

Introduction

The Backdrop

Reading Paul will never be an easy task. His letters contain challenges for any reader, be they a scholar, lay Christian, or outsider to the Christian faith. The questions surrounding Paul's views on women—particularly in relation to the place women occupy in the church and in worship services—are the source of much controversy. The exegesis of certain passages in Paul touches theological, ecclesial, and pastoral concerns. What is our theology of man and woman? How does this shape our practices in the church? What impact does this have on individuals, relationships, marriages, families, and society? This topic will inevitably evoke strong responses: theological, ecclesial, and pastoral issues are never approached in a detached and objective manner, because too much depends on the outcome. These matters concern how we live our lives together, what our relationships look like, who our leaders and ministers are, and how they behave. These matters take us into questions of authority and power, who exercises power over whom, and how it is implemented. This was not lost on Paul, and these themes emerge in his letters to Corinth. His letters to the Corinthians are directly concerned with issues of authority, power, discernment, wisdom, self-sacrifice, and what it means to be identified with the crucified Christ. Inevitably this includes how men and women behave towards one another, what marriages look like, how the rich treat the poor, and how the church treats those who do not belong. Furthermore, these are not concerns that were only relevant to the first-century church. They are current. In a church where there are often troubled gender relations, what can Paul's letters teach us about how we should treat one another today?

The First Letter to the Corinthians was written in a particular context at a particular time to a particular community addressing their own

problems and challenges, mistakes, doctrinal errors, and blind spots. Paul initially spent eighteen months in Corinth evangelizing, teaching, pastoring, discipling, nurturing, and establishing the church. He then left Corinth and set out for Syria with Priscilla and Aquila. Paul arrived in Ephesus where he stayed for a short time and then left, but promised to return to them if God willed. Priscilla and Aquila stayed in Ephesus and Paul went on to Caesarea, Jerusalem, and Antioch (Acts 18:18–22). After ministering to the churches in Asia Minor, Paul then returned to Ephesus, where he stayed for two years. While he was there he began to hear reports about the Corinthian church that caused him some concern and were the occasion of his first letter to the church, which we know about (1 Cor 5:9–11) but which unfortunately no longer exists. Disturbing reports continued to reach Paul from “Chloe’s people” informing him of divisions, jealousy, strife, and immorality within the church. Not only this, but he heard of Christians taking their fellow believers to court where “pagans” would pass judgment on spiritual matters instead of the believers resolving them privately in a godly manner. He heard of selfish and ungodly behavior during the Lord’s Supper. He became aware of their faulty thinking regarding food sacrificed to idols, sex, marriage, the use of spiritual gifts, the resurrection, and the behavior of women in worship. Three men from Corinth—Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus—arrived bringing a letter in response to Paul’s letter, the response to which is our 1 Corinthians.

The letter is written to admonish the Corinthians for ways in which they have begun to depart from Paul’s original teaching and practices, and is a response to their reply to his original epistle. Paul is writing to them regarding certain practices that have become acceptable or normative in his absence, and he is using this letter and his apostolic authority to correct them on certain matters, both theological and pastoral. Their thinking and their practices had drifted away from his original teaching and guidance. Despite assuring the Corinthians that this letter is not written to shame them, but to admonish them as dear children (1 Cor 4:14), it contains many a strong rebuke. For the most part, Paul’s corrections are not mild suggestions, but forthright and authoritative directives. First Corinthians does not simply contain the words of a mild-mannered avuncular pastor, but is delivered as a powerful and uncompromising epistle from an apostolic overseer of a young and misguided church, and the Apostle Paul does not pull his punches. Tertullian writes, “the whole first epistle was written . . . not with ink but with gall. It is passionate, indignant, scornful, threatening,

harsh; and with respect to each of its various charges, it is directed against certain individuals as chief offenders.”¹ Gordon Fee also argues that 1 Corinthians is more than a mild corrective. “[T]he language and style of 1 Corinthians are especially rhetorical and combative. Paul is taking them on at every turn. There is little to suggest that he is either informing or merely correcting; instead, he is attacking and challenging with all the weapons in his literary arsenal.”² The force of Paul’s argument is significant, as is his perception that his teaching has universal import. Paul informs them that he is planning to send Timothy to remind them of his “ways in Christ as he teaches them everywhere in every church” (1 Cor 4:17), so that they might become imitators of him. Although written in a specific context, we may infer that this teaching is not simply context specific.

