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For You Are All One in Christ (Gal 3:28): The Role of Women in the Pauline Churches

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I. Introduction and Methodology

Paul spread the Christian message across the Mediterranean during the first century CE. He wrote to the communities to which he had traveled addressing various issues that arose regarding their new Christian faith. His letters to these communities were later canonized, elevated to a sacred, authoritative status that is still honored by Christian communities today. As Paul was the founder of many of the first Christian communities, Paul wrote to these communities and his correspondence with them reflects the Christian movement in its infancy. His letters give us valuable insight into the lives of the earliest Christians including the values and concerns of these communities in relation to their religious practice and daily life. Through written correspondence he speaks as an apostle of Christ suggesting ways in which the communities can address specific issues with which they are dealing.

Since Paul was a prominent missionary and leader who invested himself in the communities to which he traveled, lived and wrote, his attitude towards women in the church had a profound impact upon the communities which he established and thus upon the early Christian movement as a whole. Through his mission and ministry, Paul was able to reach a large audience, and he endorsed inclusion of all people in the church, which in turn contributed to the movement’s appeal and agility. For this reason the inclusion of women in Paul’s mission is an important issue to examine, particularly because it appears that Paul’s theology allowed for significant gender inclusivity that was later lost.

This paper seeks to demonstrate the fundamental importance of women in Paul's ministry. Contrary to many modern interpreters, I suggest that Paul had an inclusive attitude toward women–an attitude that was rather extraordinary for his times. Paul's

inclusive attitude was however not maintained in the later Christian churches, however. I suggest that this loss of inclusivity has led people to read Paul incorrectly, through the lens of the Deutero-Pauline literature and the later church, rather than letting Paul's letters stand on their own. Through a literary-historical analysis of the authentic Pauline letters I will try to show the various and substantial roles that women played in Paul's churches and how their importance in Paul's churches was linked to Paul's larger theology. Like many other issues addressed in Paul's letters, his perspective on women continues to be debated by Christians and scholars alike in order to better understand the ancient customs and traditions of the religion and how they shape modern practice.

A close reading of Paul's undisputed letters[1] reveals seemingly contrasting attitudes towards women. It is clear that women held leadership roles within Paul's churches. However, when Paul writes to the Corinthians he suggests that women should remain silent in the churches (1 Cor 14:34). Instances such as this contribute to the ambiguity in modern interpretations of Paul's position on women's roles within his churches. It appears as though the reason for Paul's differing attitudes relates to the occasional nature of his letters. This paper's analysis of Paul's letters argues that Paul's perspective differs based on the needs of the individual community to which he is writing, prevailing social attitudes, and his desire to establish functional churches.

Considering the individual basis on which Paul addresses each community is essential, because it illustrates specific issues affecting various churches and the early

[1] Jurgen Becker, *Paul Apostle to the Gentiles.* trans. O. C. Dean (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 23. Scholars have come to accept seven of the thirteen letters credited to Paul as authentically Pauline literature. These seven letters include, Galatians, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon. Through close examination and study of vocabulary and literary style, scholars suggest six of the thirteen letters were not written by Paul. For the purpose of this paper, I will first consider Paul's undisputed letters viewing them as authentic to Paul and then compare and contrast the attitudes towards women displayed in the Deutero-Pauline epistle 1 Timothy.

Christian movement. This paper analyzes each one of Paul's undisputed letters, focusing on the identity and role of women in the specific communities where Paul and his coworkers established churches. Individually, the letters reflect Paul's mission to spread the Christian message. When considered as a whole, Paul's correspondence more clearly demonstrates this mission and allows for a deeper understanding of his motives. An assessment of Paul's motives within this larger context offers explanation for his seemingly ambiguous attitudes towards women.

Before analyzing and interpreting Paul's writings, I discuss briefly who Paul was and the previous scholarship of Paul with regard to his attitudes towards women. This will assist in assessing his motives, which in turn will help us gain a better understanding of why Paul was writing and consider the communities to which he traveled, exploring possible reasons as to why he chose these specific communities based on his motives. I then consider who the people were living in these communities. This helps in understanding why Paul chose to address certain issues to specific communities. By developing an understanding of who Paul was and to whom he was writing we can better understand the content of his letters by placing them within the historical and cultural context of the first century CE Mediterranean world.

