Timothy 1:20). So how can we progress in our salvation, through the great mercy and grace of Jesus Christ, in faith, in love, and in holiness with self-control? What does that look like?

To repeat it once more, I would say that in my opinion Paul does not conclude that women are so different from men that they are generally excluded from certain roles in the church or in the household. In fact, the opposite is the case. Men and women are equal before the Lord. He does not mean to say that women cannot be placed in certain roles because of their sex. In antiquity, women were regularly heads of the house or household. *Adam and Eve do not form the basis of the command in verse 12; they serve as examples of what not to do.* In 2 Corinthians 11:3 Paul uses the serpent's deception of Eve as an illustration *for the whole church*. Here in 1 Timothy it is applied to women alone.

112. Michael Trenkel, 2017 (see bibliography)

Personally, I do not expect my husband to behave as if he were the head of a Greco-Roman household. It would be strange if he behaved that way. We are 21st-century people living 21st-century lives. If I expected him to exercise authority as if he were a first-century husband, I would lead unbelievers to take a critical view of the Christian faith. As 1 Timothy 5:14 warns, we are to give the adversary no occasion for slander."[113]

6.3.13 Conclusions

A look at the historical situation in Ephesus makes some things clearer. Even then, questions remain open. Yet the intention of the text has become recognizable. What has emerged is this: *It is not a general prohibition on teaching or preaching, nor a prohibition on leading, but a prohibition on teaching a very particular theology, namely a false one. And a prohibition on teaching in a dominant way that demands obedience, or even in an overbearing way.* Or on claiming teaching authority without any right to it. That has no place in Christian life and none in the assembly of God. That was a specific problem in Ephesus. Generally speaking, this certainly applies to men too. This time, in this matter, they were not the reason for the correction. *So Paul is not defining the role of women in the universal church, but rather correcting abuses in Ephesus.*

How many women among us have received a gift of teaching but cannot exercise it because men block their way?

With this one verse, countless gifted women in Christ have been made unable to teach just as men do. *Men are responsible for this! They must end this wrong.*

6.3.14 An Explanatory Rendering of the Timothy Text

What follows is an explanatory, paraphrasing rendering of the passage. This is how I would render the text if I had to expound it briefly. *This is my text, my words, not the biblical text.*

113. Kidson, Persuading Shipwrecked Men: The Rhetorical Strategies of 1 Timothy 1, 2020, Mohr Siebeck Tübingen

Dear Timothy, in order to get the problems in Ephesus with some men and some women under control, the following should happen: The men should start to pray. Everywhere they meet. In public too. Instead of arguing about myths and false teachings. Anger and quarreling hinder prayer. Praying together leads to a quiet and peaceful life. With raised, open, and receptive hands that are clean of strife and violence, they should worship our Savior God together and intercede for all people at God's throne.

Of course the women should pray too, just like the men. In doing so it is important that the women – I mean above all the rich women – show themselves modest wherever they appear and are seen. Their adornment, which draws attention to them, even with the aim of outdoing other women, should not consist of elaborate and conspicuous hairstyles, or of gold and pearl jewelry and expensive and extravagant clothing. Women who follow the Messiah do not need to put themselves on display like this or to exert influence and dominance in this way. There is an adornment and an influence that is worth more, that is even respected by all people: good works.

The woman should learn what the truth of the gospel is. Willing to learn, attentive, and eager for knowledge. In her own home. Especially one of these women I do not permit to keep spreading all these false myths and teachings. She should not exalt herself over her husband or over men in general and claim teaching authority that is not hers, since she does not know and understand sound doctrine. She should listen when sound doctrine is explained to her. For she needs it, since she lacks knowledge, and this ignorance does great harm when she spreads myths in the households. The creation of Adam and Eve is the fitting example for this situation. Adam was created first, and he was the one who was to instruct Eve. He was not deceived. But Eve was deceived and misled. If the women are not willing to learn, they will be deceived like Eve and become a snare to others. If some women in Ephesus do not learn from their husbands, the same thing will happen.

And these women must know that they will be kept safe in childbearing. Despite the seduction of Eve and the great pains of childbirth. God our Savior

saves, not the man-made protective goddess Artemis of Ephesus. That is why they should concentrate on faith and love and holiness. Together as a married couple, who like Adam and Eve are one flesh. The women should not be afraid to have children, and the men should control themselves sexually and keep in mind that too many pregnancies are a danger to their wives.

6.4 Universal and Time-Bound Commands

Having dealt with this short text, and since questions remain open here too, I would like to point to the principle of validity:

How do we know when commands in Holy Scripture are universal, and when others are limited by context or culturally bound?

Often we can recognize them from the context. Sexual immorality, for example, is always sin. That is clearly universal! But sometimes it is very difficult. The Bible contains different genres – that is, literary genres, text types, or forms such as history, narrative, instructions, exhortations, etc. – and on this basis practice and ethics are derived in different ways. Then there is the question of who specifically is being addressed. A simple example: Israel in the Old Testament received instructions that do not apply today to the church of the New Covenant.

In Paul's letters there are clues that help us recognize this:

Are the instructions repeated? Do we see them in different contexts? Is there clear and common language? Or, put differently: when Paul uses rare and unusual terms or vocabulary, this leads us to assume that the situation is special and more limited. For the particular topic of this book it turns out that the central texts (1 Corinthians 11; 14; 1 Timothy 2) have such special arguments and such peculiar vocabulary that they can hardly prove a universal prohibition of women in teaching and leadership.

Universal commands fit into the overall context of the Bible and create no contradictions.

Biblical interpretation never takes place in a neutral vacuum. We do not lay aside our presuppositions, experiences, formative influences, and values when we approach the Bible. We bring ourselves into understanding and interpreting the text. If we do not keep this in mind, there is a danger of unhealthy biblicism.

6.4.1 Biblicism and Sola Scriptura

At the beginning I mentioned the term "biblicism." As a negative and unhealthy attitude toward the Bible and the Christian life. Biblicism is the attitude that neglects the distinction between universal and time-bound commands. It is an attitude that claims faithfulness to the Bible for itself, setting itself apart from others who in certain places do not take the Bible literally but contextualize it. For such "Bible-faithful" people it does not matter how well the others justify their position. Often the others are accused of intending to adapt the Bible to their own wishes or to the spirit of the age.

Biblicism explains and limits the role of women in the church on the basis of a few Bible texts and overlooks the big picture that the Bible clearly shows, already in the Old Testament. For every tradition and practice, both in shaping the worship service and in shaping Christian life, a Bible verse is demanded as justification. Certainly the Bible is the guideline and norm. But where the instructions are not unambiguously clear, we must follow the overall picture of the Bible and not appeal slavishly to individual verses. Only a certain altitude allows a wider view, *to survey the whole biblical landscape*. In the same way, when you look at a painting, you have to step back a little to see it whole, so as not to get stuck on details. Sometimes we need to find pragmatic solutions, with openness and trust in God.

Biblicism is the way of reading and approaching the Bible that admits it as the exclusive source for formulating the Christian faith and, in particular, Christian practice. In itself that is a good attitude. But when historical backgrounds are neglected, or rejected as uncertain and unimportant, it becomes problematic. *Biblicism overlooks insights from the broad Christian tradition and is unable to assess its own cultural situation and position compared to the time when the New Testament was written.* Biblicism is immune to legitimate questions and arguments. The understanding

of one's own group, movement, association, or "tribe" is, consciously or unconsciously, regarded as the highest or deepest and passed on to each generation. Biblicism is blindness to the fact that one stands in an interpretive tradition oneself, with its own formative influences, its own leading thinkers, and its own group pressures.

The Reformation's "Sola Scriptura," i.e., "Scripture alone," is not biblicism! When the Reformers or their successors articulated the solas, they did not mean naked or bare Scripture, *but the primacy of Scripture alongside tradition, experience, and nature.* When Protestants emphasized the clarity of Scripture, they did not mean that all of Scripture is equally clear, *but that it is clear when it comes to the gospel and salvation.* When they affirmed the full sufficiency of Holy Scripture, they did not mean that it is sufficient for dealing with matters beyond the biblical context, such as open-heart surgery, the treatment of bipolar disorder, or macroeconomics. *The Bible may well have values, principles, and statements that contribute to these things, but they are not sufficient to deal with them in their entirety.*

When Protestants spoke of the authority of Scripture, they meant the authority of the Holy Spirit speaking in Holy Scripture. Of the Spirit who leads believers into the truth and enlightens them, who trains teachers for the church and gives them to it, and who brings its confession of faith and its liturgical heritage to life.

As Christians in the 21st century we stand on the shoulders of our predecessors, just as they stood on theirs. Faithfulness to the Bible and understanding of the Bible never happen "in a vacuum," never on "neutral ground." It is already a good starting point to keep this insight in mind when reading the Bible, studying the Word, forming doctrine, and describing Christian practice.

Rigid biblicism not seldom leads to rigid dogmatism and to legalistic severity and narrowness – precisely where the matter is not clear-cut. That is not consistent with the freedom of the gospel and the grace to which Christians are called.

Allow me to point out here that even Bible-believing Christians do regard words of the Bible as no longer applicable today – for example, when it comes to the charismatic gifts (1 Corinthians 12), which they believe no longer exist today. No Bible text confirms this thesis. These are conclusions, often pure experience-based theology, since they themselves do not experience these gifts. And that although these gifts are present and active in many places worldwide and, for example, many miracles of healing can be documented. This theology is determined by presuppositions and experiences. In other words, they do not take these texts literally.

Holy Scripture settles many questions of the first generation of Christians. Questions of the 21st century can only be settled in the spirit of Scripture. That remains a challenge, in which different answers also arise – a difficulty that will remain.

Rhyne Putman was interviewed about his new book "When Doctrine Divides the People of God"[114] and made this statement: "Sola Scriptura (Scripture alone) does not mean 'nuda Scriptura' (naked Scripture) or 'solo Scriptura' (only Scripture). … I believe we can say suprema Scriptura (the supremacy of Scripture) when we talk about the relationship between Scripture and other sources such as tradition, reason, experience, etc. Scripture has priority over other sources, but these sources are of value for our theological and spiritual formation. Nevertheless, Scripture alone is the inspired and infallible source. Scripture alone is the norming norm over these other sources."

6.4.2 Taking Literally and the Literal Sense

Understanding the Bible, interpreting it, and then applying it in practice is quite complex. The literal sense of the text and taking it literally are not the same thing. The literal sense must be explored in every Bible text. But taking everything literally will lead to controversial and downright comical results.

114. Putman, Rhyne R., When Doctrine Divides the People of God: An Evangelical Approach to Theological Diversity, Crossway, 2020

In determining the literal sense, one first establishes what kind of text (genre) it is. There are many in the Bible: parables, letters, doctrinal texts, poetry, apocalyptic literature, laws, history, sermons, etc. Next, one explores what the text intends to say, according to the genre in which it is said. A parable usually has one central intended message, not several at once. Usually it will also not be an event that actually happened.

The whole Bible is always to be explained or interpreted according to its literal sense. What of it is to be applied literally in our lives, and how, must be examined very well and carefully. Much cannot be applied literally. This applies especially to culturally and time-bound practices.

The sum of your word is truth, and the whole law of your righteousness stands forever.

Psalm 119:160 (Zürcher Bibel, German Bible translation)

7 Women Priests, Women Elders, and Women Deacons

In the garden of paradise, Adam and Eve, in innocence, are *kings* who rule and *priests* who live in God's presence. The garden of paradise in Eden is an image of the Most Holy Place in the cosmic temple. The new and better Eden, that is, the new earth, will be a global Most Holy Place. The whole earth will be a garden of paradise. That is why the New Jerusalem, an image of the new creation, has the shape of a huge cube. This corresponds to the shape of the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle and in the temple. *The new earth will be populated by women and men, by kings and queens, by priests and priestesses. Do you believe there will be a hierarchy then?* Some say no, because it is the new creation. Hierarchy, they say, applies only to the old creation. But in the church the new creation has already begun. It is the firstfruits. It is God's bridgehead in this world. Why should there nevertheless always be a hierarchy in the church?

I now come to a point where all the preceding insights must become concrete and practical. What do we do now with all the information, conclusions, and lessons of the preceding chapters? The truth must now touch the ground of reality, the everyday reality of the churches. From everything that has gone before I draw one quintessence:

There is no hierarchy of the sexes! Not in the church either!

7.1 The Priesthood of All Believers

The Reformation brought this long-buried truth back to light. In church practice, however, it has not been reflected. No one, not even the Catholic

Church[115], doubts the priesthood of all believers. The question is what this truth, affirmed by all, means in practice for church life.

That every believer, woman and man, is a priest should already be reason enough for both sexes to have the same role in the worship service. Far from it. On the one hand, the priesthood of all believers is lived personally. Prayer and fellowship with God are a personal, individual blessing.

The whole model of the priesthood and the sacrificial service connected with it comes from the Old Testament, where the priest led and carried out the official worship. *That is why it is natural, when it comes to the priesthood of all believers, to think also – though not only – of the gathering of believers who together enter the heavenly sanctuary as worshipers.* And offer spiritual sacrifices of praise. Can there, may there, be differences between the sexes here? The word of God does not make these differences *in the New Covenant*. Then we should not make them either.

7.2 Elders and Women Elders

Eldership is about a leadership function. It is about care, oversight, and protection of the church. It is shepherding with teaching tasks. With going ahead and being an example. Can women also serve as overseers or elders?