This book deals with 1 Corinthians 11–14, and more specifically, three controversial and confusing passages found within these chapters: 11:2–16; 14:20–25; and 14:33b–36. The four aforementioned chapters as a whole are concerned with orderly worship. Two of the passages concern the conduct of women, and one concerns the use of spiritual gifts and the outsider. All these passages contained within this section are marked by what has been variously identified as tense thought, contradictions, double-mindedness, inconsistencies, and bewildering references throughout. All of them are directed to a congregation that Paul is concerned to correct, and are certainly context-specific, and yet, in most churches, we read the letter to the Corinthians as if it has something to say to *us* today in terms of guiding and shaping *our* lives together. The question of how we read these passages is not simply a dry and academic question. Those who believe that the Bible contains authoritative instruction for Christians in the present are not really at liberty to ignore these passages. They not only touch on the lives of Christians today, but they continue to influence them. The task of interpretation, therefore, is ever with us, and as these passages are still employed as guiding passages for church life and practice, we should be seeking as much clarity as possible.

1. Tertullian, *Treatises on Penance*, 90–91.
2. Fee, *Corinthians*, 5–6.

The Argument: A Summary

In December 2011, I attended a conference at King's College London on Douglas Campbell's work on Romans. I heard arguments for and against his work. Scholars remain divided as to whether Campbell has indeed opened a door to a whole new perspective on Romans; however, his insights into Paul's theology and his research on Paul's use of rhetoric must now be taken into account. Engaging with Campbell's work, I was specifically struck by the possibility that Paul might, at times, use diatribal argumentation in order to make a point, and that he might be doing so more than we realize. Where else might Paul cite his opponents in order to refute them? It is already universally accepted that he quotes some Corinthian slogans in 1 Corinthians in order to make a point. These verses include 6:12, 13; 7:1; 8:1, 8:4; 10:23; and 15:12. It is also recognized that he is responding to a written letter from them (i.e., he is in a "conversation" already). If he had a letter in front of him outlining their thoughts and practices, both of which he wished to correct, might he not have referred to this at greater length in his response? As I explored this possibility in relation to the three passages in chapters 11–14, I began to see a pattern emerging in the text. As I compared 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 with 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36, I found that other scholars have for some time been arguing that Paul was using a rhetorical strategy in the latter passage to argue against the Corinthian men who were trying to silence (possibly married) women. The passage on tongues and prophecy in 14:20–25 is similarly a source of great confusion, containing as it does an apparently inherent contradiction. What if Paul was using a strategy throughout 1 Corinthians 11–14 where he cites his opponents' views from their letter in a more extended fashion in order to refute them, and what if he was doing this more than had previously been acknowledged?

In this book, I argue that Paul is doing precisely that. Although the argument—that Paul is using rhetoric against his opponents—has been proposed by individuals in relation to each of the texts mentioned above, no one has yet explored a possible connection between the three texts, and the possibility that Paul may be using a rhetorical strategy more extensively in this section. That Paul uses rhetoric in his letters is undisputed. That he uses a particular form of rhetoric in these three passages has not yet been generally accepted. I explore the possibility that within 11:2–16, 14:20–25, and 14:33b–36 there are Corinthian ideas, expressions, and theology that have been incorporated and woven into the text among Paul's own ideas,

expressions, and theology, and that Paul has done this in such a way as to construct powerful Pauline arguments *against* the Corinthian practices of head coverings for women, speaking in tongues all at once, and banning married women from speaking out in worship services. I demonstrate that reading Paul in this way not only yields coherent arguments within each passage itself, but that these arguments then accord with the letter as a whole, and with the theology found in the wider Pauline corpus. There are, therefore, many reasons, both negative and positive, for exploring a new solution to these passages.

i. The confusion of the texts

The first reason to revisit these texts is the confusion generated, evident both within the texts themselves and in attempts to bring harmony and sense out of them. Within Paul's section on public worship, we find these three passages that mostly confuse, bewilder, and challenge the reader. Making sense of these passages for any reader, scholar or otherwise, is hugely challenging, and they absorb the commentators with their exegetical possibilities and puzzles. They are riddled with inconsistencies, contradictions, and confusing messages and are marked by serious textual and exegetical problems. Yet, despite a plethora of problems with the text, theologians, biblical scholars, and churchmen and women alike continue to hold doggedly to the notion that these verses in their entirety reflect *Paul's* views. The bewildering corollary to this is that those who hold these views begin by admitting their own and everyone else's inability to make sense of the passage under consideration, then go on to outline the astonishing array of interpretations of the terms used within the passage, before finally offering their own interpretation of how it might possibly be read as a coherent whole.