After gaining a better understanding of who Paul was and why he was writing, we can then consider why Paul chose to not only include women in his churches, but also allowed them to hold leadership roles. I will argue that the inclusion of women in Paul's ministry, as reflected in his undisputed letters, was crucial to the growth and development of the movement of his churches. Paul's theology and missionary work were closely linked. In an effort to spread the gospel to as many people as possible, Paul seems to have

created new opportunities for women that were not otherwise available in Greco-Roman society. This heavily contributed to appeal of Paul's message, and it gained Paul a substantial amount of support from women in certain communities.

Paul's letters demonstrate an inclusive attitude towards women. However, these attitudes were not permanent in the development of the early Christian movement. As early as the Deutero-Pauline[2] letters, a shift begins to take place. There are a number of reasons why this may have occurred. Paul's inclusivity of women in his ministry and churches was radical during the first century CE. Perhaps then it comes as no surprise that his attitudes towards women as displayed in his undisputed letters were lost as the early Christian movement began to develop and spread. Allowing women to hold prominent leadership roles within the church carried certain political and social implications that would have profoundly influenced culture in a predominantly male society rooted in patriarchal values and ways of life. Without Paul's authority to support the inclusion of women, the early Christian movement fell back on prevailing attitudes.

While I suggest that women played an important, crucial role in the growth and development of Paul's churches, we must examine the outcome of Paul's work in comparison to his actual motives. There are six Deutero-Pauline epistles that were elevated to an authoritative, sacred status just as Paul's authentic texts. In this paper I consider one Deutero-Pauline text in order to demonstrate the shift from Paul's inclusive attitudes towards women to a more exclusive approach.[3] This will assist in assessing

[2] Scholars categorize six epistles as Deutero-Pauline letters. The Deutero-Pauline letters are texts that identify Paul as their author but were probably not written or dictated by Paul. Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 585.

[3] As the focus of this paper is the roles of women in Pauline churches, I do not analyze all six Deutero-Pauline epistles. I use the Deutero-Pauline Epistle of 1 Timothy to demonstrate the theological shift and suggest why this shift may have occurred as is relevant to my thesis.

Paul's motives verse the overall outcome of his mission. I will conclude in offering insight as to why the outcome of Paul's mission may not necessarily coincide with his original motives as displayed in his undisputed letters, and how this affected the role of women in the early Christian movement.

This paper contributes to the field of Biblical Studies in that it seeks to identify Paul's inclusive attitudes towards women through women's roles in Pauline churches as separate from the attitudes displayed in the Deutero-Pauline literature and later orthodox literature. I seek to demonstrate that Paul had an inclusive attitude towards women in his churches, that is, his inclusive theology and mission allowed women to hold leadership roles within Pauline churches. This paper is a starting point in differentiating between Paul's attitudes and the attitudes of those who followed. The later loss of Paul's radical inclusive theology carried enormous political, social and theological implications for the growing movement and the formation of the orthodoxy. Addressing Paul's inclusive theology as separate from Deutero-Pauline literature opens doors for scholars and practicing Christians alike to be able to view Paul through a new lens. This new perspective may have a profound impact on our perception of who Paul was and his intentions and desire to form churches and spread his gospel. This is significant because Christians continue to consider Paul's letters as sacred and continue to value Pauline theology in modernity.

II. Paul and His Writings

Paul's attitudes towards women as displayed in his undisputed letters are a reflection of his motives as a missionary. It is thus important to identify Paul's motives

within the larger context of his identity as a missionary. As the author of many of the writings included in the New Testament canon, it is no surprise that the identity and life of Paul has come under great scrutiny. While the fact remains that there is not enough evidence to assist scholars in reconstructing a clear picture of Paul's identity to define his intentions and motives, a substantial amount of scholarship has been done on Paul's life. This scholarship has left us with a number of important details offering us valuable insight into who Paul was. In this section I examine previous scholarship specifically on Paul as a missionary in the work of two influential scholars, W. Reinbold and L.J. Lietaert Peerbolte. I note several details creating a biographical framework of who Paul was and his motives, in order to better understand his attitudes towards women and their role in the early Christian movement as a whole.

In 2000, W. Reinbold published *Propaganda und Mission im ältesten Christentum*, offering a detailed analysis of the early leaders of the Christian movement.[4] Reinbold described three main characteristics of Paul that offer valuable insight into Paul's missionary identity. Reinbold concluded that (1) Paul believed the gospel should be made known across the world; (2) Paul travelled to and stay in certain places, drawing in new believers with his gospel; and that (3) Paul worked with others rather than alone.[5] Reinbold's research has been supported by many other scholars, including L.J. Lietaert Peerbolte who published *Paul the Missionary* in 2008 and whose work is engaged throughout this paper.