Ben Witherington gets to the heart of it: "Sometimes you hear the argument that since it is assumed in 1 Timothy that the elders will be men who are faithful to their one and only wives, that this must signal that only men should be elders in churches. This is totally forgetting that Paul is speaking as a missionary into a

115. From the Catechism of the Catholic Church on priestly ordination: "Jesus, the Lord, chose men to form the college of the twelve apostles, and the apostles did the same when they chose co-workers who were to succeed them in their task. The college of bishops, with which the priests are united in the priesthood, makes the college of the Twelve present until Christ's return. The Church knows itself to be bound by this choice, which the Lord himself made. Therefore it is not possible to ordain women." In this sense only men can represent Christ. This position, too, is under pressure today. It seems ambivalent and contradictory that women cannot be priests, while Mary, as Mother of God, is invoked and venerated in Catholic popular piety as virtually equal to God. The Catholic Church is under pressure, because many Catholic women are pressing into the ordained office. Their argument is the priesthood of all believers. Changes are not possible without church divisions/splits, or only through councils. Whether this rests on a spiritual or a worldly motivation is not my topic. My focus is not the Catholic Church, but my conservative evangelical environment, which has to deal with its own problems.

strongly patriarchal cultural setting whether in Ephesus or on Crete, and his principle is to start where the people already are, not where he would like them to be. *This means starting with the existing male leadership structure in the culture until the leaven of the Gospel can fully do its work and change things from the inside out. So quite naturally, it is men that Timothy and Titus are going to appoint first as leaders to these brand new church plants. This does not mean it needs always and forever to be that way,* but the new converts would have to be convinced by loving persuasion that it was o.k. for women to fill such roles. You can see however how Paul is already beginning to push in that direction because in Rom. 16 he mentions a woman leader named Phoebe who is a deacon of the church in Cenchreae, and probably there is a reference to women deacons in the Pastoral Epistles discussions about elders and deacons as well. As I said before, you have to not just evaluate what Paul says, but read it in its cultural context, and ask what sort of changes is Paul trying to make in relationships as he applies the Gospel to the situation?"[116]

I would compare excluding women from this office with this word of Paul: [Ephesians 5:29] "For no one ever hated his own flesh, but he nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church." It is no blessing for the church when we men exclude women from the office of elder. That is more than a loss. As a result, the wrong men often come into a role they are not equal to (whether officially named as elders or as participants in a "brothers' meeting"): *"Gender prejudice, in my view, is responsible not only for our having excluded many gifted women from leadership; beyond that, it has qualified many men who are not particularly gifted as leaders."*[117]

Some women, from good as well as less good motives, will exert influence on leadership questions "through the back door," via their husbands. It would be better if the elders' wives were present at the many meetings and all the background noise were spoken out openly, face to face.

116. Ben Witherington III, Why Arguments against Women in Ministry Aren't Biblical
117. Danny Silk

7.3 She Desires a Noble Task

Jim Reiher has drawn attention to a matter in 1 Timothy 2 and 3: "Many see 3:1 primarily as the logical start to the rest of chapter 3, which contains a long discussion about elders and deacons. However, I would argue it actually belongs as a conclusion to chapter 2, even more than an introduction to chapter 3. This is of significance for women in church because it would mean verse 1 encourages both men and women to aspire to be elders. *If it concludes chapter 2, Paul is seen to be supportive of both genders serving God in leadership roles, so long as they are trained up and mature in the faith. Yes, he has put some restrictions on women in the Ephesian church for the moment, but he does not want that to be seen as his "end game." Rather, he adds more generally that it is a good thing for men and women both to aspire to be elders.*

Paul makes it very clear that he wants women to be trained up correctly (2:11). *That verse, interestingly, holds the only imperative verb used in the paragraph [learn]. That means verse 11 is the closest thing we have in the paragraph to a command by Paul: he insists that women be trained.* It is a high point in his mind and writing. *That is indeed the key to the paragraph: Paul wants all the members of churches to be trained up properly in the faith. Not just men, but men and women both. After being properly trained and matured, then teaching and leadership positions will be options for women and men alike.*

What if 1 Timothy 3:1 was directed toward those women? Then we come to chapter 3 verse 1. What does it say exactly? Well one thing it does not say is that "it is a good thing for only men to seek to be elders." No. It might be a reference to just men. However, it equally could be a reference to just women. *Or, quite probably, it is a reference to both men and women.* The NIV (New International Version) has done the better translation here. The text says, "Here is a trustworthy saying: 'Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task.'" *(So too in all the German translations known to me, where the "whoever" can mean men as well as women.)*

In verse 1 the Greek for "men" or "man" is not used. Nor is the stand-alone word for "he." The Greek word *tis*, however, is used. This same word is used for men and women. Similarly, the word for "he or she desires" is a verb stem

for the word "desires" with the ending "he, she, or it" attached. Context has to decide who this verb is referring to.

If we group 1 Timothy 3:1 as the conclusion of 2:8–15, that verse then becomes a strong supportive comment affirming women's leadership in the church. Because, as noted, the words used can be about men or women, it is possible that 3:1 might simply mean "if any women desire to be an overseer, that is a good thing she desires." *This means Paul could be communicating something like, "despite my insistence that women be trained up and that they can't teach or have authority until they are mature and competent—it is a good thing for a woman to desire to be an elder."*

So rather than the divisions of 1 Timothy 2:8–3:14 which we often see:

Women and men in church (2:8–15). Male elders (3:1–7). Male deacons (3:8–10). Female deacons (or male deacons wives) (3:11). Male deacons again (3:12–14).

We should see the movement of the letter this way:

Women and men in church (*2:8–3:1*). The current situation: addressing the current leadership in a gender stereotyping way (3:2–7). Male deacons (3:8–10). Female deacons (3:11). Male deacons (3:12–14)."

7.4 Women Deacons

There was no feminine form of the word *deacon*. *Deaconess* is a word that appeared only several hundred years later, and it no longer had anything to do with church offices or with ministries in the worship service.

Alongside the eldership, deacons hold an office in the church that is marked by what a deacon is: a servant. That women can also hold this office – or better, can give themselves to this ministry and be recognized, valued, and confirmed as a woman deacon – is shown by Romans 16:1. Phoebe is a deacon. How she became one, we do not know. Perhaps because the church met in her house. In any case, her devotion in serving the church made her a deacon.

In 1 Timothy 3:11 it is possible that the wives of deacons are not being spoken of, but that women deacons are meant:

The women likewise, dignified, not slanderous, sober-minded, faithful in all things.

Even John MacArthur, a declared proponent of hierarchy (a complementarian), endorses female deacons: "In 1 Timothy 3:11 Paul refers to a separate group of deacons. Several factors indicate that Paul is speaking here of a distinct group of women deacons and not of deacons' wives. First, the use of 'likewise' (cf. 2:9; 3:8; Titus 2:3, 6) strongly favors seeing a third group here alongside the elders and deacons. Second, there is no possessive pronoun and no definite article linking these women to deacons. Third, since Paul gave no qualifications for the wives of elders, why would he do so for the wives of deacons? Fourth, Paul did not use a feminine word for 'deacons,' because there was no such word in the Greek language. Phoebe is called a deacon in Romans 16:1 because there is no feminine form of *diakonos*. ... The use of the term 'women' (gunaikeios) was the only way for Paul to distinguish them from the male deacons. Finally, their qualifications correspond to those of the male deacons. *Obviously Paul was introducing another category of deacons.* I prefer to call them female deacons because that preserves the New Testament terminology." [118]

That a third group of offices is being introduced here is doubtful. *The "likewise" puts them on a par with the male deacons!* This shows once again what conclusions one is virtually forced into when man and woman cannot hold this office of deacon with equal rank – because there is supposedly a difference in hierarchy in which the man has authority over the woman.

What the ministry of a deacon consists of is not stated. I would not rule out that a deacon can also have leadership tasks. One more thought on the question of the deacons' ministry with regard to leadership: "The same applies when you compare the qualifications of elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3. Wilfrid Haubeck concludes from the similarity of the lists that elders and deacons led

118. MacArthur, J., Different by design, MacArthur Study Series, Victor Books, Wheaton, IL 1996, 153–154.

the church together, which in turn could mean that Phoebe (Romans 16:1) was part of the church leadership."[119]

In the letter to the Corinthians elders are not mentioned at all, but gifts of leadership are, and these can be given to every member, woman and man (12:28; likewise Romans 12:8: the gift of leading).

In 1 Corinthians 12:23 there is talk of members that have less honor. "On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are necessary; and those that we consider the less honorable parts of the body, these we surround with more abundant honor; and our unpresentable parts have all the more abundant decency." *Could it be that Paul is thinking of women, children, and slaves here?*

7.5 Women Preachers

Today, in evangelical churches, the sermon is usually the main part of a worship service. Everything is organized. Often the topic or the Bible text of the sermon is known in advance. In the first century it was different. More the way Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14.

> [1 Corinthians 14:26] What then, brothers? When you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation; let all things be done for building up.

Everyone brought something and contributed so that all were built up. Less podium, more exchange and fellowship. More waiting for one another, more of God's Spirit. It is remarkable that the sermon (kerygma) – or what we understand by it today and have made of it – is not mentioned in this gathering.

Since I come from a Closed Brethren assembly, my DNA was shaped so that women did not take part and certainly did not preach. At some point I visited a Free Evangelical Church (FEG). A woman preached. At the time that was not acceptable to me, and hard to bear. I listened anyway. Despite my reservations, I

119. Wunderli, 48

had to admit that this sermon was deeper and more alive than many I heard in my assemblies.

Perhaps "prophesying" or "speaking prophetically" – speaking from God – is what we understand by preaching. Since this applies to women according to 1 Corinthians 11:5, this preaching ministry must also be part of their area of service in the church. God wants to have man and woman as his voice in the church. *Without the voice of women, the church lacks what God has in store for it.*

Some time ago the well-known theologian N.T. Wright was asked what he thinks about women preachers. "The common notion that women in antiquity were oppressed and that only recently has feminism lifted them up again is completely wrong," Wright argues. The theologian, who recently published a book titled *The New Testament in Its World*, said that women who had a certain authority in church and society were no abomination in antiquity. "There were many independent women in Paul's world, and that was something Paul worked with."

In John 20, when Jesus is raised from the dead, the first person he meets is Mary Magdalene. "He doesn't say: Mary, I have a really important message – I want you to fetch Peter, because I have to tell him, so that he can then go and tell everyone else," Wright explains. Instead "he says: Mary, go and tell my brothers – the men who are hiding at home because they are afraid – go and tell them that I am going to my Father and your Father ...." The news that the crucified Jesus has been raised from the dead and is now Lord of the world is "the foundation of all Christian ministry," says Wright. When Jesus entrusts this news to Mary instead of one of his male disciples, that is "a revolution almost as great as the resurrection itself."

The other example Wright draws on to answer the question of whether women may preach or not is found in Romans 16. Wright says the letter to the Romans is "probably the most important letter ever written." The fact that Paul entrusted this most important letter to Phoebe, who was a deacon in the church in Cenchreae near Corinth, is very significant when you consider the context of the era and the culture. "In the ancient world, the person who delivers the letter

is the person who will read it aloud." Phoebe was "probably an independent businesswoman" who traveled to Rome on business, Wright explains. In addition, there is a high probability that Phoebe also explained what Paul meant when people had questions about the letter. In fact, it is "very likely that the very first copy of Paul's letter to the Romans was delivered by a Christian businesswoman from the eastern port of Corinth," said Wright. "Paul could easily have chosen a man for this," he explained. Instead, he deliberately chose Phoebe.

7.6 Summary

I close with an awakened conscience: How could I ever have held a patriarchal view of women, in light of the overall biblical evidence? And in light of what God has accomplished through women in the last two centuries of world mission? Women who gave everything, who preached, taught, led, and evangelized? What a disregard for the nature of God, to keep women from any ministry.

There is reliable information that of the currently well over 100,000 house churches in China, more than 70% are led by women. Anyone who has understood Jesus, who has understood Paul, is not surprised by this. I will never again accept, or tolerate within my area of responsibility, the contempt for women found in Greek philosophy, nor any Judaistic discrimination against women, and certainly not any church discrimination against women.

It is not the "equal-treaters" of men and women who think and act in a worldly way. It is those who command women to be silent, not to teach and lead, and not to do any public ministry at all. According to the biblical evidence, all offices, ministries, and functions, public and non-public, are open to women and men without distinction. Let us men help women to grow step by step into these ministries. Just as others have helped us!

8 "One in Christ": Galatians 3:28

No word of the Bible is quoted and celebrated as often when it comes to gender roles. *It is said to be "hailed as the Magna Carta of Christian (evangelical) feminism."*[120] Here is the whole passage. Like every passage, it has to be explained in its setting, that is, in its context:

> [Galatians 3:23-29, translated from the German Elberfelder Bible] But before faith came, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian; for you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring and heirs according to the promise.

What was the background and the problem in Galatia? In short, this: The Galatians had joyfully accepted the gospel that Paul preached to them. They had been baptized into Christ and had powerfully experienced God's presence in the Holy Spirit. Then Jewish teachers came, *Judaizers* – as Paul himself had once been one – and tried to introduce additions to the gospel: the Gentiles who believed in Christ should all be circumcised. So that they would become Jews who believed in Christ. So that in this way they would become sons of Abraham (who, after all, was also circumcised and received this from God as the sign of the covenant). So that through circumcision they would enter the covenant and become heirs. There is no other letter in which Paul uses such drastic words against these Judaizers and their demands. For they were distorting the gospel, which did not demand works of the law, but faith.