One can find those who attempt to "make sense" of these passages often engaging in elaborate speculation as to the original meanings of words or phrases (sometimes even proposing that Paul uses the same word with two different meanings in sentences that occur one after another). Others give up trying to make sense of Paul and simply state that he must have been confused himself, and still others—in relation to the women passages—just accept (either cheerfully or disgustedly) that Paul was blatantly patriarchal or possibly just a misogynist. In relation to all three passages there is a staggering lack of consensus among scholars as to what Paul might actually have been trying to convey, with New Testament and Pauline experts

coming to radically different conclusions from one another. What this book has in common with those who try to bring harmony to these passages is that it attempts to demonstrate that Paul is not only a coherent thinker, but that he is attempting to convey deep spiritual truths in his epistles. Part of what I endeavor to show in this volume is that most attempts to make sense of these passages as examples of Pauline thought in their entirety do, in fact, fail on one count or another. This should spur us on to seek better solutions.

ii. Paul's overall message to the Corinthians

Not only is there internal confusion in the texts, but most of the explanations offered do not agree very easily with Paul's wider thought, both in the letter, and in the Pauline corpus. The first letter to the Corinthians is concerned primarily with addressing disunity among the body, which has been sown by the arrogant, the puffed up, and the immature. Paul enjoins them to make "love" their aim, articulating with great vision and precision what this might look like among them in 1 Corinthians 13, but also throughout the letter. As we have noted, there are many themes in 1 Corinthians: sexual purity, marriage, idolatry, rivalries, secularism, and much more. This volume is concerned with Paul's view on unity in public worship, and how his view of Christlike love is translated into concrete practices within the church. If we begin with the uncontested claim that Paul sees the Lord's Supper as a place where the rich and the well-fed should make way for the poor and marginalized, we begin to see Paul's emphasis here, which runs throughout the letter, that the call to Christlikeness should be lived out by taking the lower part and preferring others. The "higher" the calling in the body of Christ the greater the call to humility, with apostles leading the way down. Paul's own life of apostleship is marked by public shame and dishonor, about which he is clear: apostles are the scum of the earth, a public spectacle. One of the tasks of the exegete is to clarify the role of the passage in the context of the whole epistle. In the light of these observations, we need to be clear, therefore, about what precisely Paul might be saying in chapter 11, for example, if we think that he is now suddenly concerned with establishing or maintaining boundaries based on the glory of men to guard both men and women from "shame" in worship. Similarly, we need to give coherent reasons for why he encourages women to pray and prophesy in public worship while simultaneously telling them to be silent. These are some of the themes that emerge in this book.

Clement, in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, is at great pains to reiterate the theme of submission, humility, subordination, and the importance of all members of the body that he sees in Paul's epistle. This, however, is applied to the entire congregation and not just to the women. "Even the smallest of our physical members are necessary and valuable to the whole body; yet all of them work together and also a common subordination, so that the body itself is maintained intact."³ Moreover, he offers "shining examples" of both men and women of courage and martyrdom to inspire the Corinthians to persevere in their faith, and when citing the story of Rahab, he adds, "Notice, dear friends, how in this woman there was not only faith, but prophecy also."⁴ In the light of these men and women of faith, "it is a moral duty for us to bow the head and take our seat on the stool of submission."⁵ In addition to the theme of submission and humility that Clement brings out so clearly, Paul exhorts the Corinthians to take part in the loving use of spiritual gifts in worship, preferring others, considering the outsider, and elevating prophecy. We explore the implications of the overall message of 1 Corinthians in relation to worship for the reading of our texts.

iii. Paul's wider thought

The third factor in a rereading of these texts includes various aspects of Paul's wider thought. The first, as Judith Kovacs writes in relation to Paul's thought, is that "[t]he confession of faith in the crucified and resurrected Jesus and the hope for his triumphant return have concrete consequences in the here and now."⁶ My premise, therefore, is that Paul's eschatology is not developed as a longed-for future hope to be realized with the return of Christ, but that the coming of Christ into the world, and the gift of the Spirit, has already radically changed human relations in the here and now. With reference to N. T. Wright's work on *koinonia* in Philemon as an ethical challenge affecting both slave and free, and Campbell's work on Galatians 3:28, I argue that what can be claimed for the radically new relations of slave and free, and Jew and Gentile can, *mutatis mutandis*, be claimed for

3. Clement, "First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians," 38.
4. Ibid., 28.
5. Ibid., 49.
6. Kovacs, 1 *Corinthians*, xxi.

man and woman.⁷ It is quite clear that the phrase ἐν κυρίῳ (in the Lord), which occurs both in Philemon 16 and in 1 Corinthians 11:11, describes and frames a radically new existence. It enables Paul to describe Onesimus as no longer a slave, but now beyond a slave—a beloved brother. If we take seriously the impact of the gospel of Jesus Christ for slave and free, and Jew and Gentile, then what are the implications of the radical new existence for men and women as brothers and sisters “in the Lord” and coheirs with Christ? This must be taken into account when explicating a theology of gender in Paul.

iv. A discernible pattern

One of the most difficult questions for those who wish to argue for a rhetorical reading of Paul is how we can divide up the text when there are no visible cues in terms of quotation marks or markers in the text that we are now “hearing” another voice. Having acknowledged this, there are two key discernible patterns worth noting in 11:2–16, 14:20–25, and 14:33b–36. The first is the obvious “breaks” in the text where we know that there is a shift in thinking, or where Paul appears to be contradicting himself. The second is the use of the rhetorical question. In each example we will note Paul’s use of the rhetorical question occurring in 11:13, 14:23, and 14:36. The question that we will be exploring as we look at these passages is this: what answer was Paul expecting by the time he poses these questions to the Corinthians?

v. Where the logic leads . . .

