

Theology Matters

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Editor's Note: Some people have claimed that sexual relationships are a side issue, apart from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They insist that Christians can affirm and practice a wide variety of sexual behaviors without compromising the Gospel. Dr. Ken Bailey demonstrates, in his careful analysis of 1 Corinthians 6, that this assurance is false. Right sexual conduct is an expression of fundamental truths of the Gospel. Attempts to separate sexual behavior from the Gospel deny the Gospel!

By uncovering Paul's use of the Hebrew technique of literary parallelism in which themes are repeated and compared and contrasted, Dr. Bailey shows how biblical sexual ethics are interwoven with the doctrines of Creation, the Trinity, the Cross, the Resurrection, and the Church. Sexual immorality denies the truths of who Christ is, why he came, what he has done, and who we are in light of our redemption in him. The Gospel not only addresses our spiritual lives but it also involves our physical bodies. The two cannot be separated: spiritual and physical, Gospel and sexual behavior.

Dr. Bailey's ground-breaking analysis of 1 Corinthians stems from his extensive Middle Eastern and New Testament studies. Dr. Bailey completed degrees in Arabic Language and Literature, and Systematic Theology with a doctorate in New Testament. Ordained by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Dr. Bailey spent 40 years living and teaching in seminaries and institutes in Egypt, Lebanon, Jerusalem and Cyprus. Dr. Bailey was Professor of New Testament and Head of the Biblical Department of the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, where he also founded and directed the Institute for Middle Eastern New Testament Studies. Dr. Bailey was on the faculty of the Ecumenical Institute for Theological Research in Jerusalem, with the title of Research Professor of Middle Eastern New Testament Studies. In 1990 Dr. Bailey accepted the additional responsibility of Canon Theologian for the Episcopal Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf, residing in Nicosia, Cyprus, and returned a third of each year to Jerusalem to continue teaching at the Ecumenical Institute. Dr. Bailey's area of specialty is the cultural background and literary forms of the New Testament.

"The Women Prophets of Corinth: A Study of Aspects of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16," by Ken Bailey, begins on page 12.

Dr. Bailey's most recent book is *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians* (2011) from which this article is adapted with permission from InterVarsity Press. Dr. Bailey also presented a version of this article at the Presbyterians for Renewal breakfast at the July 2012 PC(USA) General Assembly.

Paul's Theology of Sexual Practice: A Study of 1 Corinthians 6:9-20

by **Kenneth E. Bailey**

Paul tells the Corinthians (4:6) that his intent in this letter is, (literally translated) "that you may learn in us not to go beyond that which is scripture...." The Presbyterian Logo, as you recall, has a dove descending on a book. Our

Reformed tradition rests solidly on *sola scriptura*. Out of this heritage I am honored to be invited to reflect with you on what Paul has to say in I Corinthians 6:9-20.

My thirty-five years of concentrated study on 1 Corinthians has led me to the firm conclusion that Paul is deadly serious when he affirms in the opening of this epistle that he is writing “for the Corinthians” *and* for “all those in every place on whom is called the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That is: This letter is for the Corinthians and all Christians. From John Chrysostom in the fourth century, through Bishr ibn al-Sari in the 9th century to John Calvin in the 16th century and beyond, there is concurrence that Paul means what he says. 1 Corinthians was indeed written to the Corinthians, but at the same time Paul was deliberately addressing *the entire Church*.

This long-endorsed understanding is greatly strengthened when we note that Paul’s letter presents five carefully constructed essays. (**See Study Sheet 1 below.** Note: this sheet is on our website as a single page for ease in teaching).

The five subjects are:

- The Cross
 - Men and women in the human family (sexuality)
 - Christians and pagans
 - Men and women in worship
- The Resurrection

The first essay (on the Cross) and the fifth essay (on the Resurrection) form a pair. The second (on men and women in the human family) and the fourth (on women and men in the church) form a second pair. The climax occurs in the center where Paul focuses on how to live out the Gospel among non-Christians with the goal of witnessing to them without compromise and without giving offence.

Study Sheet 1

Outline of First Corinthians

Study Sheet 1

INTRODUCTION 1:1-9 (For the Corinthians and All Christians Everywhere)

1. UNITY AND THE CROSS 1:10-4:16
 - A. Divisions in the Church (Paul, Apollos and Cephas) 1:10-16
 - B. *The Wisdom of God: the Cross* 1:17-2:2
 - C. *The Wisdom of God: the Spirit* 2:3-16
 - D. Christian Unity (Paul, Apollos and Cephas) 3:1-4:16
2. SEXUALITY (Men and Women in the Human Family) 4:17-7:40
 - A. Immorality and the Church 4:17-6:8
 - B. *Theology of Sexuality: Kingdom Ethics* 6:9-12
 - C. *Theology of Sexuality: Joining the Body* 6:13-20
 - D. Christian Sexuality 7:1-40
3. CHRISTIAN AND PAGAN: Freedom and Responsibility 8:1-11:1
 - A. Food Offered to Idols: Freedom and Responsibility 8:1-13
 - B. Paul’s Personal Freedom and Responsibility 9:1-18
 - C. *Freedom in Mission: Identification* 9:19-27
 - D. *Old Covenant Sacraments and Idolatry: Partial Identification* 10:1-13
 - E. *New Covenant Sacraments and Idolatry: Non-identification* 10:14-22
 - F. Food Offered to Idols: The Responsible Use of Freedom 10:23-11:1
4. WORSHIP (Men and Women in the Church) 11:2-14:40
 - A. Men and Women *Leading* in Worship: Prophets and How They Dress 11:2-16
 - B. Order in Worship: The Lord’s Supper 11:17-34
 - C. Gifts and the Nature of the Body 12:1-31
 - D. *Love* 12:31-14:1
 - E. Gifts and the Up-building of the Body 14:1-25

- F. Order in Worship: Prophets and Speakers in Tongues 14:26-33
- G. Women and Men *Worshippers*: No Talking in Church 14:34-40

5. RESURRECTION 15:1-58

- A. Cross & Resurrection: *The Message and the Validity of Faith* 15:1-20
- B. *Resurrection: Adam and Christ - The End of All Things* 15:21-28
- C. Resurrection and Ethics 15:29-34
- D. *Resurrection: Adam and Christ - The Nature of the Resurrected Body* 15:35-50
- E. Resurrection: *Victory over Death* 15:51-58

PERSONAL NOTES 16:1-23

Mission Funding, Leadership, Greetings, Final Admonitions

These five essays are themselves constructed with great care. Each of them has the same outline. Each essay begins with a reference to *the tradition*. Paul then presents *the problem* under discussion. He continues by laying a theological foundation for the problem. In the light of that theology he offers a second reflection on the problem. He concludes each essay with a personal appeal. One essay concludes with “imitate me.” A second offers “imitate me as I imitate Christ.” A third admonishes, “I think I have the spirit of the Lord.” In two essays Paul includes a summary of the essay in his conclusion. Thus his outline for each essay is:

- Tradition
 - Problem
 - Theology
 - Problem revisited
- Personal appeal

The five problems Paul discusses remain as deep concerns in the Church today. 1 Corinthians can be called Paul’s most contemporary epistle. These brief remarks are focused on the center of the second essay to which we now turn.