120. Strauch, 122

8.1 What the Text Says

Now the paragraph quoted, not just the one verse 28, is a high point in the refutation of these Judaizers. A true word of God, in which God's heart can be felt, his immeasurable devotion and his unstoppable will to save in Christ. Justification by faith belongs to the core message of the letter. In other words: acquitted, as if we had never sinned!

The law was only a guardian for a limited time, meant to help people seek Christ and receive him. Through faith all became sons of God! All, men and women too. In the culture of that time, women played no public role. They lived in seclusion, were not heirs, and until marriage were under the guardianship of their father or their eldest son. Then they became the property of their husband. *Here Paul raises women to the status of sonship!* It is not about male or female, but about the privileged position, the high privilege of sonship. The model for this position is not derived only from the time-bound cultural and social family conditions. This sonship has the sonship of the Son of God himself as its model. All are accepted and raised to the position of sons. Only in *today's* usage can we rightly also say: to the position of daughters.

For Christian women in the cultural context of that time, on the other hand, it would have been no gain to be called daughters of God. As "daughters" they would then have been subordinate to their "brothers" in the church. But by declaring all believers to be sons of God, Paul gives women the same status as men. That is why he consistently concludes with "you are all one" – German *einer*, "one person," masculine (not the neuter *eins*!) – because "in Christ" all are sons of God, the believing women too. *Under the conditions of that time, this "change of gender for the sake of salvation" for women is not hostile to women, but the beginning of something new.* If women too are "sons of God," does that then have consequences for their role in the church?

All the sons and daughters of God have put on Christ through water baptism. In them, in every single one of those named in verse 28, Christ can now be

seen. Without distinction. This applies without exception and regardless of race, social status, or sex. Paul could have named still more dividing examples to make clear that no one, for whatever reason, least of all for a reason he cannot help, is excluded from God's saving work. This great salvation makes all of them offspring of Abraham and thus heirs, through Christ, the seed of Abraham. Born spiritually into the new creation. *That makes blood relationship and circumcision meaningless.*

In Christ all are equal. Equally raised to sonship and to being heirs. A tremendous, revolutionary message never heard before, straight from heaven. Even circumcision falls away as the entrance into the covenant. *The male privilege of circumcision was ended at the cross and is history forever.* Women never again need to wonder how their belonging to the covenant can be expressed and secured. *Baptism is now the new symbol of salvation for everyone.*

8.2 What the Text Does Not Directly Say

This word of Paul is not primarily about how the roles of man and woman are to be understood (*the text says male and female, echoing Genesis 1:27*). The text does not end the differences within these three pairs. They continue to exist in the world. Nationalities remain, a slave does not become free when he believes in Christ, and the sexes do not cancel each other out. A man remains a man and a woman remains a woman. Becoming one and becoming equal refers to salvation in Christ. To the relationship with the Father and one's place in the body of Christ. Not to the visible creation and the conditions of society. Or to the creation order. Advocates of complementarianism, the hierarchical subordination of women, emphasize this especially and constantly. I, too, whom Strauch and Johnson Jr. would call an "evangelical feminist,"[121] do not take this word of Paul

121. In the USA this term probably does not have as negative a ring as it does in Germany. I would not call an advocate of the subordination of women a Christian masculinist. Feminism stands for a large complex, a many-layered movement with all kinds of extremes. One that has brought about good, less good, and, like every other movement, bad things. In this movement I perceive a reversal of dominance, which means swinging from one extreme and error into the other. I do not stand up for feminism, but for the overall biblical picture of man and woman. Constant insinuations that one is influenced by this movement or indirectly supports it are not helpful.

as the main argument of my case for equal rank. At this point that is not Paul's subject.

8.3 What the Text Does Say Indirectly

Nevertheless, this word does say something that concretely concerns the sexes. It stands in the same chain of reasoning and argument that began with Genesis 1. In verse 28 it is more than just a comparative list showing that all share equally in salvation. It is a salvation that includes not only the forgiveness of sins, but one that already now rescues from the ruin, from the bankruptcy and brokenness of the fallen creation and humanity. In all three pairs a tension, something dividing, is implicitly hinted at. Otherwise Paul would not have used them. Against the background of Paul's time and the culture and way of life back then, he addresses what is not as it should be from the Creator's point of view. Into the tension, into the inequality of these pairs, God's grace now works through his good Spirit, healing, reconciling, and restoring.

Even if this aspect was not in the foreground back then, it certainly is today, looking back over 2,000 years of church history and cultural history. God's word is timeless and can create something new in every generation and every century.

8.3.1 Jew and Greek

This distinction marks the separation between the nations of idol worshipers and Israel, the people of the one true God. It shows God's grace to a small and, at that time, insignificant people. It sets them apart. They alone are God's treasured possession out of all the peoples. But that is over. This separation is history. Salvation is for all. All become sons of God.

Paul deliberately begins with this distinction, because the Judaizers were pressing the believing Gentiles to be circumcised in order to become Jews and so enter Abraham's covenant.

The nations, just like the Jews, will keep their nationality right into God's new and eternal world. No one can shake off his nationality. But through salvation in Christ, all the negative and sinful, all the destructive side effects that come from the different and often hostile peoples are removed. This should be lived out in the church and in God's kingdom. All are to accept one another, just as Christ accepted us.

8.3.2 Slave and Free

What an incomprehensible message for slaves, who were the property of their masters like merchandise. In Christ they are now brothers, of equal worth and equal dignity before God's face. But slavery is an expression of a fallen humanity. It was never God's will. Because it does not correspond to human dignity, which is grounded in being made in the image of God. A human being is never the property of another human being, under compulsion and violence.

Perhaps the little letter of Paul to Philemon is in the canon of the New Testament for this very reason: because here a slave, Onesimus, a runaway one at that, is honored by Paul as a brother and co-worker. But Paul leaves it to Philemon, his believing owner, how he will deal with the slave when he comes back home. In short, Paul does not fight slavery directly. That war would have been lost back then before it had begun. But indirectly the fight against slavery has begun. Through the teaching of Christ, the gospel, the slave is now a full human being who must be respected as such. The gospel is the deathblow to every form of slavery. The gospel is the reason it was abolished, sadly much too late.

Here too it cannot be overlooked that the gospel brings freedom. Also from literal slavery (not only from spiritual slavery). In the new creation there will be no more slaves. *In the church and in God's kingdom, the fruit of the gospel, this new creation has already begun. The effect of the gospel on what is inward and what is outward is a two-way relationship. They absolutely belong together.*

In the church, slave and slave owner are equal. The difference in hierarchy is part of the fallen world. The same applies to the difference between man and woman, which no longer applies in the church, in the new creation.

8.3.3 Information on Slavery

Abolitionism (from English *abolition*, from Latin *abolitio*, "abolishment," "cancellation") refers to a movement for the abolition of slavery. Fed by Christian as well as Enlightenment convictions, this happened in more and more Western countries, beginning with Portugal in 1761 and ending with Brazil in 1888. From 1808 on, Great Britain took a leading role in the fight against slavery. William Wilberforce (1759-1833) was a British member of Parliament and a leader in the fight against slavery and the slave trade. What mattered in England was that in Pietism and in Protestant missions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the view prevailed that understanding a human being as a child of God is incompatible with slavery. In the southern states of the USA, slaves continued to be exploited on farms and plantations. Because the northern states demanded the abolition of slavery in the whole country, war broke out in 1861 (the Civil War). In the end the northern states won, and so with the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution in December 1865 slavery was abolished throughout the USA.

It was Europeans, Christian Europe, who had commercialized slavery on a large scale. *In view of the teaching of Jesus, that is appalling for Christian Europe.* So is the fact that it took so long and was such a difficult road to abolish it. Today human trafficking still exists. Children and women above all are its victims. Anyone who knows and loves the gospel should stand up against it wherever he can.

8.3.4 Man and Woman

Now to the last of the three examples, the one most relevant to our topic. The same applies here as to the previous examples. The Fall threw the relationship between man and woman off balance. The man made himself the stronger one,

the ruler. Worldwide, from Adam until today, the man has wrongly seized authority over the woman and exercises it in a discriminating way.

How does the gospel bring healing into this relationship? Through new hearts, through sacrificial and selfless love. Through mutual submission, faithfulness, and respect in the power of the Holy Spirit. When men recognize that their wives are a counterpart without whom their life does not succeed as God wants it to; through men who do not insist on submission, but in selfless love stand up for their wives, fight for them and protect them, and share their lives with them. And through women who willingly submit to such men and follow them. And the other way around. The gospel can set marriage relationships completely free, so that husband and wife complement each other: physically, emotionally, spiritually.

It is absolutely important to think this word of Paul further than relating it only to the salvation of the soul and only to the unity of God's family. Why does a broken and shattered marriage come right again when both believe the gospel? Because God creates not only "pure hearts," but also "new hearts." *Because the old, worldly, patriarchal view of man and woman finds its end at the cross, just like slavery and the special status of the Jews.*

Back then, too, Paul did not fight this fallen, patriarchal understanding of roles directly. But indirectly, and so effectively in the long run. That this picture of man and woman has persisted stubbornly even in Christendom is a disgrace that one can only be ashamed of.

8.3.5 Earthly and Spiritual?

Karl-Heinz Weber thinks that the "creation order" will only cease in the new creation. Being in Christ, he says, is not to be equated with the earthly position of a believer on earth. This, he says, applies to all areas of work. Also to the meetings, where according to the creation order the sisters keep silent.[122]

122. Weber, 11-13

The first question is why the "creation order" should cease in the new creation. The new creation in particular will have a blessed, undisturbed, and perfect creation order. Namely the one before the Fall. *The creation order and the order of salvation in Christ cannot contradict each other. The order of salvation restores the original creation order.* There, man and woman are of equal rank. The gospel has wholesome consequences that are effective in society. Certainly first in the church, that is, first among believers. These are far-reaching, positive, and revolutionary changes. It is power for salvation that can dissolve sinful structures thousands of years old and change and save whole cultures and nations.

It is an unbiblical dualism to separate earthly existence and the gospel. It is not a social gospel, but it is a powerful message with an unstoppable vertical direction in the relationship with God. But at the same time it also has a horizontal effect among people. The gospel is relevant to salvation and to culture. *Certainly there is a tension between the "already" and the "not yet." But the "already" must be released and be able to set free, so that it can unfold its full effect in this life.*

Anstey argues similarly: "There are two terms that distinguish these two things: 'in Christ' (Galatians 3:28) and 'in the assemblies' (1 Corinthians 14:34)." The one, he says, applies in heaven, the other on earth. All one can say to this is that we are "in Christ" forever and in every place, including in the assemblies. Anything else would call our salvation into question and simply contradict Scripture.

8.3.6 There Is Not Male and Female

"That the apostle is entirely serious about the masculinization of women for the sake of salvation is shown by his consistent support of a gender-neutral ecclesiology, which results in a church practice that allows everyone, regardless of social status, ethnic-religious origin, and sex, in principle to take on any function in the church. *The only criterion is ability, which Paul understands as gifting by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12).* … Interestingly, however, with the gender category it is not said that there are no longer men and women. Rather, the terms 'male' and

'female' are used. *This suggests that … the point was not to abolish the sexual identity of individuals, but to dissolve the gender aspect of the functions in the church.*

In practice this then means: prophesying is not male and not female. Leading the church is not male and not female. Speaking in tongues is neither male nor female. … Being sent by Christ to proclaim is neither male nor female. Preaching is not male and serving is not female, and so on. That is why in Pauline churches there are female deacons like Phoebe (Romans 16:1), female apostles like Junia (Romans 16:7), and so on.

That the early Christian non-gender ecclesiology was not … limited is shown by the church in Rome. It came into being independently of Paul, and a body of women obviously played an outstanding role in it. Paul names Mary (Romans 16:6), Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis (Romans 16:12)."[123]

In his commentary Martyn writes: *'For you are all one in Christ Jesus*. Religious, social, and sexual opposites are not replaced by equality, but by a newly created unity. In Christ (in what Paul will later call 'the body of Christ,' 1 Corinthians 12:13, 27), persons who were Jews and persons who were Gentiles have been made into a new unity that is identified so fundamentally with Christ himself that Paul uses the masculine form of the word 'one.' The members of the church are not one thing; they are one person, taken up into the corpus of the one new man.

From other letters of Paul we know that the apostle was aware of the fact that even in the church, the bridgehead of God's new creation, there were still some signs of sexual and social exclusion (e.g., 1 Corinthians 7; Philemon). He therefore later had to reflect seriously on the tension between affirming the real unity in Christ and the troubling continuation of the distinguishing marks of the old creation." [124]

123. Kügler, Joachim; Paulus und die prophetischen Frauen in Korinth, Zur Gender-Politik des Apostels (1Kor 11,2-16; Gal 3,26-28)

124. Martyn, J. L., Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, 33A, Anchor Yale Bible, New Haven; London 2008, 377.

8.4 Summary and Conclusion

I summarize this chapter in the words of Michael Bird: "Now Paul does not want to suggest that for Christians gender ceases to exist, as if God looks at people only from the neck up and thereby erases the physical distinction between men and women. Being born again does not mean that we should ever strive for unisexuality and be able to use the same restrooms in church. Nor does Paul say that this teaching applies only to salvation or to spiritual things. What Paul means is that the new creation means the abolition of the distinctions that have separated people from one another in the past.