For the purpose of this paper I will use Reinbold's missionary characteristics of Paul as a starting point for our inquiry, the first being Paul's desire to spread his gospel. It

[4] Wolfgang Reinbold, *Propaganda und Mission im ältesten Christentum Eine Untersuchung zu den Modalitäten der Ausbreitung der frühen Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000).
[5] L.J. Lietaert Peerbolte, *Paul the Missionary* (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 14.

is important to note that while many scholars have come to acknowledge Paul as a missionary through his intentions and actions, Paul never directly refers to himself as such. Paul does however identify himself as an *apostolos* in four of his seven undisputed letters: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians. *Apostolos* or apostle is a messenger from God.[6] Paul states that his task as such was given to him by God (Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1). Contrastingly, in his other three undisputed letters, 1 Thessalonians, Philippians and Philemon, he only refers to himself by name, and does not identify himself as an apostle.[7]

Why Paul did not refer to himself as an apostle in all of his undisputed letters is more easily understood when considering the communities to which the respective letters were composed. The church at Corinth was experiencing conflict regarding the authority of Paul's teachings. Paul identifying himself as an apostle when writing to the Corinthians was most likely a way to defend his authority over other teachers in the community and over the congregation to which he was writing. The same can be said for Galatians, in which Paul needed to defend his authority against other missionaries. In Romans, Paul is writing to a community he has never visited but from whom he hopes to gain support, and thus his identification of himself as an apostle is important in describing himself and his mission. In 1 Thessalonians, Philippians and Philemon, Paul did not need to defend his apostolate because it was already recognized in these communities.[8] This is important to note because it reflects what I will later argue, that is

[6] Liddell, Henry George and Robert Scott. *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 220.
[7] Peerbolte, *Paul the Missionary*, 177.
[8] Ibid., 178.

the occasional nature of Paul's letters. Paul's self definition was based upon his perception of the community to which he was writing.

Reinbold's second missionary characteristic of Paul is that he traveled and lived in various communities, spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. While Paul rarely talked about the cities to which he traveled in his writing, he wrote a great deal about the needs of the congregations and early Christian communities themselves. This raises the question of who exactly was living in these communities to which Paul was travelling and writing. It is clear through Paul's letters that women were not only living in these communities, but involved in Pauline churches. In Corinthians, Paul addresses concerns of the community specifically regarding women and their roles in the church. This is important in understanding who Paul was and his attitudes towards women because he chose to travel to and live in communities where women were present and where women could be contributing members of his churches.

The geographical and cultural demographics of these locations reflect Paul's missionary identity. Paul founded new Christian churches in a number of communities including Philippi (Phil 1:1; 1 Thess 2:2.), Thessalonica (Phil 4:16; 1 Thess 1:1.), Corinth (1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1.), Ephesus (1 Cor 15:32; 16:8.) and Galatia (1 Cor 16:1; Gal 1:2.), all during the first century CE. Two important factors most likely contributed to Paul's decision to start churches in these cities. All of these cities were main centers of business and trade.[9] They were occupied primarily by merchants and tradesmen as well as many travelers, providing Paul with a large audience to whom he could preach. It is likely that Paul acknowledged that the location of these cities, contributing to the high economic status and large, changing population of each location was critical in the effectiveness of

[9] Ibid., 234.

spreading his gospel.[10] Paul was able to reach a travelling audience which may have contributed to the spread of the gospel. The fact that women were holding certain leadership roles in Pauline churches would have also spread to other communities and therefore other women. In addition, reaching the business and tradesmen was a valuable tool in gaining financial support for Paul's churches.

A number of these cities had some Jewish presence which would have also been of value to Paul as Christianity found its roots in Jewish belief and practice. A Jewish presence may have also been a valuable asset for Paul's mission in regards to its appeal to women due to the lack of leadership women were allowed within the Jewish tradition.[11] Although a Jewish presence created a foundation on which Paul was able to preach and share the gospel, the communities to which he traveled were primarily Hellenistic and heavily influenced by pagan tradition. There is a lack of evidence of a Jewish presence in Philippi, Thessalonica and Corinth. The only literary evidence supporting this is the book of Acts.[12] Paul addresses the Thessalonians and Corinthians as "former pagans" and most of the people who occupied these cities came from pagan communities. In these predominantly pagan communities Paul's gospel may have appealed to women for similar reasons as in predominantly Jewish communities. Paul allowed women the opportunity to serve in new leadership roles which they most likely had never previously been permitted to fulfill in both Jewish and pagan traditions.