1 Corinthians 6:9-12

Chapter 6:9-20 has been described as “somewhat disjointed and obscure.” Reason for this has been found in “the unfinished spontaneous nature of these passages.”¹

Yet it is possible to see this text as a very carefully constructed literary whole that includes two apostolic homilies.² All of the homilies in 1 Corinthians are constructed using short semantic units I have chosen to call “cameos.” (See **Study Sheet 2 below**. Note: this Study Sheet is formatted on a single page on our website for ease in teaching.)

Study Sheet 2

Theology of Sexuality: Kingdom Ethics (6:9-12)

Study Sheet 2

1.^{6,9} Do you not know that the *unrighteous* will not *inherit the kingdom of God*?

THE UNRIGHTEOUS
Not Inherit the Kingdom

2. Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor catamites, nor sodomites.

FIVE SINS
(sexual)

3. ¹⁰nor thieves, or the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers,

FIVE SINS
(non-sexual)

nor robbers

4. will inherit the kingdom of God.
¹¹And such were some of you.

Not Inherit the Kingdom
LIKE SOME OF YOU

5. ^{11b}But you were washed,
but you were made holy (sanctified),
but you were justified

Washed
Made Holy
Justified

6. in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ
and in the Spirit
of our God.

Lord Jesus Christ
Spirit
God

7. ¹² “All things are lawful for me.”
but all things are not helpful.
“All things are lawful for me,”
but I will not be enslaved by anything.

Lawful
Not Helpful
Lawful
Not Enslaved

Here before you is the first of two linked homilies. Paul often chooses to construct a homily out of seven cameos.

(The cameo numbers are to the left and the traditional verse numbers are the raised numbers within the text. The summaries to the right attempt to highlight the major ideas in the cameos.)

Turning to the first of these two linked homilies, Paul opens with:

1. ^{6:9} “Do you not know that the unrighteous
will not inherit the kingdom of God?”

THE UNRIGHTEOUS
Not Inherit the Kingdom

Following this affirmation, Paul presents two lists of five sins. The first list focuses on five sexual sins and the second list records five non-sexual sins. Cameo 2 reads,

2. Do not be deceived;
neither the immoral,
nor idolaters,
nor adulterers, FIVE SINS
nor catamites, (sexual)
nor sodomites.

The word “immoral” (*porneia*) is a broad category that includes casual sex among the unmarried. Idol worship often included sleeping with the temple prostitutes of the city. Adulterers were married people who violated their marriage vows. The last two words refer to the active and the passive in a same-sex conjugal relationship.

Both heterosexual and homosexual sins are condemned.³ There is no indication that one is considered more heinous than the other. The use of the number ten, invoking the Decalogue, is music playing in the background.

The reason for Paul’s special emphasis on sexual sins is obvious. Starting with a case of incest, in this essay he is dealing with the broader topic of sexual practice and the Gospel.

The second list of five sins is presented in cameo 3 and includes:

3. ¹⁰thieves,
the greedy
drunkards, FIVE SINS

revilers, (nonsexual)
and robbers

Paul begins with individual *thieves* and concludes with *robber gangs*. Sadly, “Greedy, drunkards and revilers” focus on the sins of the Corinthians at Holy Communion.

Paul then calmly reminds his readers that these ten sins described their *past*. Corinth was a “tough town,” famous for its debauchery. Paul was a brilliant scholar. At the same time, he was able to communicate the Gospel to the uneducated, tough, immoral flotsam of Corinth. Working as a poorly dressed, itinerant tentmaker would have thrown him in with the trades people of the city. He gained a hearing—but those drawn to the Gospel through his preaching inevitably brought problems with them into their new life in Christ. The phrase “such *were* some of you” indicates that the power of the Gospel had brought healing for *all the sins on his list*.

Paul continues in cameos 5 and 6 by invoking the Trinity. The text reads:

5. a. ¹¹But [*alla*] you were *washed*,⁴
 - b. but [*alla*] you were *made holy* [sanctified],
 - c. but [*alla*] you were *justified*

6. a. in the name of the Lord *Jesus Christ*
 - b. and in the *Spirit*
 - c. of our *God*

The first three lines in cameo 5 all begin with, *alla* (but). The three fold repetition of *alla* (but) is striking. The six lines interrelate through the use of step parallelism. *Washing* (5a) refers to *baptism* which for Paul (Rom 6:3) was “in the *name of the Lord Jesus Christ*” (6a). The phrase “you were *made holy*” (5b) matches “in the [*Holy*] *Spirit*” (6b). Finally, *justification* (5c) for Paul (Rom 8:33) was an act of *God* (6c).

Clearly the Trinity is affirmed in the last three lines with the mention of the Lord *Jesus Christ*, the *Spirit* and *God*. That is, the Trinity is at the heart of new life in Christ.

With a new status in the presence of God in mind, Paul closes this first homily by quoting the reasons the Corinthians were apparently giving to justify their behavior. He wrote:

7. ¹²“All things are lawful for me.”
but all things are not helpful (*sum-pherei*).

“All things are lawful for me,”
but I will not be enslaved by anything.

The first two lines in this cameo focus on loving the neighbor. *Sum-pherei* has to do with “bearing together.” Four people carrying a single heavy box would be described with this word. It was also used to describe a stone built into a well-constructed wall. Each stone needed to “bear together” with the other stones to prevent cracks that would weaken the entire wall.

It is generally agreed that here Paul is addressing the Corinthian libertines, and the lead phrase “all things are lawful to me” may well be his own words used to oppose the idea that the believer can be justified before God by a strict observance of law. Out of context it takes on meanings he did not intend.