His primary dialogue partners here were not feminists or advocates of hierarchy, but Jewish Christians who wanted to preserve the privileges of their ethnic identity. For Paul, no one is closer to the throne of God by race, by class, or by sex. God wanted to create one family, not two or more families, and Abraham's family has children from all nations, rich and poor, male and female. This underscores the principle of equality in the gospel, according to which no one can boast that he has the direct line to God, or claim that he is better or more useful than any other person. While the primary content of Galatians 3:27-28 focuses on soteriology (salvation), we must keep in mind that it is also connected with ecclesiology (the church) and pneumatology (the Holy Spirit). It is not only about equality before God, but about unity within the church, which was created through the bonds of baptism and sealed by the gift of the Holy Spirit."[125]

After weighing many aspects and details, this word of the Bible is a strong, a divine argument for an equal-ranking role of the believing woman in marriage and church. *In the light of this simple yet profound truth of redemption, all other texts that speak about the relationship of man and woman, about the role of the woman in marriage and also in the church, must be interpreted. To come back to the beginning: Yes, this word of Paul amounts to a Magna Carta.*

125. Bird, 37

9 God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

In the Bible, God is presented in male form. He is Father. His Son Jesus, the Savior of the world, is a man. He chooses 12 men as his followers. No women. All the books of the Bible were written by men. Only men were priests under the old covenant. *Taken together, doesn't that say enough – that the man has a superior position of authority and a leadership function over the woman?* So much maleness does not pass us by without leaving a trace. At any rate, the unconscious perception of whether God is male or not has a certain effect on our thinking, on our self-image, and on our image of God. Probably a different one for men than for women, I suspect.

"This emphasis on male figures and on male images and language in Holy Scripture and in the church has been described by John Piper as a 'masculine feel' of the Christian faith. In a certain sense it is hard to dispute this. The question arises, however, whether this is the reflection of a God-willed order or whether another message is woven into this supposedly obvious message. Is the emphasis on the androcentric[126] and patriarchal narratives in the Bible a clear endorsement of patriarchal structures in church, family, and society? *Or are there other clues in the texts that lead us to the conclusion that the Bible breaks through these patriarchal structures and offers alternative aspects of relationship for men and women?"*[127]

God reveals himself in Jesus. He is God's image. He is the exact imprint of his being. He is the final, complete, and deepest revelation of God, in his life and in his death on the cross. Yet before Jesus came, we could already learn a great deal about God. Scripture already reveals who God is and what he is like. Jesus completes this picture to perfection.

When God reveals himself in a man in the first century, in a Jew, an unmarried builder, I am at the same time aware that God, the Eternal One, the wholly Other, is more than could be seen in Jesus. We cannot even fully understand

126. Androcentrism is understood as a view that regards men as the center, the standard, and the norm. Androcentrism can be understood as a social fixation on the man or on what is "male." Wikipedia
127. Peppiatt, Rediscovering Scripture's Vision for Women: Fresh Perspectives on Disputed Texts

him, God's Son, himself. Our knowledge is partial. McFarland concludes: "We must therefore take care to present Jesus in such a way that the Logos [the Word] who comes in the flesh is not reduced to the flesh."

God is spirit (John 4:24). God is a triune God. These two aspects of God's being should not fade into the background. Even if in the Old Testament God is described in male terms, as Father, warrior, or king. One who at times feels and acts like a human being. The so-called "anthropomorphic[128] images of God" show God's acting and feeling in human comparisons and analogies. How close do these images come to the reality of God? God, as three in one, as spirit and without beginning, is incomprehensible to us. When he comes to us and becomes one of us, a man, that does not mean that God is a man, *but that he reveals himself in this way. God does not have a body like ours, and therefore he has no sex either.*

9.1 Is God Male?

God reveals himself as Father. Does that reveal his sex? No, but it reveals something far more important: He is a person, and he is a God of relationship, of affection, and of fellowship. This God, who is described to us in human images, speaks, hears, warns, protects, strengthens, acts, makes covenants, gives promises, and above all he loves with a sacrificial and inextinguishable love. He is unchangeable, but he has deep emotions. Although unfathomable, he has at the very least, to an extent unknown to us, all the abilities that we have as human beings, as woman and man. Human images try to describe the indescribable One. Much of it in masculine language. But there are countless female images of God that highlight and praise his female side. I will cite some of them, without forgetting that God is not a woman either. Once again: He has no sex. *The female images of God show what became flesh in Eden: man and woman are God's image, and in their existence and in their sex they reflect the being of God, who has no sex.*

128. Anthropomorphism (Greek ἄνθρωπος anthrōpos 'human being' and μορφή morphē 'form, shape') means attributing human characteristics to animals, gods, forces of nature, and the like (humanization). The human characteristics can show themselves both in form and in behavior. Wikipedia

Describing God in male grammar is also, but not only, a limitation of language. If in German and in many other languages God were described as neither male nor female, all that would remain would be the neuter pronoun "it." That would be impersonal and would not serve the purpose. The same applies to the original languages of the Bible. *For example, the Greek word for spirit, pneuma, is neuter. But the Hebrew word ruach is feminine. This cannot be expressed in German, but when speaking of the Spirit of God one could speak of a "she" or "her" ("Geistin," a feminine form of the German word for Spirit).* But that too cannot assign a sex to the divine persons. It would strike us, probably irritate us, because we are simply used to the masculine personal pronouns and know nothing else. *The question of God's sex simply cannot be settled by language, neither biblical nor modern.*

In the Old and New Testaments there is no concrete indication of God's sex. This needs to be stressed *because the gods of the ancient Near East and of antiquity were deliberately male and female*. The cycle of life was kept alive through sexuality. Fertility was the ideal of the female deities. Sexuality was the focal point around which the cults revolved. *But not so with Yahweh, the God of Israel. He is called neither male nor female.* In the Jewish faith, just as in the Christian faith, sexuality does not belong to an eternal, cosmic rhythm. Sexuality is created. It has a beginning and will have an end.

"Nevertheless, in Scripture God reveals himself as 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Ephesians 1:3) and not as 'Mother.' Nor does God present himself as a father-mother complex, as if he embodied 'masculinity' and 'femininity.' The terms 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are inseparably bound up with the sexual differences between the sexes. Sexuality and its sexes are eternal spiritual principles only in a pagan cosmology."[129]

If God has no sex and yet is described as Father, then one cannot simply change the images and language and put in "Mother." That would mean replacing one error – namely understanding God as a male being – with another. This

129. R.K. McGregor Wright

is what happens in the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* (a German Bible translation in "inclusive language"), which translates in a "gender-neutral" way.[130]

Although God is portrayed considerably more in male images than in female ones, no conclusions about sex can be drawn from this. The fact that on the whole there are more male images and that male language is used may also have to do with the fact that the biblical writings came into being in a patriarchal age. Holy Scripture, too, must be read historically, without denying its relevance and authority for today.

9.2 You Shall Not Make for Yourself an Image

This commandment from the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:4), touches on the question of God's sex, even before he revealed himself in Jesus. The prohibition of images rules out sexuality in God, just as the fact that God is spirit does. The two are directly connected. Nor can a sex be derived from God's famous statement about himself, "I will be who I will be" (Exodus 3:14), neither a male nor a female one. Deriving a female one is the intention of currents in feminist theology.

"In the Bible God is often spoken of as Elohim. *It is a plurale tantum*[131] *– a grammatical form of expression that seeks to do justice precisely to the multitude of divine attributes, which are neither male nor female.* For at every time and in every place, in endlessly different situations of need and suffering, but also of joy and thanksgiving, many kinds of images of God come before our minds."[132]

130. Wolfgang Huber criticized it: "That a translation always contains interpretation as well is turned upside down here: interpretation is passed off as translation. That violates the Reformation principle of Scripture. Justice is a central theme of the Bible. But one cannot, from the standpoint of justice, twist a Bible text in such a way that, for instance, where twelve men are clearly meant, 'women apostles and apostles' is written, and the reader gets the impression that there were also women in this circle." Peter Hahne: "It pains a Lutheran journalist to the soul to be laughed at by his skeptical colleagues, not because of his faith in the resurrection, but because of a sectarian special Bible born of the spirit of a fundamentalist feminism." Wikipedia, on the Bibel in gerechter Sprache

131. A plurale tantum, plural word, or plural-only noun is a noun that is used only in the plural (German examples: *Ferien* 'vacation,' *Kosten* 'costs,' *Leute* 'people').

132. Lapide, Pinchas, Ist die Bibel richtig übersetzt, Gütersloh, 2004, 202

9.3 Female Images of God

Here I give examples of how Scripture describes the female side of God:

The mother who nurses her children and is responsible for their care (Numbers 11:12): "Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth, that you should say to me: Carry them in your arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their ancestors?"

The mother who brought the Israelites into the world (Deuteronomy 32:18): "You neglected the Rock who fathered you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth."

The woman in labor, whose powerful breathing is an image of divine power (Isaiah 42:14). "For a long time I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back. Like a woman giving birth I will breathe deeply, gasp and pant at once."

The mother who gives birth to Israel and protects it (Isaiah 46:3): "Listen to me, house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, you who have been carried since you were conceived, and borne since your birth!"

The mother who does not forget the child she is nursing (Isaiah 49:14-15): "Can a woman forget her nursing infant and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even if these should forget, I will not forget you."

A mother who comforts her children (Isaiah 66:13): "You will be carried on the arms and dandled on the knees. As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you."

A mother who calls, teaches, holds, heals, and feeds her young (Hosea 11:1-4).

Further mother images are found in Psalm 131:2; Job 38:8, 29; Proverbs 8:22-25; 1 Peter 2:2-3; Acts 17:28.

In a similar way, the Bible describes places where we find God described in terms of the cultural or social activity of women:

A seamstress who makes clothes for Israel (Nehemiah 9:21).

A midwife who is present at a birth (Psalm 22:9-10; 71:6; Isaiah 66:9).

A woman in authority to whom her maidservant looks up (Psalm 123:2); a woman who works yeast into bread (Luke 13:20-21).

Scripture also speaks of God by using the images of a female bird or animal: God acts like a mother bird protecting her young (Psalm 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 91:1, 4; Isaiah 31:5; Deuteronomy 32:11-12), like an eagle (Deuteronomy 32:11-12; Exodus 19:4; Job 39:27-30), like a hen (Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34; compare Ruth 2:12), and like a mother bear (Hosea 13:8).

One of the most fascinating references to the feminine in relation to God's nature is the portrayal of Wisdom as a woman in Proverbs 1:20-33; 8:1–9:12.

9.4 Father and Son

Before Jesus came, no one could know that God is "one in three." Nor that God is the Father of his Son in the sense that became known through Jesus. Only when the Word became flesh did God reveal himself as Father in his Son. Yet he is not a father who begot his son with a woman. Father, Son, and Spirit are all eternal, without beginning. This language shows the relationship in which the first and second persons of the Godhead stand to each other. It shows the relationship in which human beings may stand to God. But this reality, too, does not make the eternal Father and the eternal Son into a male sex.

I am aware that these questions are seldom, if ever, thought about in this form. In the framework of this book I consider it necessary to address this topic. Though with the awareness that I will soon come up against limits.

9.5 Submission of the Eternal Son?

In this book I argue that a hierarchical subordination of the woman is always the result of the Fall and was not intended in the original, unfallen creation. That holds true even when God's word calls women to submission. However, this has to be understood in the context of the circumstances of antiquity. I have described this in detail.

For several decades now, a doctrine has arisen in American conservative evangelicalism that could refute my argument above, if it corresponded to the biblical texts. It concerns the triune God and how the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit relate to one another. In a few words, this doctrine holds that the three persons of the Godhead are equal in being and glory. In their being (ontology) they are equal. But they take on different roles in relation to one another and to creation. Thus, it is said, the Son has been subject to the Father "from the beginning," and the Spirit subject to the Father and the Son. In Christ's incarnation, in his voluntary humiliation, what had already been the relationship in eternity comes to expression.

You are wondering what this has to do with the subject of this book? A great deal. For this "eternal hierarchy" is meant to serve as the model for the roles of man and woman. Accordingly, a clear equality of worth can already be seen in the unfallen creation, but just as clearly the different distribution of roles, in which the man is the leading and governing head, to whom the woman submits. That, it is said, is how man and woman are designed by creation, with the familiar consequences for marriage, church, and society.

I do not know this idea from German-speaking Christian thought and literature. But with the extensive Reformed systematic theology by Wayne Grudem, this idea, with all its consequences, has also arrived in Germany since 2013: "Here in marriage, just as the Father in the Trinity has authority over the Son, the husband also has authority over his wife. The role of the husband parallels that of God the Father, and the role of the wife parallels that of God the Son.

Moreover, just as the Father and the Son are equal in deity and importance and personhood, so also the husband and the wife are equal in their humanity and importance and personhood."[133]

So in this systematic theology, with an "eternal weight," so to speak, that is, with reference to the Godhead, all women are excluded from leadership ministries such as eldership and preaching. Younger Reformed movements in Germany are promoting this doctrine proactively and almost missionally.

Although this exclusion did not shape church history from the beginning, it sadly did so for at least 1,700 years – yet this argument was never brought into play.

This relatively young doctrine cannot be discussed within this framework. I merely offer some food for thought and will not base my overall view on this doctrine. In this way I stay with my starting point in Genesis 1 and 2, in whose light I have explained relevant Bible texts in the New Testament in this book.