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[10] Ibid., 236.
[11] Roslyn Lacks, *Women and Judaism* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1980), 158-159.
[12] Peerbolte, *Paul the Missionary,* 235. The book of Acts functions a continuation of the Gospel of Luke. Most scholars suggest the same author composed both books. Acts is often considered by scholars to represent the history of the early church, from Christ's resurrection to Paul's spread of his gospel. It is for this reason that I utilize Acts as a reference in correlation with Paul's undisputed letters. See Sherman E. Johnson, "The Acts of The Apostles" in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible With Apocrypha: Revised Standard Version.* eds. Bruce M. Metzger and Ronald E. Murphy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 1319.

The diversity of this religious culture is acknowledged by Paul and reflected in this letters. Based on the large populations and economic status of the cities to which he traveled to share his gospel and start churches, we can suppose that Paul had in mind a specific method in selecting his cities. Having identified that Paul's desire was to spread his gospel, we can move forward to examining his letters; keeping in mind his motives when considering what Paul says in regards to women.

III. The Texts

While Paul wrote to different communities with the same intention, that is to spread his gospel, the ways in which Paul talks about the role of women in each letter reflects and relates to the specific needs and beliefs of each community. As noted in the previous section, Paul chose the communities to which he wrote and travelled intentionally, focusing on diverse communities having both Jewish and Gentile presence. He chose communities based on their location, enhancing his reach throughout the regions surrounding the Mediterranean and Asia Minor. I examine each of Paul's undisputed letters, keeping in mind their diversity and location, focusing specifically on Paul's differing attitudes towards women as they are evident. In doing so I also consider the roles women held in these specific communities, and how these roles influenced the effectiveness of Paul's ministry and his overall missionary goals. I begin with Paul's longer undisputed letters, analyzing them in order of importance to my argument.

A. Galatians

1. Disturbance in Galatia: Responding to Dispute

In considering the influence and importance of Paul's letter to the Galatians in relation to women in the early Christian movement, the socio-historical context in which Paul wrote to this community must first be identified. The purpose of Paul's letter to the Galatians was to address the teachings of the other missionaries in Galatia that opposed the gospel Paul had previously shared with them (Gal 1:6-7). The other missionaries had been advocating the fundamental importance of circumcision as a decisive factor in justifying entrance into the covenant community. Scholars suggest his opponents were most likely Jewish Christians deeply rooted in practice and adherence to Mosaic Law.[13] In addition, scholars note the range of interpretation among Jews regarding the law, from strict adherence to more leniency. Location seemed to play a role as Palestinian Jews tended to interpret and perform the law more strictly than Jews of the Diaspora.[14]

Acknowledging this range of interpretation, Paul argued for his gospel, presenting that the law had been fulfilled by Jesus Christ and now all could be children of God through faith (Gal 3:23-26); therefore, circumcision and other such practices of the law were no longer a necessary part of conversion to Christianity. As exemplified through the conflict taking place in Galatia, continuing to require the practice of circumcision would have a direct effect on the churches Paul had already established heavily influencing the relations between members of these congregations.[15] We will see this same inclusivity in

[13] Frank J. Matera, "The Letter of Paul to the Galatians" in *The New Interpreters Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (eds. Walter J. Harrelson et al.; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 2080.
[14] Tatha Wiley, *Paul and the Gentile Women* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd., 2005), 79.
[15] Ibid., 78.

Paul's overall theology and how because of this women have a more inclusive role in Galatia.

2. Paul's Perspective

Paul did not believe the gospel to be limited to the Jews, but believed that Jesus was revealed to him through God so that he should spread the gospel among the gentiles (Gal 1:16-17). He wrote that God's promise to Abraham had been fulfilled through Jesus, and therefore the law had been lifted and was no longer needed to attain righteousness (Gal 3:6-13). He proclaimed that gentiles were to become followers of Christianity, and were not obligated by Mosaic Law but were required to have faith and worship the one true God. This would directly affect women and their inclusion in early Christianity. Circumcision was an act through which only men could enter the covenant. Because the act of circumcision was no longer required as an identity marker, women were able to enter the covenant through the same practice of faith as were men.