How can Paul reply? One simple answer would have been to insist on a rigorous enforcement of the law with its punishments. But to do so would be to deny the Gospel. Instead, he takes their point and then affirms that all things are not “helpful.” All things do not “bear together.” “Christian freedom must be limited by regard for others,”⁵ wrote Plummer over a hundred years ago. The law is not a means of salvation, and the law that matters had been summarized as “the law of Christ.” Orr and Walther, distinguished NT professors at Pittsburgh Seminary, in their Anchor Bible commentary on I Corinthians succinctly observed, “When one loves God, *all things are permissible*; but when one loves God, one loves what He loves... and conduct will be regulated by this love.”⁶

In the second pair of lines Paul utilizes a play on words in Greek. Without burdening you with technical details, over 100 years ago, Plummer aptly caught the Greek word play using the English paraphrase, “I can make free with all things, but I will not let anything make free with me.”⁷ Freedom cannot be allowed to cancel itself. Emancipation from slavery is here affirmed and then expanded in chapter 7. Paul never endorsed slavery: instead he became pastoral with those trapped in it. He urged slaves to “obey their masters” because if they failed to do so, they would have been crucified. At the height of the power of Stalin, no Russian church *published a book* saying “You must overthrow the atheistic Russian government.” In like manner, Paul was not living in a Jeffersonian democracy. “Obey your master” does not mean “I endorse slavery” rather it means, “Right now, for many of you, obeying your master is your best option.”

The first two lines focus on loving the neighbor. The second two lines concentrate on loving God.

To summarize, in this seven-stanza homily Paul affirms the following:

1. Some of the Corinthians had previously engaged in sexual and nonsexual sins that were incompatible with the Kingdom of God. From these sins they had been healed.
2. The three persons of the Trinity are mentioned along with something of their function in the reformation of new believers.
3. All things are indeed lawful, but a Christian must avoid anything that does not build up the community and reject anything that enslaves. They already had a master.

This brings us to Paul’s second homily (6:13-20) on the subject of a theological foundation for sexual practice. (See **Study Sheet 3 below**. Note: This Study Sheet is formatted as one page on our website for ease in teaching.)

Study Sheet 3

1 Corinthians 6:13-20: Theology of Sexual Practice

Study Sheet 3

In this text Paul offers his views in the form of a marvelously structured apostolic homily with ten cameos.

- | | | |
|------|---|---|
| 1. | a ¹³ <i>Food</i> is meant for the <i>stomach</i> ,
b. and the <i>stomach for food</i> “
c. and <i>God both this</i>
d. and <i>that will destroy</i> . | FOOD for STOMACH
God Will Destroy Food
God Will Destroy Stomach |
| 2.a. | <i>The body is not for prostitution, but for the Lord</i> ,
b. and the <i>Lord for the body</i> .
c. ¹⁴ And <i>God raised the Lord</i> ,
d. and <i>will raise us up</i> by his power. | BODY for THE LORD
God Raised: the Lord
God Will Raise: Us |
| 3. | ¹⁵ <i>Do you not know</i>
<i>that our bodies</i>
<i>are members of Christ?</i> | OUR BODIES
In Christ |
| 4. | So <i>wrenching away the members of Christ</i>
shall I make them <i>members of a prostitute?</i>
May it never be! | SIN AGAINST
Christ |
| 5. | ¹⁶ <i>Do you not know that the one joining a prostitute</i>
<i>becomes one body with her?</i> | ONE BODY
With Prostitute |
| 6. | For, it is <i>written</i> ,
<i>“The two shall become one flesh.”</i> | SCRIPTURE
Two - One Flesh |
| 7. | ¹⁷ <i>But the one joining to the Lord</i> | ONE SPIRIT |

becomes *one spirit with him*.

With the Lord

8. ¹⁸Flee from prostitution.
Every other *sin* which a man commits is *outside his body*; SIN AGAINST
but the immoral man sins against *his own body*. His Body
9. ¹⁹*Do you not know*
that *your body*
is a *sanctuary* of the *Holy Spirit* within you,
which you have *from God*? YOUR BODY
Of Holy Spirit
From God
10. You are not your own;
²⁰you were *bought with a price*. CROSS
So *glorify God* in *your body*. With Body
Glorify God

This homily uses what I have named “the high-jump format.” Like a high jump, the homily begins with a *short sprint* (cameos 1-2). Then comes *the jump* (2-5), followed by the crossing of the *bar* (6), and finally there is the *descent* on the far side (7-10). The arc of the *descent* is the reverse of the arc of the *jump*. Isaiah 40-66 contains 14 cases of this format. In 1 Corinthians alone Paul uses this prophetic Jewish style more than ten times.

Amazingly, in this text, Paul builds a foundation for Christian sexual practice on the *Resurrection*, the *Cross*, the *Trinity*, the doctrine of the *Church*, and the doctrine of *Creation*. These five hugely important theological pillars are put in place to support the forms of sexual practice that Paul judges to be in harmony with the Gospel. These he presents in chapter 7. Paul begins with the *Resurrection*. His views on this subject are set out in cameos 1 and 2.

(In the following Study Sheet the related cameos are placed side by side for easy reference.)

Study Sheet 4

- A. **Cameo 1 Food**
a. Food is *for* the *stomach*
b. The *stomach* is *for* *food*
c. *God—destroys stomach*
d. *God—destroys food*

- B. **Cameo 2 (resurrection)**
^{13b}The *body* is not for prostitution but for the Lord,
and the Lord for the body
and God *raised the Lord*
and will *raise us up* by his power.

- C. **Cameo 3**
¹⁵Do you not know
that *our* bodies
are members of Christ

- D. **Cameo 4**
^{15b}So taking away the members of Christ
Shall I make them members of a prostitute?
May it never be!

Study Sheet 4

- Cameo 2 Sex**
a. The *body* is *for* the *Lord*
b. The *Lord* is *for* the *body*
c. *God—raised the Lord*
d. *God—will raise us* (our bodies)

- Cameo 10 (the cross)**
^{19b}You are not your own;
²⁰ *you were bought with a price*.
So glorify God in *your body*.

- Cameo 9**
¹⁹Do you not know
that *your* [pl.] *body* [sing.]
is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit within you
which you have from God?

- Cameo 8**
¹⁸Flee from prostitution!
Every other sin *is* ... *outside his body*
but the immoral man sins against his own body.