If this eternal submission of the Son were a given, and not only from his incarnation on, then the role of man and woman would not automatically be determined by it. It would be an analogy, a comparison, but not a necessity. No one will doubt that the Son as a man submitted himself to the Father. *But what remains important for the subject is that neither a possible eternal nor a temporal submission of the Son is ever taken as the model for describing the relationship and the roles of man and woman in general or in marriage. The example of Jesus' humiliation is of course often emphasized, but always for all disciples, without any emphasis on sex.*

It took several centuries before a confession or a doctrine about God came into being in Christendom, mostly as a reaction against false teachings. So it was Athanasius (fourth century) who, more than anyone, shaped, formulated, and defended the doctrine of the Trinity. To this day it is undisputed Christian dogma.

133. GRUDEM, W., Biblische Dogmatik: Eine Einführung in die Systematische Theologie, XXIX, Theologisches Lehr- und Studienmaterial des Martin Bucer Seminars, VKW; arche-medien, Bonn; Hamburg 2013, 284–285.

It seems strange to me that in the debate about the role of man and woman such a doctrine is formulated, and the subordinate role of the woman is thereby fixed. I cannot shake the suspicion that here "the tail is wagging the dog." In other words, what weighty doctrine of God has to serve this question of gender roles? It should be noted that all this was unknown at the time of the creation of human beings and could only be recognized with the coming of the Son. The "image of God" could not yet contain this knowledge in Eden.

I consider such a fixed position, which ventures an enormously far-reaching statement about the Godhead, to be questionable. Even if there are indications for such conclusions, I see no clear evidence for this assumption. There are also indications for the opposite.

Note in the fourth edition: This doctrine has since been withdrawn because of massive objection from many sides.



9.6 Jesus and His 12 Disciples

Jesus was recognizable in the prophecies as Messiah and King, as the Son of Man. As a man. These words were fulfilled in the man from Nazareth. Paul compares him, as in a patriarchal family, with Adam as head of the new creation.

Alexander Strauch stresses that Jesus had to be a man. One could agree with that, but to derive from it the superiority of the male sex, as he does, is simply misleading.[134] *He became first and foremost a human being – the Word became flesh, not a man!* His remarks, and all the representatives of this way of thinking, are an

134. Strauch, pp. 42–44

example of how Greek philosophy has managed, to this day, to infiltrate God's church. And that under the cloak of piety.

The male figures fulfill symbolic and typological functions or roles in God's history of salvation. This is not about elevating the male sex, not even when one keeps getting that impression. I would distinguish in Jesus' work between his function in salvation history and his function in salvation itself. The former required that he be a man. For accomplishing salvation, sex was of no significance. In other words, to put it sharply, a woman could also have accomplished salvation on the cross.

Jesus chose 12 disciples, all men. That was normal in the male-dominated culture of the time. But as representatives of the 12 tribes of Israel they had to be men. "*Jesus chose male apostles for the same reason that he chose twelve Jewish apostles.* To the extent that Jesus' followers represent the new Israel, Jesus' twelve apostles typologically represent the twelve tribes of Israel and especially the twelve patriarchs (the sons of Jacob) from whom the nation of Israel descends. Witt points out that the twelve male apostles give typological continuity and fulfillment to the history of Israel. *'The Twelve had to be free Jewish men and not slaves, women, or Gentiles in order to fulfill the symbolic function of their typological role.'"*

12 men were called by Jesus. Anyone who appeals to this to say that it may only be men must also consider only Galilean or Jewish men. The historical, prophetic, cultural, but unique situation required that his disciples be men, Jews. *That is why this can never be a guideline or norm for the worldwide church of Jesus Christ, which is being created from all peoples.*

The number twelve does not bring to mind a school class with 12 pupils; it also points to the all-embracing character of the messianic movement, which leaves no one behind and *to which women, too, belonged.* It is remarkable that the Twelve are never called men. In following Jesus, all were learners, all were pupils. In Jesus' presence there was no room for macho posturing toward women.

Androcentrism, that is, the predominantly masculine perception and manner of speaking in the Bible, definitely does not come at the expense of women. They

are not pushed aside by it.

The man Jesus valued and respected women in an unusual and radical way. He gave women back their dignity. Richard Bauckham writes about the women at Jesus' tomb: women are preferred by God as recipients of revelation and thus as mediators of this revelation to the men. *Is this not part of the eschatological reversal of status, in which God makes the last first and the first last, so that no one can boast before God?*

9.7 Conclusion

"Our conclusion must be that there are no biblical grounds for a dominant influence of ideas of masculinity and femininity on our understanding of the essential nature of God's being. God is a He because God is personal, and our Father because God acts like a loving father. He is neither male nor female, nor a combination of both. Ideas of a gendered God are characteristic of a multitude of pagan conceptions, but in a biblical Christianity they are absent."[135]

Men, and women just as much, identify with men like Abraham, Moses, David, and Elijah when they read the Bible. Do we men also identify in the same way with women like Deborah, Rahab, Ruth, or Mary? Let us for once read the Bible and its stories deliberately from the perspective of the women. Let us deliberately read the stories of the women and pass them on to young people and in our sermons.

135. Ibid.

10 My Confession of Guilt

The sum of the wrongs we men have done to women is great. Mostly in the belief that we were being faithful to God and his word. This is about far more than a disputed theological position. For my own part, I see myself called to an open and at the same time unsparing confession of sin. Repentance is the opportunity for new life and revival. My hope is that many brothers in the Lord will make this confession their own, and that it will reach the ears and hearts of the sisters in Christ, to the joy of God.

God, Yahweh Elohim, Creator of man and woman, forgive me for having thought, demanded, and acted as if the woman were not of equal rank, but of lower rank. Not a counterpart, but one step beneath me.

Lord Jesus, forgive me for thinking that women must keep silent and hold back from public life.

Forgive me for thinking that you did not want them to teach publicly about you and your truth.

I confess to my wife, my mother, my sisters by birth, and all my friends in the Lord, all my fellow workers in the kingdom of God, all the sisters with whom I sat together in countless hours of meetings, that I regarded you hierarchically as under the authority of the man!

Forgive me this wrong attitude, which I thought was godly and biblical!

Forgive us for discussing and deciding important debates and questions without you. We did not ask for your counsel! We lived in our own world as if it were the only one or the most important one.

I confess that we men have failed. Often, and without noticing it, we were selfish, domineering, and discriminating machos and know-it-alls.

Blind about ourselves. Blind about you women and your callings and gifts. And therefore, in this matter, blind about God too, your Creator.

Forgive us where we were cowardly and pushed you forward and relied on you, where we should have stood our ground like men and gone ahead, and you rightly expected it of us.

Forgive us our indifference to what was hard for you and what you never understood. We never asked you how you felt about it.

Forgive us for not asking you how you felt about these discriminating attitudes and teachings.

We are sorry. We were wrong.

Be free! Serve the Lord with gladness!

Don't get used to the status quo! Stand up!

Even if it takes time for traditions to change, we want to start now and not lose any more time.

We will support you – just as you have always done, despite everything we have done.

How can we make it right?

The cross of Jesus Christ is the only refuge for the sinner, where he can experience forgiveness and freedom. For the Christian, too, it is the spiritual place where he can be assured of his forgiveness. The place where Yahweh Elohim himself bore our sins in his body on the tree. And where sinners meet and speak forgiveness to one another.



When the Holy Spirit enlightens our heart and conscience, and the confession of sin is necessary and repentance is the only next step, then, in view of the cross, this is the place where men and women meet. For mutual forgiveness and reconciliation, for freedom and healing.

"It is not an easy road to move from a patriarchal way of thinking to one that is friendly to women. It requires that we reimagine everything we thought we understood about our world and how it works, about our faith and our relationship with God, with one another, and with our cosmos. It is as difficult a shift as it was for our ancestors to move from an earth-centered to a sun-centered understanding of the universe. The first scientists who suggested that the earth revolves around the sun and not the other way around were excommunicated, because it was believed that this posed a threat to God's power! In a similar way, it is very difficult to break free from a patriarchal worldview in which it is accepted as normal that women are dominated by men and that systems and institutions are organized and led by men. An equal-partnership, egalitarian worldview is a worldview that sees women and men in mutual relationship, sharing power, recognizing, fostering, and releasing each other's gifts. And meeting one another with equal respect and equal dignity."[136]

136. Reid, Barbara E., p. 7, Wisdom's Feast, 2016

"Whoever has been gripped by the spirit of the gospel will agree that a patriarchal understanding of roles that patronizes women and paralyzes them for the kingdom of God is not only wrong, but has brought unspeakable harm to God's church. Even if this never happened out of ignoble motives, in the spirit of a power struggle or even of intended humiliation, but often enough because of a tragic misunderstanding of Holy Scripture, it is now time to courageously question degrading traditions and to turn away from them, so that women too can set their feet in 'a spacious place' and can at last gratefully experience the complete redemption purchased by Jesus Christ."[137]

"A man who is healthy within himself will do everything he can to love the woman at his side into her calling." Veronika Schmidt

Like an incurable disease, like an age-old weed, firmly and deeply rooted and spread everywhere, the image of women held by Christian men has from the beginning been an echo of their surroundings and, sadly, of their own hearts as well. Lived out consciously and unconsciously, in crass ways, in moderate ways, even in loving ways – there is nevertheless no other option than turning back to the biblical and therefore divine truth, which alone sets us free.

137. Krüger, Hartmut, p. 183, Frauen im Pietismus, Marburg, 2005

11 Conclusion and Outlook

From my experience, which is limited and subjective, I come to the conclusion that in people's stance on the "women's question" (it is almost only men who call it that), mentality, church environment, and background play a decisive role.

In the churches where women keep silent, and do so out of conviction, it is humanly hardly to be expected that this practice will be abolished. The patterns of thought have been shaped over generations and are entrenched. They are fortresses. In such circles, changing such habits and traditions seems like "shaking the laws of the universe."

Of course everything is justified with "faithfulness to the Bible" and obedience. But is one really faithful to the Bible, or to one's interpretation of the Bible? But the question must be asked: Could one be wrong?

The same applies to churches in which women may not be deacons or elders. Where they are excluded from all or some leadership functions. Also where they may not preach and may not teach.

Could it be that our society (and its social order) and our legislation are more biblical in the equal standing and equal rights of men and women than the attitude among conservative, Bible-believing Christians?

What if the law of equal rights and the prohibition of discrimination against one sex one day demands the same rights for women in all areas – in the evangelical churches and free churches, including those of a conservative stamp? Perhaps requires a quota for women? Is our patriarchal and, at its core, medieval view of man and woman then something we would suffer for? Something we would go to prison for? The state of course has no right to decide this in the church, but what if it took that right for itself and threatened consequences?

We men should repent that we have still not understood how God created the role and the relationship of man and woman in the beginning. In many cases this understanding does not come from the Bible at all, but is shaped by culture

and society. When will we finally recognize this deep-seated connection? You cannot condemn the world and at the same time declare worldly patterns of behavior to be biblical ones.

When will the freedom of the Spirit and of the original creation order come? An order in which it is not sex that determines ministry, assignment, and calling in God's kingdom and in his church. But gifting, ability, character, and faithfulness, as well as personality and training. Simply spiritual competence: willingness to serve and humility, wholehearted devotion and spiritual authority that is not decreed or conferred, but perceived, recognized, and valued. That would be a breakthrough of blessing for all churches that have defined and curtailed the role of women in worldly forms and not in spiritual, biblical, and divine ones.

With this I have fulfilled my responsibility and distance myself from the forms that do not come from Holy Scripture, but from a fallen world. Views that Christians themselves, the men, to whom I belong, have "baptized" into the churches and made pious. *That is exactly what the serpent, the deceiver, has achieved: suppressing or eliminating the indispensable contribution of women in many places.* Adam and Eve together were bearers of God's image. The functioning of the body of Christ happens in the same way. Or else it does not function as Christ wants it to.

Let us men follow in the footsteps of Jesus in the way he behaved toward women. There is a way back. God grants forgiveness and a new beginning. In these questions too.

But only with repentance. Only with a change of mind and a rethinking will we be able to fight the serpent's poison, with which it has deceived God's people and the whole world for thousands of years, namely that the man has authority over the woman.

A change of thinking from the heart can happen in a moment, but it can also take years. I am writing these lines at the age of 56. I did not foresee this. Five years ago I would not yet have written this. That is why I accuse no one. At most myself, for having lost four decades on this question. Paul needed three years in Arabia, directly after his dramatic encounter with Christ and his

conversion, to be freed from the ballast and rubble of Pharisaic thinking, also with regard to his image of women. But it worked. And it can work today too.

Pastorally, this healing and liberation would have an almost incalculable restoring, correcting, and healing effect, since it is the sound and therefore health-giving teaching of God's word. If marriages were freed from the myth of the man's authority over the woman. If churches and denominations would finally draw on their full potential.

Let us finally leave our favorite reflexes and bogeymen on these topics behind us. Our wives and daughters, our mothers and our sisters by birth and our spiritual sisters are an idea of heaven. Whoever lays a hand on them, whoever condemns them to silence, becomes guilty. What answer shall we give on that great day when Yahweh Elohim calls us to account?

Slogans for holding the line are one such favorite reflex: Let us stay with the Word! And people confuse "staying with the Word" with "staying with one's own understanding of the Word." We men must capitulate and recognize that the old serpent can be defeated in the name of Jesus. Repentance is the best insight with an outlook! It no longer makes any sense to fight for worldly and therefore sinful orders in God's church.

When women are set free, men are set free too.

May God the Lord, Yahweh Elohim, be gracious to us!

Blanking out the cultural background of the biblical texts does not lead people to keep to the wording of the texts; rather, the biblical wording becomes a projection screen for the cultural convictions of their own present.

What has been proclaimed to many evangelicals as an eternal biblical truth is in truth a product of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Anyone can check this.