Wiley suggests that the law played a more direct social role in that it not only separates insiders from outsiders but also insiders from one another.[16] The law was both received by and given to men and was gender specific, outlining both the obligations and privileges of men. Male circumcision was the sign of the covenant through which males were made full members of the community (Gen 17:10-14). It was only through relations with men, however, that women were also included in the covenant. Wiley proposes this as an illustration of the inferiority of women of the culture and time. Scholars cannot deny the patriarchal values in which both Judaism and ancient Greco-Roman world itself

[16] Ibid., 81. Working from the standpoint of Gentile women, Tatha Wiley presents her work as "reframing Galatians." A feminist scholar, her work demonstrates a specific approach or way of reading the text from the perspective of Gentile women, focusing on the issue of circumcision. While her work may not be considered typical Biblical commentary, Wiley clearly takes interest in the text as a whole, supporting her argument in detail using other credible Biblical commentators.

were rooted. These values permeated even the walls of the Temple in Jerusalem whose structure was such that women were only allowed entrance to specific areas under specific circumstances.[17] Thus it comes as little surprise that the sign of the covenant between God and man be the male act of circumcision.

In Galatians 3:28 Paul demonstrates a new, radical inclusivity by saying that in Jesus Christ there is no longer a distinction between Jew and Greek, therefore reinforcing the idea that circumcision was no longer a necessity for conversion. In addition to dissolving distinction between Jew and Gentile, Paul references slaves and those who are free, and, especially important for this discussion, male and female. Thus, for Paul in Christ all cultural, social, and gender barriers are dissolved. I would like to focus on the significance of Galatians 3:28 not so much in relation to Paul's specific teaching regarding ethnicity to that particular community at that moment in time, but rather its implication and deeper meaning for Pauline churches and the early Christian movement as a whole with regard to women. As such implications are open to interpretation, scholars have long questioned Paul's meaning. For the purpose of this paper, I will focus on scholarship which directly reflects implications that would suggest the importance of the inclusion of women in the Pauline churches.

3. The Allegory of Sarah and Hagar

Paul reconciles the act of circumcision in relation to the inclusion of women in the covenant through his definition of righteousness which involves faith above all else. In Galatians 4, Paul discusses an allegory of Abraham and his two sons, drawing from the Hebrew scriptures to defend his position (Gal 4:21-31). I examine this allegory as it directly applies to women, drawing on the commentary of Williams and further

[17] Lacks, *Women and Judaism*, 158.

developing his interpretation.[18] Paul describes two lines of inheritance. As Abraham and his wife Sarah were first unable to have children, Abraham had a son born by his slave, Hagar. Williams explains the birth of Ishmael as representing Abraham's trust in his own means and the old covenant and law given from Sinai (Gen 16:1).[19] Then through God's promise Sarah was also able to bear a son, Isaac, to Abraham (Gen 21:1). Isaac's birth represents fulfillment of the covenant God made with Abraham.

As Williams notes, Paul's allegory takes root in God's promise to Abraham.[20] The birth of Ishmael by Hagar represents the old covenant under which the Galatians were currently trying to function by concerning themselves with the importance of circumcision. The birth of Isaac by Sarah, however, represents fulfillment of law through Jesus Christ, as Paul desired to demonstrate to the Galatians. The significance of this allegory is that Paul uses two women, Sarah and Hagar, to symbolize the law and fulfillment through Jesus Christ respectively. As demonstrated in his other undisputed letters, Paul is not bound to purely masculine illustrations and language in describing key concepts to the early Christians. God's promise is fulfilled through both Abraham and Sarah.[21]

Paul writes that through Christ there are no longer divisions of "male and female" (Gal 3:28). This language is particularly important in that is suggests women are then

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[18] Don Williams, *The Apostle Paul and Women in the Church* (Glendale: G/L Publications, 1997), 83.
[19] Ibid., 84.
[20] Ibid., 85.
[21] Ibid., 86. Williams suggests symbolism of the slavery and freedom of Jerusalem embodied in this allegory. He also suggests that while Abraham may be the "father" of the promise, then in the same respect Sarah would be the "mother." Sarah's role in the metaphor is as representation of the gospel. I do not find this part of Williams interpretation and commentary to be substantial evidence relating to the importance of women in Paul's churches. While Sarah could be perceived as the "mother" of the promise, nowhere else does Paul directly state this or even allude to it in the same way he does here. I do not believe the purpose of Paul's allegory was to establish Sarah as the "mother" of the covenant, but rather to portray the birth of Isaac through Sarah (Abraham's wife, not mistress/slave) as Christ in fulfillment of the promise.

elevated to a status of equality before God. Differentiation between distinction and equality then becomes significant. When Paul says that in Christ there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free and male and female, Paul is not necessarily saying that Jews and gentiles, slaves and their masters, and men and women are equal. He uses the phrase "in Christ" to differentiate between the two. This is a key component in Paul's overall theology and in relation to his mission. Paul is not making a general statement about equality in the Greco-Roman world itself; he is making a direct statement regarding the equal status of men and women in Christ and therefore in Pauline churches.