Study Sheet 4

- E. **Cameo 5** ¹⁶Do you not know that the one joining a prostitute
Becomes *one body with her*?
- Cameo 6** For it is written,
“The *two* shall become *one flesh*.”
- Cameo 7** ¹⁷But the one joining to the Lord
Becomes *one spirit with him*.

The parallels between the first two cameos are strong, and can be summarized as follows:

Food (cameo 1)	Sex (cameo 2)
a. Food is <i>for</i> the <i>stomach</i>	a. The <i>body</i> is for the <i>Lord</i>
b. The <i>stomach</i> is for <i>food</i>	b. The <i>Lord</i> is for the <i>body</i>
c. God— <i>destroys stomach</i>	c. God— <i>raised the Lord</i>
d. God— <i>destroys food</i>	d. God—will <i>raise us</i> (our bodies)

Each line in cameo 1 is matched with a line in cameo 2. I have chosen to call this style, *step-parallelism*.

Apparently the Corinthians were arguing that food and sex were parallel. It is possible that the first two lines of cameo 1 are quoted from their argument. *They say*, “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food,” noting that both are destined for destruction. Sexual appetites, they seem to have argued, were in the same category because the body dies and the soul is immortal. The Gnostic/Stoic rejection of the body is clearly behind such thinking. Paul had another view.

Using carefully chosen words, Paul wrote: God *raised the Lord* (that is, his body) and he will *raise us* (that is, our bodies). There is a balancing of terms that makes *us* = our *bodies*. The resurrection of the Lord assures the resurrection of the body for believers, and the future resurrection of our bodies is an important reality that must guide how we behave sexually in this life.

James Moffat observes that Paul does not attack sexual immorality as a menace to public health or as a case of psychological unfairness to one of the partners, but as “a sin that strikes at the roots of the personality which is to flower into a risen life.”⁸ In short, if I take my body with me beyond death, then any permanent damage that I inflict on it in this life has eternal significance. Paul is objecting to the *dehumanizing* of sex that takes place when it is turned into a form of entertainment and /or made parallel to food. Paul is rejecting the view that says “I feel hungry—I eat. I feel sexual desire—I sleep with whomever is available.”

The alignment of Paul’s phrases is extremely precise. Paul seems to be saying, “Every Christian must understand that if his or her body is *for* the Lord, it cannot be *for* prostitution at the same time.

Paul continues in 2b by writing, “and the Lord for the body.” Here there is the unmistakable ring of double meanings. The term *body* certainly means the individual body of the believer (this *thing* that I can pinch), but also carries overtones of the community body, the Church. The Lord is *for the body*, and *the body* is both of these. Again and again throughout this text the first meaning shades into the second.

The crucial comparisons are between *the stomach* that will be *destroyed* and *the body* that will be *raised*. The advice given is: Do not damage *the body* with *immorality* because *the body* goes with you beyond death—it *will be raised*. Foods and stomachs are impermanent while bodies are permanent. Human sexuality, he affirms, is part of the inner core of the whole person called *the body*, and that whole person is affected negatively by immorality.

This raises a problem. In 15:43 Paul affirms that the Spirit-formulated body will be raised in “glory” and “in power.” We are encouraged to believe from this language that in the resurrection the broken physical body of a dying cancer patient will be replaced with a Spirit-formulated body that is whole. Is Paul contradicting himself? Or is he discussing mysteries that are beyond both him and us? One beam of biblical light on this problem is the fact that Jesus’

resurrection body was most certainly a new glorious body. Yet he had *scars on his hands and in his side*. Paul seems to be saying “Don’t scar up *your own body with immorality*—because *we are not Platonists*—*your body goes with you!* The *Resurrection is critical for our here-and-now sexual practice.*”

But, cameo 2 is not only related thematically to cameo 1, it is also connected to cameo 10 at the end of the homily. In cameos 2-10 Paul uses *ring composition* (also called *Chiasm*). Cameos 2 and 10 form the first of four connected pairs of cameos. That pair is as follows:

B. Cameo 2 (Resurrection)

^{13b}The *body* is not for prostitution but for the Lord,
and the Lord for the body;
and God *raised the Lord*
and will *raise us* up by his power.

Cameo 10 (the Cross)

^{19b} You are not your own,
²⁰ *you were bought with a price*
So glorify God in your *body*.

As noted, cameo 2 tells of *the body*, and *resurrection*. Cameo 10 concludes the homily with a reference to the price paid on *the Cross* and its significance for “your body.” The “body” that “belongs to the Lord” is central to each cameo and the themes of “Cross and Resurrection” form a complementary pair.

One of the few ways a slave in the first century could gain freedom was for the slave to slowly build up funds in an account in a local temple until that slave managed to save her own price in the slave market. That slave would then be “bought with a price” from his master by the “god of the temple” and would in name become a slave of that god. Actually, he/she would be a free person.

Here Paul unveils an important aspect of the great mystery of the Atonement. The Corinthian slave believer was not set free from bondage to sin and death by painstakingly saving his copper coins one after another for thirty years. Rather, God in Christ died on the cross to set him free. Here and elsewhere (1 Cor 7:23; Gal 3:13; 4:5) the text clearly affirms that God paid a price for the believer’s redemption and that price was the Cross.

Turning to the final phrase in cameo 10, we find a subtle but powerful Old Testament echo. Apart from 1 Corinthians the only other case of incest mentioned in the Bible occurs in Amos where the prophet reports, “A man and his father go in to the same maiden” (Amos 2:7). Apparently the Amos passage is in Paul’s mind because Paul describes the problem using the same language. In both texts it is “a man and his father do so-and-so.” Starting with this identity in topic and language, we observe that Amos affirms the incident of incest and records God’s lament, “so that my holy name is profaned.” The sin was certainly against the woman and against the father, but on a deeper level it was a sin against God, whose holy name was thereby profaned. Amos uses the Hebrew word הלל (to profane). Change the Hebrew hard ה to a soft ה with a slight change in pronunciation or the slightest erasure and you have the word הלל (to praise).⁹ The same is true in the Hebrew script in use at the time of Amos. Amos says, “Your sexual practice has become a הלל (profaning) of the name of God. He seems to infer, “It should have been a הלל [an offering of praise] to a holy God.” Readers with a Jewish background would have caught this verbal and visual play on words. This raises the question: How can the prophet Amos imply with his play on words that intimacy in marriage between a man and a woman is intended to be a hymn of praise to a holy God? Paul gives the answer.