How is one to learn, on disputed questions, even to carry on a serious discussion of different positions, if for decades one has practiced not representing convictions, but enforcing dogmatic confessions?

Thorsten Dietz

11.1 Pointers and Advice

In view of the controversy, how do we apply biblical principles so that the conclusions become reality in the church of Christ today?

A major problem in the churches and denominations today is a deep misunderstanding of the nature of grace and of the work of the Holy Spirit. As long as legalism and tradition are confused with the gospel of Christ, divisions will always follow changes. That is why we must work diligently to proclaim the good news in the churches. We must explicitly point out the errors of legalism and clearly state the truth of God's grace.

While many will consider such teaching liberal, in reality it is only a repetition of Paul's work. Paul worked for most of his life to correct Judaizing teachers who sought a return to the law of Moses. We should follow Paul and correct those who seek a return to the theology of the Old Testament (only male priests, observance and overvaluation of forms and externals, fear of mistakes, blind obedience, etc.). But we should speak the truth in love.

And yet we must understand that it takes time for our brothers and sisters to accept new ideas. Even for an open-minded person, a radical change in thinking can take many years before he feels comfortable with it. When I get a new eyeglass prescription, the new, better lenses actually seem worse to me than the old, blurry ones until I have worn them for a few days. We must be patient. Practice may only follow a new understanding of doctrine years later.

Divisions are not inevitable, but the danger is very great. *If the churches do not reject legalism and do not turn to the cross, there will be separations and divisions.* The only other solution is not to change. *And then, on top of that, to lose one's own children.*

Change is necessary and inevitable. We cannot deny far more than half of the believers the right to be Christians with full rights. *This is not about their "rights." Rather, God needs workers.* The hungry must be fed, the children raised, and people saved. If we deny so many members of the body of Christ the right to take

part in decision-making or in leading the church, *we are disarming ourselves unilaterally in the face of Satan's army.* Imagine you are facing an enemy army, and then you turn around and disarm the majority of your own best officers for fear of violating the army's rule book. We must concern ourselves with how we can resist Satan, and let God take care of choosing his leaders, teachers, spokespeople, and administrators.

In the end we can only do so much; the rest is up to God. *Even Jesus did not change the hearts of most of the Pharisees, but he changed enough hearts to rewrite the history of the world. We can only sow. God must give the growth.*

Real change comes when people are enabled to use their thinking and their energy in a new way, to use a different pattern of thought and a different language, and to have fresh visions of the future.

As man and woman

Loving, leading, and teaching

BETTER TOGETHER!

BETTER AS ONE!

BETTER WITH EACH OTHER!

And I will walk about in a SPACIOUS PLACE, for I have sought out your precepts.

Psalm 119:45

12 The Difference

From the book by Marilyn B. Smith, ed. Ingrid Kern: *Ohne Unterschied; Frauen und Männer im Dienst für Gott*, 2005 (English original: *Gender or Giftedness*), I have scanned two overviews and diagrams. They give a good overview of how the two positions of complementarity – one with and one without a hierarchy or one-sided subordination of man and woman – are understood and justified. Here they are called the *hierarchical model and the gift-based model.*

I do not present these two models so that you will decide for one of them, but so that you can determine for yourself which one you hold, consciously or unconsciously.

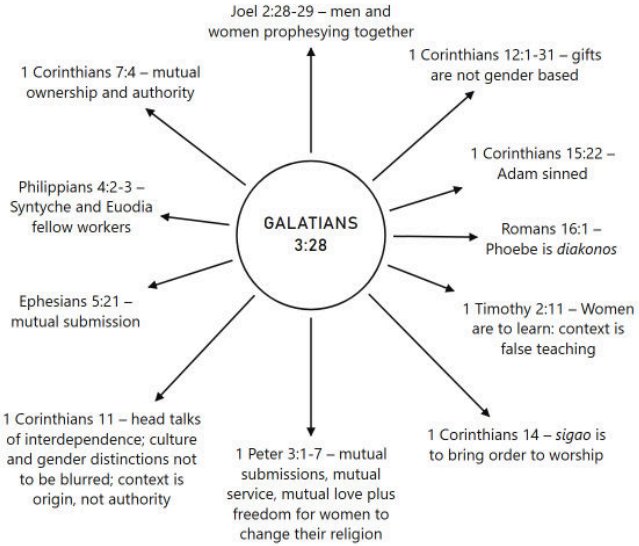
12.1 The Gift-Based Model

In this second paradigm, the following meanings prevail:

ʿezer kᵉnägdo	helper "equal to" means face to face, suitable to
kephale	head means source
authentein	is recognized as an unusual word which suggests dominance
sigao	means voluntary silence in order to pay attention
hypotasso	is a voluntary submission and is used in the context of mutual submission

There is one core text: Galatians 3:28, which summarizes the equality of all people in Christ and has both spiritual and practical implications because the daily living out of our identity in Christ can never be separated from the eternal reality of our life in Him.

Summary of Beliefs Undergirding *Gift Based* Model

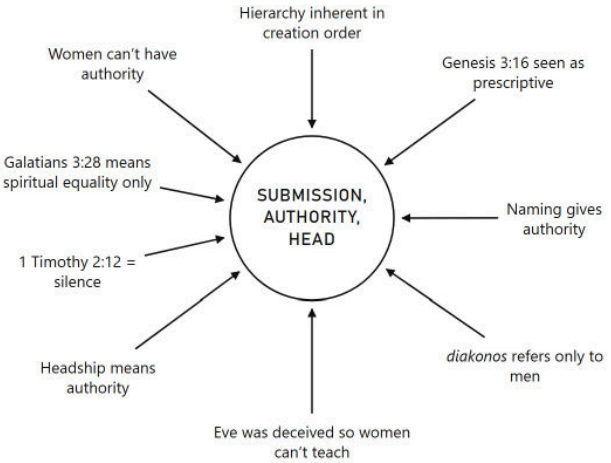


Men and women are equally created in the image of God, to live together in community and serve within that community on the basis of their giftedness by the Holy Spirit. Service within the community is not determined by gender. The essence of community is mutual submission and mutual responsibility: each one is to be a servant, contributing to the building up of each other according to their gifts.

12.2 The Hierarchical Model

APPENDIX B

Summary of Beliefs Undergirding *Hierarchical* Theologies



The application is that woman is subject to the man as Christ is subject to the Father. Generally, traditionalists will say that women are not inferior to men, but that while they are equal spiritually, they do not have equal spiritual authority. That is to say, their function within the body of Christ is based on their gender. The Biblical basis for that is the belief that head means authority and since Christ is the head (authority) of the church and man is the head (authority) of the woman, she is to be submissive and cannot have authority over the man. Therefore, she cannot teach men or preach the word.

In this paradigm, the following meanings prevail:

ʿezer kᵉnägdo	"helper equal to" means subordinate
kephale	head means authority
authentein	translated authority
sigao	means cannot speak
hupotasso	means submission of the wife to the husband and then is carried over into the church to mean submission of the women to the men

There are 3 core texts:

Ephesians 5:22 – submission
1 Timothy 2:12 – I do not permit
Ephesians 5:23 and 1 Corinthians 11:3 – head

Galatians 3:28 is understood to have spiritual meaning, but not to have any impact on the current behaviour.

13 Afterwords from Various Readers

I am grateful that several friends took it upon themselves, after a critical reading of the manuscript, to contribute a personal word. It adds what is missing in my writing and deepens what I only touched on.

13.1 The Open View Has Become Overgrown!

Why do we want to write a book on this topic, and why must we? Not because we want to revolutionize everything. Not because we know better.

It comes from the fact that Hans-Jörg was suddenly asked the question: "How do you see the position and the role of women? In general, and especially with regard to Christian church life."

This was not the first time in our lives that this question had come up. For a long time we were bound to church settings, and there it is counterproductive to question the subordinate or silent role of women when everything is running quietly along fixed tracks.

Personally, I am not rebellious, in the sense of immediately airing my view and opinion or wanting to push it through. Nevertheless, in the past, especially in Christian church life, I found it hard to endure and put up with approaches when I was not "allowed" to question them or received very human and superficial answers.

With Hans-Jörg at my side, I have a husband who loves nothing more than to search and study the Bible. It is a great enrichment that he understands and explains God's word. Whatever is not understood, and wherever there are questions, is studied anew at some point.

It takes courage to question entrenched views and opinions anew and then to realize that it does not really fit with my life up to now.

I was brought up to believe that women say nothing out loud in the Christian church meeting. I am sure that as a child I once asked why that is so. The answer that this is what the Bible says was enough for me back then, and there was no need to ask further. So I adopted it just like that and went on living it. – As a result, my personal involvement in the content of church life became very passive for decades, because everything that contributed to the worship service was taken on entirely by men. When I prayed, I did it silently. As a woman, I had no responsibility in it.

Today I ask myself how God the Lord imagined it in the beginning. He, the Creator of heaven and earth, of all men and women, of all animals, He wants us human beings to be the image of HIM, equal before HIM, with the talents given by HIM. When we take the spiritual gifts test, we find that everyone can do something especially well, and everyone has strengths and weaknesses in everything.

What if

- the Creator, who made me creative, inventive, and strong, and I have nothing to say to Him in the worship service / in the church meeting
- Jesus, the Savior of humanity, came to earth, lived here, truly turned the life and role of women upside down and changed it – died for me, and now a large part of his work of salvation – the female part – half of his creation, has nothing to praise and give thanks for in the worship service

Then I want to come out of my passivity. I want to overcome the way I was shaped. I want to develop actively. You men can help the women! Who is a helper to whom here?

When it comes to our married life, we live as husband and wife in a well-oiled partnership. We make important decisions together. Decisions that concern my gifts and tasks I make quite on my own. Hans-Jörg too. In all of this we will talk about it and share with each other. Love and respect rest on mutuality and pull together on the same rope and in the same direction. After all, we are on our way to a common goal.

Even when I read cultural history and see what role was apparently taken for granted for women, from the Middle Ages through all the different eras, I become sad and can no longer imagine it today, because it was considered best when women did not appear at all in public life, in education, and in important decisions. The course of time has brought change and transformation now and then. But in some areas of life and in some ways of being shaped, the way roles are distributed still runs very deep.

A picture comes to my mind that struck me while walking around our beautiful lake: along the path around the lake there are benches here and there. When I stopped for a breather, I noticed that the view of the lake was completely overgrown by bushes and trees. While writing, this comparison came to me: the lake and the bench are still there = creation and human nature are still there – only the view, and what the Creator once had in mind at the origin, has pretty much disappeared behind bushes and trees. So that the view, the very reason the bench was once put there, can be cleared again, the wildly growing bushes and trees must be removed. In the same way, the overgrowth that we have allowed to grow over God's idea as Creator must be removed.

Christine Ronsdorf, Sulzberg im Allgäu

13.2 What Might Have Been!

"Another book on the 'women's question' …" – that was my first reaction to the preprint that Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf sent me. But after a first skim, the approach interested me so much that I could hardly stop reading. My Christian upbringing is similar to the author's. I grew up in the 'Closed Brethren assemblies,' with 'young brothers' meetings' that were reserved exclusively for young men, while the young ladies met for a 'little knitting hour.' There were no devotionals there, because a woman was not allowed to teach, after all. Women do not teach, they do not join in discussing theological questions, they keep silent in the church, except for the 'Amen' or the four-part singing. I still remember well a sermon in my home church by a brother who was at that time a national

leader of the 'Closed Brethren assemblies,' in which he dealt with the topic of 'women's conferences' with the sentence: "Where would we end up if the women are at conferences and the men have to push the baby carriage at home?" Exactly – where would we end up? A question that people, or rather I myself, should have asked much earlier. Whether out of insight or owing to pressure from society as a whole, conditions have certainly changed over the last decades, even in conservative circles of (Brethren) churches. There are youth meetings, home groups, and other occasions at which women are perceived and treated differently than in my youth. Some go a step further and give women the opportunity to serve according to their gifts and callings in certain niches of church life. Personally, however, I ask myself: Is that enough? In the founding days of the Brethren assemblies, Darby and his fellow campaigners rediscovered the principle of the universal priesthood of all believers. Combative as he was, Darby formulated it in contrast to the clericalism of the state churches like this: "I believe the 'Notion of a clergyman' to be the sin against the Holy Ghost in this dispensation." Roughly: "setting up a class of clergy is the sin against the Holy Spirit in this dispensation." In practice, this thesis, which stands at the theological center of the Brethren movement, led to a significant gain in the Spirit's leading and in freedom for God's church. But unfortunately it only removed the restriction of ministries in the church by the criteria 'studied and ordained'; the criterion "male" remained. *What might have been possible if people had recognized how the 'big picture,' as Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf has drawn it, changes the role of women in God's ecclesia?* What would have happened if the Brethren movement had firmly held that "we are all brothers," men and women alike? How much could the kingdom of God in 'righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' have conquered and permeated this world through such a discovery and its implementation, long before a time in which secular feminism has done this, partly in unhealthy ways? I therefore want to rewrite Darby's sentence, deliberately provocatively, in a new and different way: "I believe the notion that women must keep silent and may not teach and serve like men to be opposition to the Holy Spirit in our time." Scripture is clear: "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Timothy 2:2). Paul writes

"people" (anthropoi), not "men"! What happens when this is lived out? The wealth of gifts and callings of >50% of the church members is activated, and growth sets in that no one could have imagined before. These days I serve gladly and often together with my wife on many occasions, and believe me: she can teach some things much better than I can. And I discover the same in many women in my church context. *So for me personally, it is no longer about a little bit more 'woman in the church,' but about giving women the place that God intended for them.* Dallas Willard put it aptly: "It is not the rights of women to hold 'official' ministries or spiritual offices, nor their equal rights with men in these offices, that set the terms for their service to God and to their neighbors. It is their obligations that do this – obligations that arise from their human abilities, empowered by the divine gifts of grace" (in "How I Changed My Mind About Women in Leadership"). In this sense I rejoice over this book and wish everyone – whether man or woman – that they have read it with an open heart, so that they can then say and live with joy: "But we are all brothers!"