This aspect of Paul's theology also appears in Paul's letter to Philemon. Paul writes to Philemon stating that Philemon should receive his former slave, Onesimus, as though he were a brother, "both in flesh and in the Lord" (Philemon v.16). Thus, as far as Paul's theological perspective, men and women, slave and free are equal in Christ and the church. From this perspective then, all should be included in the church. It is thus established within the movement itself that while in certain places and particular situations such distinctions will continue to be made in regards to the social structure of society, in Christ and the church all will be included by faith regardless of cultural and social circumstances.

4. Equality vs. Unity

Richard Hove discusses the issue of equality through closer examination of the structure of Galatians 3:28, taking into consideration grammar and language.[22] What is particularly useful is the way in which Hove contextualizes the verse within the chapter as well as the couplets (Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female) within the verse. While each pair is presented parallel to the other two and translated in similar ways, there

[22] Richard Hove, *Equality in Christ?* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1999), 93.

are foundational differences between them. The structure of the verse suggests a common thread between the three pairs, presenting them as being tied together rather than suggesting the implications of each pair are the same. What Hove points out is perhaps most crucial: the respective pairs must be interpreted in light of the other part of the verse which states, "you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).[23] This becomes essential because what Paul is not saying is that everyone is equal but that everyone is unified in Christ and emphasizes the inclusion of all people in God's promise.[24]

Galatians 3:28 must also be read in light of the verses that directly precede and follow it, Gal 3:26-27 and 3:29. Paul is emphasizing the universal nature of the covenant. What he does not do in this particular letter is identify the respective roles of those who receive the promise. Even the phrase "you are all one" draws on differences between people. For example, as Osiek notes in her commentary of Galatians 3:26; there is a discrepancy between social interpretations and Paul's inclusive language.[25] While the text may be read as if all people are sons and daughters of God, in the culture at that time sons and daughters did not have the same status. Women's role in society was to function under male authority.[26] Paul did not directly address the roles of male and female, but we can draw important implications of truth from his writing.[27] Paul is not implying specific social roles, but rather saying that in Christ all are equal. By identifying that there is equality "in Christ" Paul may not necessarily mean in reference to culture or society as a whole, but rather that within the Pauline churches specifically distinctions between

[23] Ibid., 95.
[24] Ibid., 103.
[25] Carolyn Osiek, "Galatians" in *Women's Bible Commentary* eds. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ridge (Lousiville: SPCK, 1992), 334.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Hove, *Equality in Christ?*, 119.

culture, class, and gender are dissolved. Before God, male and female have the same status as they are equally recipients of salvation and may inherit eternal life.[28] For this reason Galatians is particularly important in that it represents inclusion of women in the covenant of Christ. As we will see, Paul implements this theological statement into his own ministry and practice by including women as his co-workers in mission.

B. 1 Corinthians

While in Galatians Paul states that men and women are equal in Christ and both can share in God's covenant, 1 Corinthians has a somewhat different tone. I now consider the ways in which Paul discusses women in his first letter to the Corinthians and offer an explanation regarding the possibly contrasting attitudes displayed between Galatians and 1 Corinthians. As with Galatians, I first contextualize the letter and present information about the city of Corinth that will help develop our understanding of who the community was to which Paul was writing.

Corinth is located near a large isthmus joining the Peloponnesus to Attica, the central part of Greece. Its location was important as far as travel, because anyone traveling from Attica or Macedonia to Arcadia or Achaia had to cross the isthmus. Corinth had control of two major harbors. Cenchraeae was located on the Saronic Gulf, and Lechaeum located on the Gulf of Corinth. Cenchraeae provided access to Asia and the Aegean Sea, while Lechaeum provided access to Italy and the Ariatic Sea.[29] Through trade and commerce, the city experienced prosperity and growth. In this way Corinth fits a certain profile in regards to being a center for commerce and travel. The location and

[28] Osiek, "Galatians," 334.
[29] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (London: Yale University Press, 2008), 21.

economic status of Corinth may have appealed to Paul in his mission as he was able to both spread his gospel and gain financial support from the community.