When the biblical author uses “ring composition” and sets out a series of ideas which he/she then repeats backwards, the reader is expected to relate the center of the ring composition to the final cameo and often to the opening cameo as well. In this homily the center cameo (6) quotes from the Genesis creation story. In the intimacy of marriage between a man and a woman, the couple is invited by God to participate with Him in the act of creating a new person. That holy event naturally forms a hymn of praise that brings honor to the name of God. At the same time, when abused, such intimacy can profane that same holy name. By connecting cameo 6 in the center to cameo 10 at the end, it is clear that Paul has both understood and is endorsing Amos’ views. The doctrine of Creation is indeed at the center of the discussion and at the end of the homily Paul calls on his readers to “glorify God in your body.”

We have already noted the double meaning of the word “body.” It refers to this thing that I can pinch. It also means the fellowship of believers called the body of Christ, the Church. The Corinthians were told, “Glorify God in your (pl.) body (sing.)”. No doubt the individual body of the believer is an important aspect of Paul’s focus here in cameo 10, but the communal body of Christ is unmistakably also intended. Defile the human body through sexual immorality and you

defile the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit which is the body of Christ. Because “you (pl.) were bought with a price” such defilement was abhorrent in the extreme.

In summary, in Paul’s mind the *Resurrection and the Cross* provide the larger theological framework within which human sexual practice is to find its appropriate forms of expression. Because of the *Resurrection* the believer knows that her or his body will be raised and sexual intimacy in this life involves that body. Because of the *Cross*, they are bought with a price and expected to participate in sexual intimacy in ways that glorify God and affirm partnership with him in creation. This brings us to the next pair of cameos which is composed of numbers 3 and 9 and is as follows:

C. Cameo 3

¹⁵ Do you not know
that *our* bodies [pl.]
are members of Christ

Cameo 9

¹⁹ Do you not know
that *your* [pl.] body [sing.]
is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit within you
which you have from God?

The familiar diatribe formula “Do you not know” opens each cameo. In the second line (in each cameo) the words are identical except for the shift from “our” to “your.” *My* individual physical body is related to *our body* the church. The doctrine of the Church is now unmistakably introduced into the larger discussion. But there is more.

Together the two third lines can be seen to carry additional theological weight. Here Paul uses complementary images. In the first (3) he tells his readers that they are *members of Christ*. In the balancing cameo (9) he affirms that the “*Holy Spirit* within them” is “from *God*.” The Trinity is again invoked. They are “in *Christ*” and the *Holy Spirit* from *God* is in *them*. Thus the believers are suspended in the heart of the Trinity. They are a *sanctuary* of the *Holy Spirit* from *God* that is present *within them*. At the same time they are *in Christ*.

Not only is the *Cross* and the *Resurrection* important for sexual ethics, the *Church as the body of Christ* and the *Trinity* are also critical to the discussion. To repeat, the *Holy Spirit (from God) is in the body* and *the body is in Christ*. This is a pointed rejection of Epicurean and Stoic thought where the spirit (of God) unites only with the soul while the body is part of the brutes.

Paul is not merely interested in the personal bodily health and destiny of the individual, but also in the health of the *whole body of Christ*. Thus in the two outer envelopes Paul sets sexual ethics into the five great theological frames of reference noted above.

In the third pair of cameos Paul turns from the great positives of the *Cross*, the *Resurrection*, the *Trinity* and the *Body of Christ* to a strong set of negatives which is as follows:

D. Cameo 4

^{15b} So wrenching away the members of Christ
shall I make them members of a prostitute?
May it never be!

Cameo 8

¹⁸ Flee from prostitution!
Every other sin is...outside his body
But the immoral man sins against his own body.

Each of these passionately stated cameos contains a strong negative. In cameo #4 Paul uses the familiar *me genoito* (may it never be) common in Romans. This is Paul’s negative assertion against something that for him is blatantly impossible. The imperative of cameo 8 may well have an Old Testament image behind it. Paul may be calling on his readers to imitate Joseph. When faced with the temptation to sexual immorality with Potiphar’s wife, Joseph *ran* out of the house (Gen 39:7-12). Paul commands the Corinthians to *flee* from the sacred prostitutes who roam the city.¹⁰

In Cameo 4 Paul focuses on the individual. He may be using his language imprecisely, but in light of the remarkable precision of expression in the rest of the structure it is doubtful. Here he affirms, “So wrenching away the members [pl.] of Christ shall I [sing.] make *them* members [pl.] of a prostitute?” Paul is here making a statement about the inherent nature of sexual relations that is in total harmony with the Old Testament Scripture he is about to quote. For Paul, in sexual intercourse the *whole body*, that is *the whole person* becomes one flesh with the partner.

Furthermore, Paul describes a wrenching process. The verb he uses is *airo*, which ordinarily means “take up” but also means “take away” and can carry the overtones of “take away by force.” We have translated it, “wrenching away.” It was the cry of the high priests who before Pilate shouted, “Away with him” (John 19:15). The believer’s entire body/self is joined to the body of Christ. That same body/self cannot be thus joined to another body (the prostitute) unless it is first *wrenched*, torn, taken away by force, from Christ. The horror that Paul feels at this prospect evokes the cry, “May it never be!”

Other sins do not necessarily take the believer by force away from the body of Christ and join him or her to a new body. In Paul’s view immorality does and thus it is singled out.

Finally, we must look briefly at the center climax of this “high jump format,” that includes cameos 5-7 which are as follows:

- 5 ¹⁶Do you not know that the one joining a
prostitute becomes *one body with her*?
- 6 For it is written,
“The *two* shall become *one flesh*.”
- 7 ¹⁷But the one joining to the Lord
becomes *one spirit with him*.

No doubt the libertines in Corinth argued that fornication with female prostitutes did not constitute any significant union with the woman involved. There was no pretense of love, and no ongoing relationship. It was strictly a casual commercial exchange. But Paul affirms in cameos 5 and 6 that *any* act of sexual intercourse necessarily creates a new unity. D. S. Bailey commends Paul’s “profound and realistic treatment of coitus.” Bailey writes regarding this passage,

Here [Paul’s] thought...displays a psychological insight into human sexuality which is altogether exceptional by first-century standards. The Apostle denies that coitus is, as the Corinthians would have it, merely a detached and (as it were) peripheral function...of the genital organs. On the contrary, he insists that it is an act which, by reason of its very nature, engages and expresses the whole personality in such a way as to constitute a unique mode of self-disclosure and self-commitment.¹¹

By comparing cameo 5 and 7 Paul understands uniting with a prostitute as incompatible to joining with the Lord and becoming “one *spirit* with him.” In this latter phrase Paul affirms that the believer becomes “one spirit” with the Lord, not “one body.” This language leaves room for Christian marriage. Paul does not join his ascetic (Gnostic) opponents by condemning all marriage as violating the unity of the believer with the body of Christ.