Rolf Stücher, Salzburg, Westerwald

The "Women's Question" and "Love for Our Brothers and Sisters"

The "women's question" has already brought so much strife and brokenness into God's church. Can it be God's will for us to bash each other's heads in over such disputed questions? Every one of us would say: "Of course not!" Then why is it the sad reality?

In our afterword we want to plead passionately for creating platforms where people can discuss and share with one another in a spiritually loving and constructive way, even about such difficult topics as this one. We experienced this at a meeting with Hans-Jörg, his wife Christine, and mutual friends. Despite partly different views on the "women's question," we left the conversation full of gratitude and joy at having such dear brothers and sisters. We experienced how the following Bible passage was lived out:

"I give you a new commandment: Love one another! You are to love one another as I have loved you. By your love for one another everyone will recognize that you are my disciples" (John 13:34-35)

In our church, too, the discussion about the role of women is now coming up. We are a small and young bunch – almost everyone is between 20 and 40 years old. In addition, we have been given very different doctrinal backgrounds to take along on the way. Humanly speaking, none of these are easy conditions. On top of that, young people are usually even more extreme in their convictions than older, more mature Christians. Thank God, what is impossible for us is possible for HIM. After all, we may count on the loving guidance of the Holy Spirit! In our church we keep reminding ourselves that we are to have the same mindset as Jesus: Always keep the other person and his needs in focus, be humble and not self-righteous!

If one wants to engage with this topic in a constructive way, which is what we intend to do, it seems essential to us to consider two things: First, we must keep reminding ourselves what weight the "women's question" has compared with "love for our brothers and sisters." God will not be pleased if we place our doctrinal convictions above the many commands to love one another in very practical ways. We have resolved that in our upcoming discussion this love should work itself out in such a way that we do not act over the consciences of our brothers and sisters, and that we take our bearings from the one who is weaker. Second, we want to examine the texts as impartially as possible, to be open to critical questions as well, and to reflect honestly on ourselves. Perhaps we will come to the shared realization that the interpretive traditions we have lived by so far do in fact need correcting. In the end we know that a fruitful exchange can only come about if everyone is open to God's guidance and ready to engage with the topic and with one another.

But there is one thing we always want to have at the very top of our list of priorities:

Let us make it our main task to live out our common commission to love one another in very practical ways!

Let us win people for Jesus through the way we treat one another, for that is why we are here!

Helen & Matthias Dünser, Missen i. Allgäu

13.3 Change

We have known Christine and Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf since December 2015, when they shared their missionary vision of "Kirche für Alle" (Church for All) with us. Side by side, together with them and a team, we built up the initiative "Kirche für Alle e.V." and since then have held many creative, evangelistic events in public places in Kempten. In these five years of shared leadership, we have gotten to know each other intensively and personally as couples and as families.

When we got to know the Ronsdorfs, Hans-Jörg was already in the middle of a spiritual change. God had touched his heart and was shaking deep-rooted patterns and convictions. We were able to witness this process of change live. That was exciting above all because only a year earlier, working together with us would have been unthinkable because of his theological convictions.

During these years we have come to greatly value Hans-Jörg's enthusiasm for the Bible, his background knowledge, his love for God, and his honesty in wrestling with fundamental theological questions. He is more committed to God than to the opinions of others, and he does not shy away from critical topics. It is his background, his church history, and precisely this authentic attitude that make his engagement with the challenging topic "The Role of Women in the Bible" so special, exciting, and worth reading.

This book does not get tangled up in theological micro-perspectives, but from a good cruising altitude it draws historical, cultural, and biblical connections that put the interpretation of hard-to-understand Bible passages in a new light. "Women, Forgive Us!" calls us to put our own patterns and theological insights to the test – and women deserve that. With great respect for the topic, we were

privileged to witness this book come into being, and we are grateful for this courageous book and above all for the many deep and good conversations along the way. Thank you, Hans-Jörg and Christine.

Tobi and Daniela Stricker, Wiggensbach near Kempten im Allgäu

14 Closing Argument: Is the Women's Question So Important?[138]

A sister pointed out to me that this question is not (only) about theology. It is about people. It is about girls and women and their dignity and recognition. As a man, I look at this whole topic from the male perspective, which does not directly reproduce the voice of women, but speaks up for them.

I fear that this hierarchical religious structure (complementarianism) has wounded or destroyed something in many women. The few responses to my book confirm this assessment. The number of unreported cases will be higher, especially when I think of young women and girls who grow up in a society of equal rights but are "instructed" in their Christian church environment with ancient role models for the sexes. How are they supposed to deal with this ambivalence?

14.1 It Is Not about a Few (Forbidden) Ministries

To make this clear: It is not primarily about women not being allowed to preach, or to teach, or to lead. Many women have gotten used to this anyway and have lost sight of the possibility that anything about it could ever change. Often they regard these structures and rules as biblical truth for themselves and no longer question these theses themselves. But they should. I would call that a healthy wrestling for the knowledge of the truth, especially when one thinks this knowledge has stood unchallenged since early Christianity. After all, that is true of many topics in the Bible. Sometimes topics have to be spelled out again from the beginning.

The question in the title is an almost exasperated reaction to the fact that with my book (title: "Women, Forgive Us!") and my articles I keep raising these "feminist" questions again and again. In my view, the question is meant to say,

138. This chapter has been added.

or to play down, the following: Sisters have so many tasks and opportunities to contribute and to develop their gifts in the church, in the kingdom of God, and in the family that it surely cannot be discrimination if they are not allowed to preach, teach, or lead. Everyone has his or her place and role, as the creation order has already laid it down.

But if one tries to see the whole picture, it is not about two or three ministries that supposedly do not belong to a woman. It is about the whole image of women that lies behind it. Behind this question of whether it is really so important stands the idea that the woman was created as a (subservient) helper for Adam and is hierarchically assigned, subordinated, or ranked below him. *Here lies the root of the problem from which many (not all) women suffer.* Often imperceptible from the outside, there is an inner, deeply hidden insecurity, a feeling of injustice. When the woman as such is not respected equally with a man. When one is not free in one's thinking, but has to think and act within legalistic limits (what am I allowed to do and what not) that are piously glorified. This view of the role of women leaves many sisters in the Lord with tormenting questions and with self-doubt. They ask themselves why God wanted it this way, as long as it is drummed into them that this is God's plan. If God is good and perfect, why do women experience terrible things in Christian marriages, and in churches limits that cannot be understood with ordinary common sense? *God's commandments are always good, and he wants us to understand their meaning, which (at least in the New Testament) is always evident. But on this question there is no plausibility at all!*

14.2 What Men Feel and Do Not Feel

This is a feeling that we men do not know in this way. Men are rarely the weaker ones. It is time to perceive this and to be sensitive to it. In the mental picture and thinking of some men, it seems impossible to understand these feelings of inferiority in women.

Is the real reason for the high emotions on this topic perhaps less faithfulness to the Bible than one's own pride, because one's leadership role, one's being the head, is being called into

question? Perhaps only subconsciously? That suddenly the wife has the same rights and duties as the husband? If one has seen and lived it differently for decades, then this realization, if it comes at all, is like an earthquake. Not only admitting the error, but adjusting to a different life together. That takes strength. Insight first. But the biblical way leads to life. Always.

14.3 How Do We Read the Bible on the Women's Question?

I know of no topic that is so highly charged emotionally. As if it were a matter of life and death. With topics such as the person of Jesus, his deity, and his work of redemption, that would be understandable. But not with the question of whether women may pray and speak prophetically in the worship service (which Paul takes for granted, if one looks closely, pays attention to the context, and also to the big, overall biblical picture).

How do we read the Bible when it comes to the women's question? *Do we see the whole topic through two (!) verses from 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14? What deformed doctrines would result if we read and judged the Bible on other important doctrinal questions as narrowly, through two verses? And did not bring the whole biblical material into a healthy, plausible relationship and weigh it. After all, that is the only way sound doctrine comes about!*

Then we read like the scribes and think we find eternal life in the Scriptures, but miss encountering the one of whom the Scriptures testify: Christ (John 5:39). The Scriptures that we love so much testify of the one who led women into freedom, to learning, to confessing, bearing witness, and worshiping.

Let us begin to appreciate the whole picture the Bible gives of women, and not interpret it through two misunderstood words of Paul.

14.4 Intuition

Many women sense, when they read the Bible, when they see Jesus and how he treated women, that something is not right. It becomes even harder for them

when they see how the men who are supposed to lead and be the head, or who want to, fail. Although it is precisely to them, as opposed to the women, that God has supposedly entrusted this role. Yet how often it is the wives who pull the chestnuts out of the fire.

That is my perception from the responses to my book. *The title of the book seems to fill a vacuum that is enormous. Bigger than I thought when I decided on this title.*

Now I certainly know marriages – as far as that is possible even for those close to them – where this kind of hierarchy is lived out in love. But is that an indication that hierarchy is then right and holy? Certainly not. How many wrong things do we think and do that we consider right because they somehow work.

Yes, the "women's question" is absolutely important. For it concerns our image of God and our image of humanity. It is about eradicating and correcting every distortion and disfigurement of this image. May God be gracious to us and help us in this task, for the false images are rooted unimaginably deep and, on top of that, appear to many as divine truth. Yet it is a worldly behavior. It is the spirit of the age – not of the twenty-first century in our part of the world, but that of the past twentieth and nineteenth centuries.

If we men want to love our wives as Christ loved the church, then we will love them out of this false and not infrequently discriminatory role and grant and open up for them the place that is theirs in God's creation order.

For the women's question is, at its core, a men's question. We men must question ourselves! For who is responsible for the hierarchical and at times patriarchal reading of the New Testament? *Men have appropriated supremacy in biblical interpretation and believe it is their very own field of expertise. What self-overestimation.* The gifts of the Spirit are not distributed according to sex. Through this behavior, countless gifts in women have been forgotten, suppressed, switched off, overlooked, and dampened. Quenching the Spirit is truly no small matter. After all, it is men who lead churches and set the course – women have no say there, and if they do, then only unofficially through their husbands, who, however, would never admit in their leadership circle that they are following their wife's opinion.

14.5 What I Am Not Concerned With

It is neither about modernizing the church (it is not about rooms and buildings) nor about being up to date. *It is about faithfulness to Jesus – that is faithfulness to the Bible!* Not modernization, but reformation on the women's question, to use this dubious phrase "women's question" one very last time.

It is not about winning a theological debate. The topic is not suited to that, since people (above all the sisters in the Lord) are directly affected, and one's view strongly shapes life, in the church, in the kingdom of God, and in marriage and family.

But still, only a debate, only objection, and only prophetic address can get this topic moving again. Without conversation and constructive dispute, everything will stay as it was.

14.6 Grounds for Separation?

The high emotional level on this question tempts people to act quickly and decisively, which often ends in separation, division, and schism. For some, a divine boundary is being crossed that does not exist for others. What now?

Enduring tensions will work for a while, but since this question involves so much for both sides, in the end there will be no going on together. Unless one can bear whatever the custom in a particular church is. Yes, God also bears a great deal, more than we can imagine, without approving of what is bad.

And so each person must decide for himself or herself. In my opinion it is also difficult, in this tension, to agree on a middle way in which each side meets the other as far as it can in good conscience.

Forgive me if I cannot offer a solution on this topic. Separations are usually bad, but so can compromises be.

14.7 Women Must Stand Up

There are things in life that you can only do yourself. No one can do them for us. Women must set out, recognize their path, and step out of a misunderstood submission. In the large churches there are women who have woken up and recognized that something is seriously wrong in the gender question. Think what you will of these movements, but with Hosea 8:7 I say: *Those who sow the wind will reap the whirlwind.*

Nice girls don't change the world – a true saying. This topic is so entrenched and has become such an untouchable truth that a megaphone is quite appropriate for standing up against it. With other Christian truths that are considered relevant to salvation, people shout loudly too, don't they?

The other option is that everything stays as it is. Only to have to realize on that great day, in the light of his glory, clarity, and truth, that we were wrong, both sexes. The men with their insights and the women with their acceptance of these supposedly biblical truths. Then a great opportunity will have been wasted and lost, forever.

Neither men nor women may be cowardly now! It always costs something to stand up for the truth. *If many courageous Christian women and men had not stood up again and again in church history and swum against the current, where would we be today?* And we know that only too well. Every movement and current in Christianity, and we belong to one of them or another, began through courageous and praying women and men.

14.8 One Day and Now

In eternity this topic will no longer follow us. There will be no more emotion and no more accusations or insinuations. Nor any New Testament whose statements people will argue about. Man and woman will simply be like brother and

sister; hierarchy and one-sided subordination will be history. All of it the past of a fallen world and a disturbed creation order. Sex will no longer play any role at all. In Christ there is neither male nor female (Galatians 3:28). That is how consistently Paul sees it. Let us be his imitators, as he was an imitator of Christ!

Let us already live now, as far as it depends on us, the freedom and the power of this new creation that we have become in the risen and exalted Messiah!