A further problem that this book addresses is the issue of where the logic of these passages leads us if we believe them to be from Paul. I argue that the texts leave us with very little choice as to the thrust of Paul’s argument, in that he clearly perceives his correctives to have universal import. Needless to say, for those who do not see the injunctions of Paul as binding on the church today, this will not be a concern. For those who view Scripture as authoritative for contemporary church practice, however, this issue must be faced. First, there is the clear expectation that worship will include the celebration of the Lord’s Supper and the gifts of the Spirit, including prophecy

7. I refer to Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, and Campbell, *The Quest for Paul’s Gospel*.

and a circumscribed use of tongues. Second, there is the question of what place women have in public worship. In the course of the book, I highlight some of the more problematic issues for consideration regarding the use of head coverings in church, and the prohibition in chapter 14 against women (or married women) speaking in public worship. If we are hearing the voice of Paul and his emphatic corrections to the church, then we should consider how we might adjust our practices accordingly. Alternative views of the texts are that Paul is simply muddleheaded and inconsistent, holding two different views at once, consequently undermining his own authority. All these views are taken into account.

vi. The historical reconstructions

All interpreters of Paul speculate as to the circumstances to which his letters are addressed. All interpretations of 1 Corinthians depend on a particular set of beliefs regarding the situation in Corinth at the time the letters were written. Some of these beliefs are derived from the text itself. Others are then built around the text in order to paint a picture that makes sense of what we cannot immediately grasp from the text itself. There is no interpretation that does not undergo this process of historical reconstruction. Understanding 1 and 2 Corinthians necessarily entails some form of historical reconstruction, although this is where we find ourselves subject to our own and others' predilections, preconceived ideas about Paul, views on men and women, limited knowledge of Graeco-Roman culture, and a whole host of other subjective and elusive factors.⁸ There is no doubt that historical data is very often treated selectively and employed in order to "prove a point," and no work is entirely exempt from this process, my own included. At this stage it should be noted that the process of historical reconstruction is highly problematic. It is, nevertheless, a necessary step in understanding 1 Corinthians. So although we may not shy away from the study of historical data and the process of historical reconstruction, we need to handle historical reconstructions judiciously on the grounds that there is a substantial amount of speculation, prejudice, wish fulfillment, and subjectivity involved in reconstructing the situation in Corinth.⁹

8. See Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, on the inevitability of the subjective nature of interpretation and historical reconstruction.

9. Holmberg makes the point that we must engage with historical data in our study of Corinthians, even though it is problematic. We cannot divorce the meaning of the text

In the case of 11:2–16 and 14:33b–36, historical reconstructions based on a traditional reading of Paul are universally based on the assumption that there is a problem with the women, rather than a problem with the men. Most commentators take part in the process of “imagining” what might have been the case in Corinth when we attempt to piece together the text in conjunction with what we know of the culture. We are asked to imagine all kinds of scenarios in order to make sense of Paul’s thought, but all are predicated on the assumption that it is the women who are rebellious and noncompliant. I question, however, whether it really is easier to imagine a group of wild and rebellious women who are so uncontrollable that they need the intervention of the apostle than it is to imagine the existence of a group of spiritually gifted and highly articulate male teachers who were both overbearing and divisive men. I propose that in a relentlessly patriarchal society, it is more plausible to believe the latter might be the case, that under the men’s influential leadership, certain oppressive practices had been implemented, and other destructive and selfish practices had remained unchallenged.

If this is the case then Paul addresses a number of problems in the public worship. The first is that women are being made to veil themselves when praying or prophesying, and being made to do so in a coercive manner. The second is that the self-appointed male leaders are behaving selfishly and greedily at the Lord’s Supper. The third is that the Corinthians (or some of them) are exercising spiritual gifts in a way that is unloving and unhelpful, possibly preventing others from taking part in bringing prophetic words, hymns, and revelations to the gathering, acting independently, or ignoring some parts of the body. The fourth is that the “spiritual” tongues-speakers have implemented a strange practice of babbling in tongues all at once on the grounds that they believe this is a powerful witness to unbelievers. The fifth and final problem is that the male leaders are subjecting married women to the requirement of remaining silent.