The climax in ring composition is almost always the center. Again and again both in the Gospels and in the Epistles that center cameo is a Scripture quotation. As noted, here the Scripture quotation (Gen 2:24) in the climactic center introduces the creation story with the coming together of one man and one woman as one flesh. *Thereby* the two become partners with God in the creation of a new person. And this act thereby gives glory to God.

In summary, this remarkable passage can be seen as a very carefully written piece of Pauline theological rhetoric that uses a variety of classical prophetic styles. Words are selected with great care, formed into pairs of cameos, and constructed into an artistic whole, following well-established Hebrew patterns.

The foundation of a Christian sexual ethic is not grounded in abstract philosophical principles. There is no discussion of social responsibility for the potential newborn child or the possibility of disease. Inheriting property and complications in family life are not mentioned. The coming together of one man and one woman is affirmed in the light of the *Cross*, the *Resurrection*, the *Church* as the *body of Christ*, the *Trinity*, and the *Creation*. Sexual immorality is seen as a forcible separation from Christ and as the forming of new unions destructive to the person and the church.

The entire discussion is tied to the end of all things. The believer *is* part of the body of Christ and he/she *shall* be raised. Flesh and blood will not inherit the Kingdom of God, but believers are cleansed, justified and sanctified as they live out their lives within the Trinity.

The law is not fashioned into a club with which to administer a beating, but the loyalties of a new relationship and a new identity are set forth. The passage is Paul's foundation for Christian sexual ethics. When his rhetorical style is observed, the passage no longer appears "somewhat disjointed and obscure."¹² Rather it surfaces as a carefully ordered theological and ethical whole that combines the five great doctrines (noted above) into a revelatory masterpiece.

This theological treasure is a part of the larger treasure hidden in a field, described in the parable of our Lord. May we like that farmer pay whatever price is necessary to take ownership of that field.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

¹Jean Héring, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, trans. A. W. Heathcote and P. J. Allcock (London: Epworth, 1962), p. 47.

²This chapter is a revision of Kenneth E. Bailey, "Paul's Theological Foundation for Human Sexuality: I Cor. 6:9-20 in the Light of Rhetorical Criticism," *Theological Review* 3, No. 1 (1980): 27-41 and *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Academic, 2012) pp. 175-195.

³Thiselton, *First Epistle*, pp. 440-55; Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), pp. 303-32.

⁴The verb here is an aorist middle. Thiselton argues that this is a "middle of personal interest," and he translates it "you were washed clean" (Thiselton, *First Epistle*, p. 453).

⁵Robertson/Plummer, *First Epistle*, p. 146.

⁶Orr/Walther, *1 Corinthians*, p. 202.

⁷Robertson/Plummer, *First Epistle*, pp. 122-23.

⁸Moffatt, *First Epistle*, p. 69.

⁹This shift from the written soft π (h) to a the hard π (ch) is very easy in the Hebrew script of the Talmuds. This is also the case in the script of the Isaiah scroll of the Dead Sea Scrolls (see: F. M. Cross, David N. Freedman and James A. Sanders, eds., *Scrolls from Qumran Cave I: The Great Isaiah Scroll From Photographs by John C. Trever* [Jerusalem: Albright Institute and the Shrine of the Book, 1972]). Also the change from the soft π to the hard π was easy in the Hebrew script of the time of Amos (See the Lachish Ostraca of the early sixth century B. C. and other ancient Hebrew scripts in James B Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958], plates 80-82).

¹⁰F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (London: Oliphants, 1971), p. 65.

¹¹D. S. Bailey, *The Man-Woman Relation in Christian Thought* (London: Longmans, 1959), pp. 9-10.

¹²Héring, *First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 47.

The Women Prophets of Corinth: A Study of Aspects of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

by Kenneth E. Bailey

Within the larger question of the place of women in the New Testament, this passage is of critical importance. All across church history various voices have found "regimental colors" or even "battle cries" in these verses. One quickly thinks of:

"the head of woman is man" and
"any woman who prays...with her head unveiled,
dishonors her head," or
"man was not made for woman but woman for
man."

In its stark blunt form the interpretation of these phrases is often summarized as follows:

This passage tells women that they are to live under male authority, keep their heads covered in public, and understand that they were created to serve men!

Such a reading of the text is of great antiquity and has dominated church life for centuries. But does it represent what Paul intends? It is the purpose of this brief essay to focus on this question with some care.

In the attached article we argue that I Cor 11-14 is a single essay. Paul opens with a discussion of disorders in worship (ch. 11), turns to the topic of spiritual gifts (ch. 12), and brings the essay to its climax in the hymn on love (ch. 13).

He then has a matching discussion of spiritual gifts (ch.14:1-25) and closes with a second discussion of disorders in worship, along with a summary statement (14:26-40). The great chapter on love is a river that is strategically placed in the center with the intent that it flow over what precedes (11-12) and over what follows (14). Thus our text is a part of the Apostle's discussion of disorder in worship. What then is the problem?

Clearly the churches of his time had male and female leaders. Here the focus of the text is on prophets. The reader is told that the men who “pray and prophesy” are to uncover their heads and that the women who “pray and prophesy” must cover their heads. It is easy to read these two verses (4-5) and focus exclusively on the problem of head coverings. When we do that we overlook the fact that *the women and the men are doing the same thing*. They are both praying and prophesying. It is possible to understand “praying” as here referring to private devotion. But the act of “prophesying” is a public function carried out in front of other people. It is impossible to prophesy in the seclusion of one’s closet. Clearly St. Paul is talking about men and women who are leading public worship. This then gives us a clue to the problem of disorder that Paul is discussing.

From the NT records we know that Greek women of high standing were attracted to the preaching of Paul (Acts 16:14, 17:4, 12, 34). Such Greek women in that period were already struggling for a place in the sun and would not have been attracted to the preaching of a man who put them down. The church in Philippi met in the house of Lydia, a seller of purple cloth. The fact that Paul visited her (with the magistrates) on his way out of town indicates that she was the leader of the church (cf. Acts 16:35-40). One of the two ports for the city of Corinth was Cenchreae. The church there was led by Phoebe who is called a *deacon* (not deaconess) and a *prostatis* (leader). So how did these women dress as they led in worship, and did the fact of their presence in leadership roles cause waves?