15 Bibliography

Anstey, Stanley Bruce, 2020, Die Rolle der Schwestern in der Gemeinde, www.soundwords.de

Andreas J. Köstenberger, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Ascertaining Women's God-Ordained Roles: An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:15

Bauer, Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament

Baum, Armin, Die Bibel und ihre schwierigen Stellen

Beale, Gregory K., 2011, Der Tempel aller Zeiten, Die Wohnung Gottes und der Auftrag der Gemeinde, Oerlinghausen

Bielefeld, Frauke, 2007, Die Sache mit der Rippe, Die himmlische Idee von den Geschlechtern, Asslar

Bird, Michael F., Bourgeois Babes, Bossy Wives, and Bobby Haircuts: A Case for Gender Equality in Ministry (Fresh Perspectives on Women in Ministry) 2012, Grand Rapids, Mi

Carolyn Osiek; Margaret Y. MacDonald; Janet H. Tulloch. A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity

Clouse, Bonnidell and Robert, 1989, Women in Ministry, Downers Grove

Cunningham, Loren; Hamilton, Joel David, 2014, Warum nicht! Frauen in christlich-kirchlichen Führungspositionen, Altensteig

Dale, Felicity, 2014, The Black Swan Effect, A response to gender hierarchy in the church

Dangendorf, Daniel, 2010, Junia, die erste Apostelin? Eine exegetische Studie, MBS Texte

Bode van het heil in Christus 140 (1997) Frage & Antwort: "Was dürfen Frauen?"

Gooding, David, Symbole und Zeichen von Autorität und Herrlichkeit

Hardmeier, Roland, 2013, Himmelstöchter! Warum die Stärke der Frau in der Bibel gebraucht wird. Und warum das biblisch ist. Basel

Hempelmann, Heinzpeter, 1997, Gottes Ordnungen zum Leben, Lahr

Hohage, Jäger, Pletsch, Ziegeler, 2010, Frau sein, Mann sein in der Gemeinde, Dillenburg

Junker, Reinhard, Genesis 1 und 2: Zwei sich ergänzende Schilderungen vom Anfang, Wort und Wissen Diskussionsbeitrag 1/91

Hausoul, Raymond, Mannen en Vrouwen in Gods schepping

Keener, Craig S., Was Paul For or Against Women in Ministry?

Kiermeier, Gerhild, 1993, Den Frauen aber sage ich, Marburg

Kubsch, Ron, Gottebenbildlichkeit und Sünde

Kuen, Alfred, 1998, Die Frau in der Gemeinde, Wuppertal

Lapide, Pinchas, 2004, Ist die Bibel richtig übersetzt? Gütersloh

Lapide, Pinchas, 1995, War Eva an allem schuld?

Liebi, Roger, Genesis 2: Die Schöpfung des Menschen

Linder, Irmgard, 1995, Ich will aber, dass ihr wisst, Dillenburg

Logos Bible Software

Nunn, Philip, 2018, Sollten Schwestern schweigen, Hünfeld

Ortberg, John, 2006, Die Frau schweige, Holzgerlingen

Peppiatt, Lucy, 2020, Rediscovering Scripture's Vision for Women: Fresh Perspectives on Disputed Texts, IVP Academic, Downers Grove, Illinois

Peppiatt, Lucy, 2015, Women and Worship at Corinth: Paul's Rhetorical Arguments in 1 Corinthians, Eugene, Oregon

Peters, Benedikt, Das Weissagen der Frau

Pierce & Groothuis, 2005, Discovering Biblical Equality, IVP Academic, Downers Grove, Illinois

Piper, John and Wayne Grudem, 1991, Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, Crossway Books, Wheaton, Illinois; German: Zweimalig einmalig – eine biblische Studie, 2008, Friedberg

Ruthven, Jon Ph.D., Women and Ministry: Does Scripture Contradict Itself?

Schirrmacher, Thomas, 2002 edition, Paulus im Kampf gegen den Schleier, Eine alternative Auslegung von 1. Korinther 11,2-16, Nürnberg

Schmalenbach, H., 2007, Frausein zur Ehre Gottes: ... im Kontext verschiedener Kulturen

Schmidt, Veronika, 2019, Endlich gleich, Holzgerlingen

Smith, Kern, 2000, OHNE UNTERSCHIED, Frauen und Männer im Dienst für Gott, Brunnen Verlag, Gießen

Stadelmann, Helge, Die Frau als Pastorin – Ja oder Nein?, and Die Frauenordination – Ein Testfall für Bibeltreue?

Steinmeister, Andreas, 2013, Wann immer ihr zusammenkommt, Daniel, Lychen

Steinmeister, Andreas, 1991, UNBEQUEM, Gottes Plan für Mann und Frau, CSV Hückeswagen

Spencer, Aída Besançon, 1985, Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry,

Späth, Thomas / Beate Wagner, (eds.), 2006, Frauenwelten in der Antike, Geschlechterordnung und weibliche Lebenspraxis, Stuttgart

Strauch, Alexander, 2001, Die Revolution der Geschlechter, Bielefeld

Trenkel, Michael, 2017, Dürfen Frauen in der Gemeinde lehren? Kurzauslegung zu 1Tim 2,11-15

Ulm, Christoph, Die Rolle von Mann und Frau

Walton, J. H., 2001, Genesis, The NIV Application Commentary, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI

Weber, Karl-Heinz, 2007, Mann und Frau nach Gottes Plan, Neustadt

Welt und Umwelt der Bibel, 4/2025, Wer waren die ersten Christinnen

White, Joel R., Ehefrauen in den paulinischen Gemeinden

Wilson, Bunny, 1992, Ich? Mich unterordnen?, Bielefeld

Wunderli, Armin, 2020, "ihm gegenüber": Geschlechter-Gleichberechtigung in der Kirche und was die Bibel dazu (nicht) sagt KSH.Digital

Zens, Jon, 2010, What's with Paul and Women? Unlocking the cultural background to 1 Timothy 2, Lincoln, Nebraska

16 Books by the Author

Und die Toten leben doch (And Yet the Dead Live), 1992

Seitenwechsel, Von Adam zu Christus (Changing Sides – From Adam to Christ), 2011

Entrückung, Himmel, Ewigkeit, Ein neuer Blick auf alte Themen (Rapture – Heaven – Eternity – A New Look at Old Themes), 2015

Gottes Lamm, Golgota und die Ewigkeit (The Lamb of God – Golgotha and Eternity), 2015

Fantastische Himmelwelt, Lehre und Leben der Himmelwelt im Epheserbrief (Fantastic Heavenly World – The Teaching and Life of the Heavenly World in Ephesians), 2016

Gott spricht, Eine erklärende Übertragung der allgemeinen Briefe und der Offenbarung (God Speaks – An Explanatory Rendering of the General Letters and Revelation), 2017

Epheser, nacherzählt, erklärt, für heute (The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians – Paraphrased, Explained, for Today), 2018

Gods good Gospel, Gottes gutes Evangelium (God's Good Gospel), 2019

Markus, nacherzählt, erklärt für heute (The Gospel according to Mark – Paraphrased, Explained, for Today), 2019

Galater, nacherzählt, erklärt für heute (The Letter of Paul to the Galatians – Paraphrased, Explained, for Today), 2020

Die Briefe des Johannes, nacherzählt, erklärt für heute (The Letters of John – Paraphrased, Explained, for Today), 2020

Frauen, vergebt uns! Kurzversion (Women, Forgive Us! – Short Version), 2022

Ein König voller Pracht – Die gute Botschaft von Jesus, dem Messias (A King Full of Splendor – The Good News of Jesus, the Messiah), 2022

17 Recommended Books



German edition available in bookstores or directly from the editor, Christian Beese: christian@rvbeese.de

Katharine C. Bushnell (1855–1946) was a courageous and gifted servant of God who had made the verse "I can do all things through him who gives me strength" the motto of her life. She was a physician, missionary, ambassador of the cross, reformer, author, and speaker, as well as a brilliant and original scholar who spoke seven languages and had mastered ancient Greek and

Hebrew. Bushnell left medicine to do what she considered even more important work, namely changing people's degrading living conditions by taking on a leading role in the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) of the nineteenth-century women's movement. The biblical position of women was of great importance to Bushnell, since she came to the conclusion that mistranslations were responsible for the social and spiritual subjugation of women. In 1896 she left the WCTU to devote her remaining years to the task of writing and passing on the biblical truth of God's original and unchanged intention of the full equality of women.

God's Word to Women by Katharine Bushnell is a groundbreaking study that carefully examines every passage of Scripture about women. Jessie Penn-Lewis said that this material had opened up Scripture in a way that can only be described as a revelation directly from God. For many today, it is the book that has given them the freedom to be what God has called them to be, and to do the work that the Holy Spirit has placed in their hearts.

During her time as a missionary doctor in China, Bushnell discovered that the Chinese Bible had been mistranslated in a way that reinforced cultural prejudices against the ministry of women. She wondered whether the same male prejudices might also be affecting the English translations, and she deepened her study of Hebrew and Greek. Later, while traveling all over the world for the WCTU, she used the hours on trains, on ships, and in the lodgings where she stayed to compare the Bible translations carefully with the wording in the original languages.

Through experience and study, God prepared Katharine Bushnell to write God's Word to Women. Begun in 1908 as a correspondence course, it was first self-published by Bushnell. Despite early positive reactions, the book soon disappeared again; and Bushnell died believing that her life had had little impact. But God knew better! The book was rediscovered and continues to be published by those who recognize its inestimable value. Today it is at last receiving the well-deserved recognition as a foundational literary source for those working on the front lines of the biblical equality of women.

Hanna-Maria Schmalenbach

Frausein zur Ehre Gottes (Being a Woman to the Glory of God)

In jeder Kultur anders? (Different in Every Culture?)



God created human beings as man and woman. In doing so, did he also give them a creation order that defines being a man and being a woman and regulates the relationship of the sexes timelessly for all cultures? What role does

human sin play; what role do cultural influences play? And what changes in the relationship between the sexes can we expect through salvation in Jesus Christ?

People are still wrestling with these and similar questions today, above all with regard to the position of women and their scope for action in the church. Being a woman to the glory of God – that is the wish of many women! But what does that mean in concrete terms: something different in every culture?

Hanna-Maria Schmalenbach traces the biblical image of women in the context of salvation history and against the background of the cultures of that time. This yields surprising insights and guidance on how women in the cultures of our time can shape their lives to the glory of God.

"… (it) can offer guidance, but also explosive material for our churches."

Heike Heun in Idea Spezial 7/2021, Buchjournal

"By far the best book on the role of women in the church … The comprehensive, objective treatment of the topic, the logical structure, the consideration of culture, and the connection to practice are some of the strengths of this book. For the first time, through this book, I have truly found peace when it comes to my role in the church. A valuable and convincing contribution to an important, current topic that absolutely should be read by men and women in our churches!"

Marianne Müller on her blog strickleserl

"Definitely the best and most convincing work on the 'women's question' that I have come across so far!"

Review by a customer

"… one of the wisest books on the 'women's question,' which can help us rediscover our role as women."

Monika Kuschmierz in the magazine Joyce

"No study of the ministry of women in the church combines insights from the perspectives of human medicine, intercultural studies, history, and the Bible as

well as that of Dr. Schmalenbach. Anyone who takes this study seriously will have to rethink his position on the ministry of women. No one who has to deal with this question should pass this account by."

Dr. Helmuth Egelkraut (1938–2018)

Neufeld Verlag

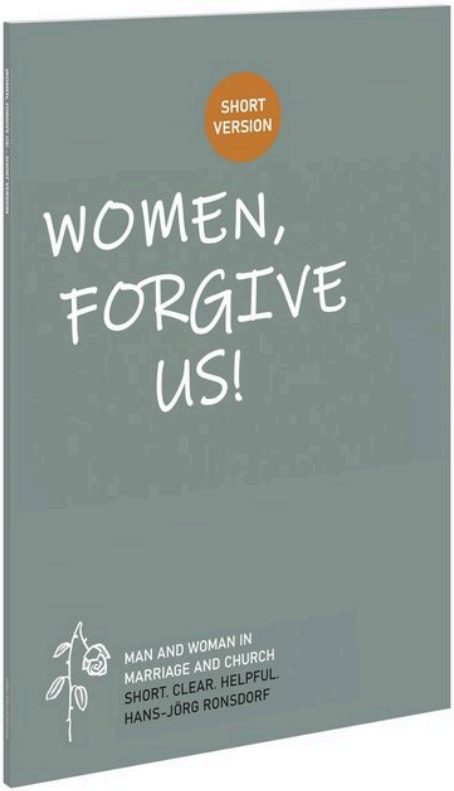
Sauerbruchstraße 16

27478 Cuxhaven

Phone: 04723 5057260

Email: info@neufeld-verlag.de

The short version of this book (in German), in a new text version with 80 pages, is available from the author for 3.80 euros (www.hans-joerg-ronsdorf.de) and as a Kindle eBook on Amazon.



Die Gleichstellung von Mann und Frau (English original: "The Bible Teaches the Equal Standing of Man and Woman") is a short but thorough work by the theologian and linguist Philip B. Payne, who shows from all the relevant Bible texts that man and woman have equal standing, in marriage, church, and society.

56 pages, July 2023 (German edition), available in bookstores or from the German translator: hj-ronsdorf@t-online.de, as a Kindle eBook on Amazon


DIE GLEICH
STELLUNG
VON MANN
UND FRAU
AUS SICHT
DER BIBEL
PHILIP B. PAYNE