We know that Paul thought that their meetings were doing more harm than good. The section on worship includes at its heart 1 Corinthians 12:31b–13:13, in which Paul describes the “more excellent way,” the way of love which must underpin all Christian worship and life together lest the church become a discordant and harsh noise to those around. The section begins and ends with two passages on the treatment of women in public worship. Traditionally, these have been read as Paul endorsing some sort

from its historical context. See “Methods of Historical Reconstruction,” 255–71.

of repressive practices in relation to women. I contend, however, that he is saying the *opposite*. If this is true, then what is his point? The community that loves one another as Christ loves, honors women, and gives a voice to the lowest and the least. If we accept a rhetorical reading of these passages it would then mean that Paul begins and ends his section on public worship by addressing the oppression of women, and coming out as strongly as possible *against* it.

A Pauline Church in Corinth?

The questions raised by the three texts in 11–14 must be considered in the context of a wider picture of equality, justice, and caring for the least, highlighted in Paul's censure over their behavior at the Lord's Supper, but permeating his instructions regarding other aspects of public worship. So in addition to preferring the poor at the meal table, *all* (men and women, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile) should be allowed to prophesy, as long as it is done decently and in order; *all* should acknowledge that everyone is needed and appreciated in the body of Christ; all spiritual gifts should be exercised within the primary ethic of love and preference for one another. Paul's rebuke over the unthinking and arrogant use of tongues, and the abuse of the poor and hungry, is consistent with his rebuke over the treatment of women. Tongues had become a divisive weapon, used as a stamp of superior spirituality, rather than a loving gift used to build up the body. Paul warns them that if they speak unintelligible words they will be like foreigners to the ones who hear them (1 Cor 14:11). This defeats the purpose of the Christian community. He is totally uncompromising with the puffed-up Corinthian men who are convinced that they are right on the grounds that they hear from God and are as spiritually gifted as Paul. They are rich, reigning, and boastful, whereas Paul and his companions were a spectacle to men and angels (1 Cor 4:8–13). Paul responds, "If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored" (RSV). Paul pulls his apostolic weight in this matter.

The Scholars' Dismissals

In the following chapters I survey a number of scholars who have considered versions of the argument that Paul employs the rhetorical strategy of

citing his opponents in order to refute their views and who have dismissed such an argument. The reasons given for the dismissals are outlined below, but it is not clear that any of these are yet compelling enough to prevent further exploration of this possibility. In the course of the book, I spell out these reasons in more detail, and explain why I do not consider any of them to be decisive enough to prevent the possibility of a rhetorical reading. In brief, the objections can be summarized as follows:

1. Paul is committed to patriarchy and the silencing of women in church so there is no need to posit an alternative reading to 1 Cor 11:2–16 or 1 Cor 14:33b–36.
2. There is nowhere else that Paul cites his opponents using such long passages.
3. There is no signal within the text itself indicating that he might be referring to a Corinthian idea.

There are those who attempt to reconcile the obvious tensions in the text, which I will discuss below, and those who believe that Paul is simply muddleheaded and inconsistent and who thus reject any attempts to “make sense” of him. In response to point 1 above, as many have now pointed out, these passages are strange when weighed against the obvious reality that many of Paul’s fellow workers were women. In Romans the names Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis are mentioned (Rom 16:6, 12). He was happy with women as leaders of house churches (Lydia in Acts 16:14–15 and Phoebe in Rom 16:1). We know of Priscilla and Aquila, who were both leaders and who both disciplined Apollos in the faith (Acts 18:26), and Phoebe, who led a church at Cenchreae (Rom 16:1). Paul refers to his friend and coworker Junia as an apostle (Rom 16:7). Furthermore, he is clearly happy with women prophesying and praying in public in Corinth, and obviously approving of Philip’s four daughters, who were known as prophets (Acts 21:9). Given the way in which he describes the gift of prophecy as being that which edifies the *whole* church, and given that he elevates the gift of prophecy above the gift of teaching (1 Cor 12:28 is expressed in terms of priority and precedence: *first* apostles, *second* prophets, *third* teachers), it would seem strange for him to implement a contradictory practice that women should stay silent. This poses an immediate problem for the verses on silencing of women.¹⁰

10. Origen responds to the passage in chapter 11 by acknowledging that Paul did allow women to speak, and so defends Paul’s later view in chapter 14 by claiming that there

In response to point 2, it is well known that Paul does indeed cite the Corinthians on occasion in his letters. We cannot decide beforehand that he would not do this more extensively if we then find compelling reasons that he might well have done, especially if this also makes better sense of the text.