It appears that some of these Christian women insisted on leading in worship with their heads uncovered. It is easy to imagine that they felt this to be their right as they affirmed their freedom in Christ where “all things are lawful” (as Paul had apparently taught, cf. 1 Cor 6:12; 10:23). The men led in worship with heads uncovered! So would they! But what signals did such an action give in the culture of the time?

In traditional Jewish culture (as evidenced in the Mishnah and the two Talmuds) women could be divorced if they uncovered their heads in public. A woman’s hair was to be seen only by her husband. (The Amish of Pennsylvania are a contemporary example of this ancient attitude. Conservative areas of the Middle East maintain these practices to this day.) On the Greek side the picture is not as clear. In museums in Greece I have examined the statues of women and most of them have their heads covered. Some do not, but it is impossible to know which of these were statues of women “at home” where their heads could be uncovered. In any case, the *dominant* pattern evidenced in these statues is for the women to have their heads

covered. Even if this would not have been a problem for the Greek Christians, it would still have been a serious problem for the Jewish Christians. The *Jewish* Christian worshipers would certainly have seen the woman prophet, leading worship with head uncovered, as acting improperly. The outcry would have been:

What is this! Is she advertising her charms? How are we expected to concentrate on worship with this going on?

The problem is put to Paul in writing (cf. 1 Cor 7:1). The easy answer would have been to say, “Let the women refrain from praying and prophesying when you meet in worship.” Rather, Paul affirms the rightness of having both male and female leadership in public worship. He then solves the problem by telling the women leaders to cover their heads in worship. The men are to conduct worship with heads uncovered. What then is his argument?

Paul starts with the general affirmation:

the head (*kefalia*) of every man is Christ,
the head (*kefalia*) of women is man,
the head (*kefalia*) of Christ is God.

Our problem is the word *kefalia*. As a Greek word *kefalia* has three meanings. These are: (1) the cranium, (2) origin, (3) authority over. In English we can approximate these three with the phrases:

1. My head hurts (head = cranium)
2. The head waters of the Nile flow from Lake Victoria (head = origin)
3. The head of this company is Ms. Jones (head = authority over)

In our text the first meaning does not fit. Traditionally we have read the verse with *kefalia* meaning “authority over.” But it is fully possible to select the second meaning of *kefalia* and read “origin of.” In this case the text would then mean:

The origin of every man is Christ (i.e. Christ is the agent of God in creation. In 1 Cor 8:6 Paul has just affirmed that Jesus Christ is the one “through whom are all things.”)

The origin of woman is man (i.e. Gen 2:21-23. Woman [*isha*] is “taken out of man [*ish*].”)

The origin of Christ is God (i.e. Jesus is Lord. Jesus comes from God. The origin of Jesus is God. The Greeks and the Jews talked about the “head of a river.”)

As noted, we use the similar phrase “the head-waters of a river.” This phrase does not affirm that the water which flows into the Nile is created by Lake Victoria but rather that it flows from Lake Victoria. In like manner, “origin of” can here be seen as an affirmation of the divine source from which Jesus has come and thus an affirmation of his divinity.

This raises the question of “the orders of creation.” Traditional exegesis of the second account of creation in Genesis 2 sees that man is created first and woman second and has concluded that “created first” means “of first importance.” The difficulty with this conclusion is that the creation stories begin with the lesser forms of life and move on to the more advanced forms. If created earlier = more important, then the animals are more important than people and the plants are more important than the animals and the primitive earth “without form and void” is the most important of all! In spite of this logical inconsistency, traditional views of the creation story have affirmed men as more important than women because Adam was created first. (We note in passing that in Gen 1:27, male and female are created *together*.) Here Paul starts his discussion with the *second* story of Genesis, which is where his readers have focused their thinking. How then does he proceed?

Paul offers a solution to the problem of the women prophets and their leadership in worship. I hear him saying:

Let the women continue to pray and prophesy—only ladies, please, be reasonable! Cover your heads as you do so! Don’t send the wrong signal to the worshipers, male and female. Do not distract the worshipers with a fancy hair-do, or even with any hair-do. You don’t like my solution? I have an alternative. Cut it all off (v. 6). Appearing bald will solve the problem. You would rather not go that route? Fine, then give my suggestion a try. You will preserve your rightful leadership role and will not distract or upset the congregation in the process. Cultural sensitivity is all I am asking for. You already *must* know that a woman’s hair, exposed in public, is seen as an intended sexual come-on in sections of the society in which you live.

I would submit the above as the intent of St. Paul as he deals with the problem of men and women prophets and how they are to dress. The problem of why the men should remain hatless escapes me. In the Middle East a servant should cover his head in the presence of his master. Modern Jewish practice preserves this custom. What the issue was for the man is not clear. Morna Hooker takes the discussion as far as the evidence we now have, and her reflections are helpful (CF. Morna D.

Hooker, “Authority on her Head: An examination of I Cor. XI.10,” *New Testament Studies*, Vol 10 (‘63-4), p 414). The literature on the problem is voluminous and most of it is not helpful. I prefer to suspend judgment until further evidence surfaces. But the problem we can investigate is: what is this bit about the angels in v. 10?

For this concern we are obliged to look at the inverted parallelism (chiasmus) exhibited in the text. Following well-known models set forth in the classical writing prophets, particularly Isaiah, the text is composed as follows:

1. For *man* is *not* from (*ek*) *woman*,
but (*alla*) *woman* is *from* (*ek*) *man*.
MAN - NOT FROM WOMAN
WOMAN FROM MAN (Gen 2:22)
2. For *man* was *not* created because of (*dia*) *woman*, but *woman* because of (*dia*) *the man*.
DEPENDENCE
Gen 2:18
3. Because of (*dia*) this the woman should have *authority* on the head, because of (*dia*) the angels.
AUTHORITY
4. Specifically (*plen*), *woman* is *not independent of man* nor *man independent of woman* in the *Lord*;
DEPENDENCE
5. for as the *woman* is *from* (*ek*) the man, so also the *man* is (born) *through* (*dia*) the *woman*. And *all things* are *from* (*ek*) God.
WOMAN FROM MAN (2:22)
MAN THROUGH WOMAN
Gen 1:27, 2:22

Just before the verses quoted above Paul affirms that the man and the woman are created in the image of God. He writes:

he (the man) is the image and glory/reflection of God
and woman is the glory/reflection of man.