Corinth was once a thriving Greek metropolis, but was completely destroyed by Rome in the Achaean War in 146 BC. It was at this time the city fell under Roman rule and remained desolate for more than a century.[30] In 44 BC Corinth became a Roman colony under Julius Caesar and adopted Roman law and culture as its own.[31] The people of Roman Corinth referred to themselves as "Hellenes."[32] Through Hellenization, Corinth became a melting pot of various cultures beyond Roman. The population included foreigners and resident aliens from Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor, and other parts of the east Mediterranean. [33] These people brought their own cultures and customs to Corinth. An inscription on a marble slab reading "synagogue of the Hebrews" found in Corinth confirms that there was also a Jewish presence there. In addition to the culture, the religious character of Corinth was also diverse. Temples excavated near the forum confirm the presence of pagan worship. In addition, imperial cult worship was established.[34] I will show the importance of these cultural influences in regards to the impact they may have had on the role of women in Paul's ministry and the church at Corinth.

Paul wrote the Corinthians from Ephesus, probably around 54 CE (1 Cor 16:8).[35] The purpose of his letter was to promote unity among the Corinthians as it was written in response to certain issues which had been reported to Paul and addressed to him in a

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[30] Ibid., 24.
[31] Ibid., 25.
[32] Ibid., 30.
[33] Ibid., 31.
34 Ibid., 32.
35 Paul Sampley, "Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians" in *The New Interpreters Study Bible NRSV* eds. Walter J. Harrelson et al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 2035.

previous letter from the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:10-12; 7). Unlike his letter to the Galatians, in 1 Corinthians Paul mentions several women by name and speaks more directly about women. A woman named Chloe is referenced in the opening of Paul's letter (1 Cor 1:11). Paul states that he was informed by "Chloe's people" that there had been quarreling in the community (1 Cor 10-12). This is the only time Chloe or her people are mentioned in the New Testament. It is most likely that Paul is referring to members of her household or slaves. It has been suggested that the reference is referring to a church, but there is no other evidence to support this.[36] While Paul does not say a great deal about Chloe, she is important enough to have "people" to send to Paul, and for Paul to receive her people and mention her by name in his letter.

Paul wrote not only to address the quarrels reported to him by Chloe's people, but also to address specific matters of which the community wrote to him (1 Cor 7:1), many of which concerned women's roles in the church. We do not have the original letter Paul received from the Corinthians, but we can identify some of the issues through his response. Paul addresses the issues about which the Corinthians are concerned in chapter 7. Women are constantly referred to in this chapter, specifically in regard to their role in marriage as wives. Paul's counsel is in reference to sexual immorality, and he encourages monogamy by stating that every man should have his own wife (1 Cor 7:2).[37] He goes on to describe the mutual obligation spouses have to one another (1 Cor 7:3). This is important because he does not say that only the woman has an obligation to her husband. The obligation is mutual and thus both men and women are held to an equal standard in this regard. This is a radical idea in comparison to Greco-Roman culture where the

36 Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 141.
[37] Ibid., 279.

woman or wife was viewed as subordinate to her husband. This shows that Paul acknowledges the value of the roles both men and women play within their marriage. This perspective reflects Paul's larger theology concerning the status and role of women.

Paul continues to describe the principles that should govern a marriage. When discussing the issue of divorce, Paul explains that it is not him, but the Lord who commands that married couples should not divorce (1 Cor 7:10). At the end of chapter 7, Paul makes it clear that the present world is ending, and suggests that it is best for people to "remain as they are" (1 Cor 7:26, 30). We see here that Paul begins to tie in the bigger picture. That is, he believed the return of Christ was imminent and while quarrels needed to be addressed and resolved they should not be a main concern. This is a key component of Paul's larger theology.

While Paul seems to be particularly concise in chapter 7, other parts of the letter remain more ambiguous. It is difficult to understand the ways in which chapter 11 reflects Paul's attitudes towards women as previously described. Paul begins chapter 11 by praising the Corinthians for holding on to the traditions he shared with them (1 Cor 11:2). He then states, "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ" (1 Cor 11:3). This verse more clearly reflects first century culture and informs the verses that follow.