In response to point 3, this objection is certainly true. We cannot find any signals in the text itself that indicate Paul is about to quote or refer to a Corinthian idea. This, however, is also true of the other verses that scholars have already agreed upon as representing Corinthian slogans, and even appear in quotation marks in our translated text where there is no such punctuation in the original (see for example 1 Cor 6:12 and 10:23 in the RSV). When faced with complex passages, and such a disconcerting array of interpretations, as we will outline, readers should explore all possibilities. Ultimately they will then have to judge for themselves which reading sounds more “convincing” to them.

must be a difference in the audience that Paul allows for a woman. In this explanation, he differentiates between “church” and other situations. This position has also been adopted by some contemporary churches where women are permitted to teach other women and children, but not men. However, when articulated here by Origen, this position is clearly seen to be riddled with inconsistencies. That a woman should be recognized as a prophet to the nation, but unable to “speak in church” becomes a little ludicrous. So Origen, “Realising that all were speaking and had permission to speak if a revelation came to them (1 Cor 14:30), Paul says, **The women should keep silence in the churches.** Now the disciples of the women, who had become pupils of Priscilla and Maximilla, not of Christ the bridegroom (see Eph 5:31–32), did not heed this commandment. Let us consider what they say fairly as we reply to their specious arguments. Indeed, let us consider their arguments fairly. They say that there were four daughters of Philip the evangelist, and that they prophesied (Acts 21:9). ‘And,’ they assert, ‘if these women prophesied, why is it not appropriate for our prophetesses to prophesy?’ Our response is as follows: First, if you say ‘our women prophesied,’ show us the signs of prophecy in them. Second, even if the daughters of Philip prophesied, they did not speak in the churches—we do not find this reported in the Acts of the Apostles. Nor is this found in the Old Testament. Yes, it is attested that Deborah was a prophetess, and *Miriam the sister of Aaron, taking a drum, led off the women* (Exod 15:20). But you will not find it written that Deborah publicly addressed the people, as Jeremiah and Isaiah did. Nor will you find that Huldah, who was a prophetess, spoke to the people, but only to a one person who came to her (2 Kings 22:14–20). ‘But,’ they will say, ‘the Gospel also mentioned *Anna a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher*’ (Luke 2:36). Yes, but she did not speak in the church. Therefore, even if we should concede, on the basis of a prophetic sign, that a woman is prophetess, still she is **not permitted to speak** in church. When Miriam the prophetess spoke, it was to certain women whom she was leading. **For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.** *And I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men* (1 Tim 2:12).” Kovacs, *1 Corinthians*, 239–40.

A Rhetorical Pattern

Part of the process of discernment must be to consider all the options before us. For this reason, I devote considerable attention to traditional interpretations of these passages, all based on the idea that the entire passage reflects Paul's views. I consider each passage in turn, but reserve the majority of comment for 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 on the grounds that this is a longer and more complex passage than the other two, and that if we can make a convincing argument for a rhetorical reading of 11:2–16, then a similar pattern in the other two passages becomes more obvious. Beginning with 1 Corinthians 11, therefore, I propose that Paul is interlacing different strands of thought and various assertions: his teaching, the Corinthians' mistaken construal of his teaching and their own claims based on a blend of Paul's teaching and their own theology, an exposure of the absurdity and aggression of their practices, and his own response, ending with an apostolic threat should they defy his rulings.¹¹ Elements of this strategy can then be seen more clearly in 1 Corinthians 14: 33b–36 and 14: 20–25.

As we have noted, a mark of all these passages is the ability to confuse the reader. They are often described as being “double-minded.” What if an explanation for this is that there are indeed two “minds” at work? As we have noted, the Corinthians knew the other “half of the conversation.”¹² Either they had supplied it in their letter in the form of the very words that Paul cites back to them, or he is referring to situations that they all know very well. We are coming in at what John Coolidge Hurd has labelled “stage 3” of the process: Paul has written to them, they have written back,

11. The idea that Paul's vocabulary and expression is complex because he would have been using the vocabulary and expression of his hearers as well as his own has been explored by Terence Paige. Paige makes the point in relation to Paul's use of Stoic vocabulary and thought, which we will refer to in due course. Here, however, I wish to note Paige's point about Paul using the language of his hearers for the sake of effective communication. He writes, “The question I wish to raise is *not* whether or not *Paul* thought in Stoic manner; rather, could it be that he is writing to people who themselves use such language, think in a Stoicizing manner, or are impressed with Stoic ideas? Otherwise why does he so frequently use language that appears Stoic, though he operates with different assumptions? After all, the manner of Paul's expression is not shaped solely by his Jewish background and Christian confession, but surely to some extent by the needs of his audience as well? Do not their problems, vocabulary, and level of understanding influence the manner of the apostle's communication with them?” “Stoicism, ἐλευθερία and Community at Corinth,” 209.

12. Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 15.

and this is Paul's response.¹³ It is entirely plausible that there are two voices woven into the text: the Corinthians' voice and Paul's voice. It is also entirely plausible that it is not a case of a simple dissection of the passage into "Paul" and the "Corinthians" on the grounds that they are in the middle of a dialogue. It is more likely, given that Paul lived with them and taught them for eighteen months, that the expressions and thoughts of each party has been influenced by the other. However, if it is possible from the clues in the text to identify whose voice is whose in the letter, and in Paul's overall theology, then it can be demonstrated that Paul is indeed arguing *against* and not *for* certain practices in these passages. I contend that it is precisely that feature which we find confusing and baffling about the texts—namely, their incoherence—that is the clue to understanding them.