The background to this verse is the *first* story of Genesis (1:27) rather than the second (2:18-23). As noted, in Gen 1:27 male and female are created together in the *image* of God. Here Paul tells us that the man is created in the image of God but he does not say that the woman is created in the *image* of man. This is because Genesis affirms and Paul assumes that they are *both* in the *image*

of God. From this point onwards Paul builds on that equality. We must look at the high points of how he does it.

The material is set forth in a 1 - 2 - 3 - 2 - 1 pattern. No. 1 is balanced and completed in No. 5, and No. 2 is balanced and completed in No. 4 (the summary words printed in capitals try to clarify the connections). The center in No. 3 offers a climax or a central affirmation of the passage. These rhetorical styles were centuries old in the Jewish tradition and Paul's Jewish Christian readers could follow this kind of poetic logic with ease. For us to catch what he is saying we need to look at numbers 1 and 5 together and then examine 2 and 4 as a matching pair.

In No. 1 Paul affirms that, yes, the woman was taken from the body of a man and is to that extent dependent on him. On the other hand (No. 5), the man is taken (born) *from* the body of a *woman* and thus dependent *on* her. So what is the problem, he argues. We are dependent on each other! In No. 5 he reaffirms what he has said in No. 1, and then completes it by showing the interdependence of the two.

The climax of the entire passage from v. 2 - 16 comes in our numbers 2 to 4. The key is the Greek preposition *dia* which appears four times in a row. All four are in the same case and must be read together. The translator can render this preposition as "for" or as "because of." For centuries we have used "because of" in the last two cases of *dia* but have translated the first two as "for." Thus many translations give us some form of the following:

For man was not created *for (dia)* woman
but woman *for (dia)* man
because of (dia) this
the woman should have authority on the head
because of (dia) the angels.

It is this translation that has been used, perhaps more than any other, to shape the female self-understanding and the male understanding of the place of women in the Christian scheme of things. Why do we have women? God has created them, the argument goes, "for men." That is, the only reason God created women is for them to serve men. This understanding of the place of women (in the minds of men and women) has existed for centuries. In the contemporary scene I have read entire books (written by women) that take this as a touch stone for defining the proper biblical place of Christian women in the church and in society.

The difficulty with this view is that it is built on a particular traditional *translation* of the text, not on the

text itself. This traditional understanding of the verse twice translates the Greek preposition *dia* as "for" and then immediately afterwards twice translates the same word as "because of." Traditionally these second two occurrences of *dia* are always translated "because of." Thus we have for centuries affirmed that *dia* in this text can rightly be translated as "because of." So, what happens if we use "because of" as a translation for all four occurrences of the preposition *dia*? When that happens the text reads:

for the man was not created *because of* the woman
but the woman *because of* the man.
Because of this the woman should have authority on
the head *because of* the angels.

This translation lets us see that Paul is referring to the Genesis story of Adam and Eve. It is not *Eve* who is lonely, unable to manage and needs help. No indeed! It is *Adam* who is lonely, unable to manage and needs help! Eve is then created as an "*ezar*." The word *ezar* in Hebrew is often used for God when God comes to help/save Israel. It appears in the name El-*ezar* which in Greek becomes Lazarus, i.e. "the one whom God helps/saves." This word does not refer to a lowly assistant to the boss but rather to a powerful figure who comes to help/save someone who is in trouble and cannot manage alone. In this light the image of the place of woman in the New Testament vision of things is transformed. Women, in Paul's mind are not created "for men," i.e. for their bed and board. Rather women, as descendents of Eve, are placed by God in the human scene as the strong who come to help/save the weak (the men). In this reading of the text, Paul, the gruff, old, unregenerate Middle Eastern male Chauvenist, disappears. In its place the real Paul emerges as a compassionate figure who boldly affirms the equality and mutual interdependency of men and women in the new covenant. I would submit that this latter is the real Paul whose views women of high standing found attractive and whose message caused them to flock to his banner.

When No. 2 and 4 are reflected on together as two sides of a single coin, this same theme of interdependence surfaces again. Often translated as contrasts, these two sections affirm the continuation of a single theme. No. 4 is introduced with the Greek word *plen* which usually means "more specifically." The common Greek word for a contrast is *alla* and that word appears (introducing a contrast) in the second line of No. 1. Here at the opening of stanza No. 4, *plen* introduces more details of the same idea set forth in No. 2. This is the primary meaning of this particle. Thus Paul is saying:

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(No. 2) Woman (like Eve) was created because the man (like Adam) needed help. More specifically (*plen*) what I mean is (No. 4), in the Lord (that is in Christ) men and women are mutually interdependent.

Finally, what on earth is to be made of the bit about the angels in the center? Many options have been proposed. Many are without evidence. With Morna Hooker of Cambridge it is clear that the background is rabbinic. (see Hooker reference on p. 14). How does the rabbinic background help us?

To summarize, the rabbis argued that creation was such an astounding event that there must have been an audience to praise God for this wondrous accomplishment. But there were no people. Who was there to do it? Answer: The angels. The angels were there to applaud. Even so, the authors of the New Testament affirmed the presence of angels gathered around the new creation of God, the Church. They were there for the same reason—to applaud this wonderful event. (We can recall that each of the seven churches in the Book of Revelation had an angel watching over it.) Furthermore, a part of this new creation is the restoration of the equality and mutual interdependence between men and women in Christ (as seen in this text).

Thus Paul says to the women of Corinth (and the whole church, cf. 1:2b; 11:16):

Do not be upset if I urge you to cover your heads when you lead in worship (i.e. pray and prophesy). Do not for a moment see this as a put down. Quite the opposite, let this be a sign of your authority (v. 10) to exercise your prophetic gifts in leadership along with the men. Do it “because of the angels.” Let them applaud the wondrous fact of your restored status in the new creation and let the image of God that is within you shine forth.

How then might this directive regarding dress for women in leadership be lived out in the 21st century in the Western world? We are not living in first century Corinth. Yet great theological principles are here being affirmed. To men and to women, I hear Paul saying:

When leading in worship, do not dress in a manner that leads to any misunderstanding or in any way detracts from the task of bringing the faithful into the presence of God. You are created in the image of God—let that wondrous fact *alone* determine your dress code.

In conclusion, we can here see a finely tuned theological discussion on the place of men and women in Christian leadership that needs to have some very old barnacles scraped from its surface so that its original intent can once again shine forth with all of its grace and power.

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