A Constellation of Ideas

In 1 Corinthians we are faced with a complex interplay of ideas that has arisen as a result of a relationship between Paul and the church(es) that has been going on for a number of years. The Corinthians have been deeply influenced by Paul's teaching, his ideas, and his personality, but like all Christians, their thinking continues to be influenced by the surrounding culture. The constellation of ideas and practices that Paul confronts, therefore, is likely to be a blend of his own teaching, somewhat corrupted perhaps, ideas from the surrounding culture, and the thinking of the fledgling Christian community itself. It is no wonder that we struggle to extricate "his" ideas from "theirs." They are interwoven. Like all heresies and misinterpretations of orthodox teaching, there are subtle elements of the "right" teaching embedded in the "wrong" teaching, because that is what the wrong teaching is based on in the first place.

This epistle was carefully crafted and written by Paul, but as a response to previously written letters both by him and the Corinthians. It is addressed to people he knows and is already communicating with. They have held to some but not all of his teaching. They have come under other influences. There have been various studies of 1 Corinthians arguing that the Corinthians were particularly influenced by one specific philosophy or school of thought over and above others, be it Epicureanism, Cynicism, Stoicism, Gnosticism, Hellenistic Judaism, or secularism.¹⁴ Instead of mak-

13. See Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*.

14. See Adams and Horrell, "Scholarly Quest for Paul's Church at Corinth," 1–43, for

ing a case here for one particular dominant school of thought behind their ideas, I am suggesting that there are a multitude of influences that have been brought to bear on the Corinthians, one of them Paul's own teaching, and that he and they share phrases and ideas, but have come to use them and apply them in different ways.

The Voice(s) of Paul

The first chapter examines a summary of some of the traditional readings of 11:2–16, noting the labyrinthine nature of scholarly comment on this text, as well as highlighting some of the inconsistencies between the many readings and within the readings themselves. The numerous problems that we find should in themselves cause us to pause before claiming that one or the other of these readings is the “definitive” reading. In the second chapter I explore 1 Corinthians 11:7–16 in more detail, examining the implications that these verses have for a theology of men and women if we take seriously the proposal that these verses reflect Paul's views. In the third and fourth chapters I offer an alternative reading of the text, identifying where I believe Paul is referring to his own ideas, and then to a Corinthian idea, or previously written phrase, or practice, through which he is challenging them to abandon the practice of head coverings as there is “no such custom” in any other church. I include a brief summary of how 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36 aligns with a rhetorical reading of chapter 11. The fifth chapter focuses on the tongues and prophecy passage in 14:20–25, noting similar patterns. The final chapter explores some of the implications for church life and worship if we were to accept a rhetorical reading. Lastly, I have included an appendix indicating where I believe Paul is alluding to a Corinthian idea, phrase, or claim, and where he is speaking with his own voice.

Having established that the entire question of “evidence” is slippery, I will nevertheless offer my own contextual and theological evidence for this reconstruction, as well as demonstrating how it brings a logic to the passages themselves. With regard to textual and linguistic evidence, we will also explore where there are clues for a rhetorical reading. This book does not include a close exploration of any attempt to identify specifically Pauline and/or non-Pauline words or phrases within the text, or an attempt to demonstrate from the grammar or structure of the text where we might be able to identify a non-Pauline voice. It is not my intention to claim that

a brief summary of the history of scholarship.

a rhetorical reading can be “proven” in this way. It may be that some sort of close textual work aimed at separating Pauline and non-Pauline words could be pressed into service in relation to this argument, but close textual work abounds, with predictably varied results, and this is not the goal of this book.¹⁵ Instead, this is written in order to demonstrate the fragility and inconsistencies of the existing interpretations of these three passages while at the same time offering a solution that, although not yet perfect, contains more than enough internal consistency to warrant a hearing, while at the same time harmonizing with the letter as a whole, as well as reflecting Paul’s wider theology and practice.

Paul and Women

In recent years it has become more and more commonplace for theologians and biblical scholars to be candid about their own particular bias or background when approaching a theological topic or a biblical text. It is part of a general recognition that there is no “neutral” or objective reading, as well as contributing to a desire for transparency, that one declares her “colors” from the outset. Autobiographical detail is never insignificant in our reading of any text, and the Bible is no exception. Paul is a highly controversial figure, and his writings so often elicit a strong response. One of the premises underlying this book is that Paul is a brilliant theologian, a man of extraordinary insight, and a careful, deliberate, and scholarly man of God. This is not always people’s view of Paul: he speaks differently to different people.

My own journey towards the great respect that I hold for Paul as a man and a theologian began when I was twenty-four years old. For most of my adult life, I have been part of the evangelical charismatic church, but before that I really had very little to do with the evangelical church, apart from perhaps adopting something of an antagonistic stance. Consequently, I was sheltered from many of the controversies that plague evangelical men and women, and it was only in later life, when I began to study theology, that I discovered what a highly controversial figure Paul was and is, and what emotions he evokes in those outside and inside the church. My recollection is that I was brought up on stories about Jesus, and some of the

15. For the most detailed account of this passage as an interpolation, see Walker, *Interpolations in the Pauline Letters*. Walker argues that the passage is composed of three separate texts, the whole section is an interpolation, and that none of these texts is from Paul.

Old Testament stories and Psalms, but I was never “taught” Paul in Sunday school or church and so in some ways I came to him blissfully ignorant. When I did read the Bible for the first time properly I was an adult and I read it cover to cover. This meant that after the Old Testament, the Gospels came first, followed by Acts, followed by Paul’s epistles. As a consequence, I read Paul through Jesus. Encountering Jesus in the Gospels, I was struck by his love for women and was drawn to it. I was certainly baffled by certain passages in Paul, but I think at that stage I just glossed over them. These strangely negative passages about women seemed to be outweighed in my mind first by the teachings and behavior of Jesus, and then by other passages in Paul’s letters where I saw his passion for mutual respect, forgiveness, and self-sacrificing love between all peoples, including men and women. I recognized that he worked with women, that he expected them to serve in every aspect of church life, and that he sometimes referred to his own experience in feminine terms. I liked him, and over the years, I came to love his writings. Consequently, I am a sympathetic reader of Paul. Against the usual feminist reading of Paul, therefore, I assumed from the outset that as a man who had known Jesus Christ, he was not against women, but indeed, must have been “on our side.”¹⁶ This has been one significant aspect of my approach to Paul.

The second significant experiential factor was that in my journey towards God and into the church, I had encountered the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit. I was struck by how—both in Scripture and in the church life of my experience—the Spirit is poured out on, and pours out gifts on, men and women alike. In practice, there is no gender discrimination in the apportioning of the Spirit’s gifts, so why would there be any division of labor in terms of what is expected of us in God’s kingdom? A pneumatological understanding of calling and vocation leads to an uncompromisingly equitable structure. What disturbed me, however, was that I became more and more aware of the teaching on Paul in evangelical denominations and I realized what a powerful weapon the Bible could be against the participation of women in ministry, and how damaging this has been and is for both men and women inside and outside of the church.

16. For feminist readings of Paul where Paul is understood to be attempting to silence the women, see MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches*, and Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*.

Having personally glossed over the difficult passages regarding women for many years, I found the topic of Paul and men and women became a subject that I was less and less able to ignore.

Gordon Fee's work on Paul and the Spirit was an inspiration to me. With Fee's careful and sympathetic exposition coupled with my own experiences, I saw Paul's emphasis on the work of the Spirit in all his writings, as well as what I believed was his commitment to women in leadership in the church. This view, however, is in stark contrast to those who believe Paul was committed to the subordination of women to men, or to either an exclusively or even an ultimately male leadership in the church. As a result, I also believed that as a church we needed to continue to wrestle with the texts that have been used to prevent women from participating in all ministries and forms of service.

Thus, we have a number of choices when faced with Paul's passages on women. Furthermore, the choices that we have already made regarding the Bible, Paul, and how the biblical voices speak to men and women will color the way we read. There is no escaping this. It may be that you, the reader of Paul, are already convinced that he (a) is committed to patriarchy, (b) is a hopeless and offensive misogynist, (c) holds different views in tension, (d) is confused and oscillates in his thinking, or (e) ruled on certain practices regarding women that were only appropriate to his day and therefore not binding upon us today. This book explores a sixth perspective: that Paul understood that women enjoy a new status in Christ that liberates them, both in terms of their identity in relation to Christ and also in relation to men, and that an appreciation of this new identity led to him implementing practices in the church that allowed women to participate equally in all forms of ministry and service. Not only this, but that Paul believed these views should be reflected within the entire body of Christ.

This book is not only about Paul and women, but also about Paul and his views on the ethics of public Christian worship and how it affects all the participants. This cannot help but shed light on his views on women, but is also linked to his general concern for those of low status in his society.

There are two reasons that I have chosen to focus on a third passage in chapters 11–14, a passage on the use of tongues and prophecy in public worship. The first is that the structure of the passage is very similar to the passages on women in chapters 11 and 14 and thus we can see a pattern emerging in all three. The second reason is that the content of the passage, when read as a refutation of Corinthian ideas and practices, sheds even

greater light on Paul's general rebuke for the Corinthian church, and why he felt the need to intervene. In other words, what is going on between the Corinthians and Paul in the tongues passage is all part of a bigger picture and contributes to how we might understand the overall picture of what he was targeting and why.

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