A woman was expected to worship with her head covered, and by not doing so would dishonor both her husband and Christ.[38] A man however, dishonored Christ by worshiping the same way, and was not to cover his head[39]: "For a man ought not to have

[38] Knox, John. "The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians" in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible With Apocrypha Revised Standard Version* eds. Metzger, Bruce M. and Ronald E. Murphy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 1390.
[39] Ibid.

his head veiled, since he is the image and of God, and woman is the reflection of man" (1Cor 11:7). In order to more fully understand what Paul meant by this, this verse cannot be considered individually, but within context of verses that directly follow. "Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels" (1 Cor 11:8-10). Interpreted in light of Paul's attitude towards roles of husband and wife in marriage in chapter 7, it could be that Paul was describing the importance of the creation of both male and female. Both men and women play vital roles in the process creation and procreation, thus reinforcing Paul's counsel regarding the mutual obligation husbands and wives have to each other. The second half of the verse, "because of the angels" is often overlooked by scholars and does not appear to fit neatly into Paul's argument.[40] One suggestion is that evil angels lusted after the women and so the women needed to protect their vulnerability.[41] Scholars have also considered that the presence of the angels was positive and suggests the angels were interested in the conduct of worship. Angelic presence may be "good" angels interested in conduct of worship.[42] Therefore the sign of authority over a woman's head was meant for the angels. This coincides with the interpretation that the sign of authority was actually empowering and encouraged women to pray the same as men.[43]

Paul's later states, "Just as woman came from man, so man came through woman; but all things come from God" (1 Cor 11:12). However, this is most commonly

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[40] Kevin P. Sullivan, *Wrestling with the Angels: A Study of the Relationship Between Angels and Humans in Ancient Jewish Literature and the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 169.
[41] Ibid., 168.
[42] Ibid., 169.
[43] Ibid.

interpreted as women being made from man, and for the sake of man, and thus women are subordinate to men. Paul is referencing a story in Genesis from the Hebrew scriptures, but it must be interpreted and understood in light of Paul's greater theology. That is, all are equal in Christ. Therefore this interpretation of 1 Cor 11:12 does not mean that Paul necessarily held the attitude of women as subordinate, nor the opposite. I suggest that this shows that Paul was most concerned with settling the quarrels among the community that were prohibiting them from being effective in their ministry. Knowing that the Corinthians were questioning the role of women in their church, he leaves the matter up for more interpretation on their part in order to keep peace. This supports that Paul wrote based on the need and beliefs of the particular community to which was writing in order to further the spread of his gospel. So, while Paul sought greater inclusivity for women, it is clear that he would yield on this issue for the greater good of harmony in the community.

Paul states that women should have a sign or symbol of authority on their head (1 Cor 11:10). This has been interpreted primarily two ways; the first being that the sign symbolizes the authority of the woman over her own head. The second suggests the sign symbolizes the authority of the husband over the woman's head. Thus, the sign is either a symbol of independence or of subjection.[44] The Greek word used here meaning authority is *exousia*, appearing in the passive form.[45] It is found 29 times throughout the New Testament, and in its active form means "have right to control or do something."[46] Thus it can be suggested that in covering her head a woman is displaying her control over it. Her

[44] Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 416.
[45] Ibid., 417.
[46] Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 599.

head covering symbolizes power she received from God, and she honors that power by wearing it to worship God.[47]

Paul's reference to this head covering reflects the custom prominent in first century culture,[48] and his mention of it in this way allows him to honor the custom through his assertion of guidance. Paul advises the Corinthians to judge for themselves, reminding them that ultimately, "all things come from God" (1 Cor 1:12). Worship is neither the time nor place for a woman to assert her equality over man by uncovering her head, for this covering is a way in which she honors God, and honoring God is what is most important. He follows it saying that there is no custom of arguing or controversy in the church of God, reinforcing his overall intention, which is not to address the status and roles of women in relation to their subordination to man, but is first and foremost to restore peace and order to the community. This again reflects Paul's motives to effectively spread the gospel by bringing peace to the Pauline churches.

Paul addresses another issue regarding women's conduct during worship in chapter 14. Jewish tradition was that women were not allowed to come to the lectern to speak in the synagogues.[49] Women's speaking in church was a cultured judgment, as women in almost every ancient society were reprimand for displaying authority through rhetoric.[50] Aspects of Paul's writing reflect this Jewish custom. "As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says" (1 Cor 14:34). This is perhaps the most negative passage in Paul's letter to the Corinthians regarding women. The attitude

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[47] Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 417.
[48] Lacks, *Women and Judaism*, 159.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 532.

reflected here drastically contrasts Paul's previous notion of women in both this letter and his other letters.

Paul follows this statement by advising women that if they have questions, they should ask their husbands in the privacy of their home, because it is shameful for women to speak in church (1 Cor 14:35). Assuming that this is authentic to Paul, the passage strongly reflects Jewish custom. As with the tradition of women veiling their heads in worship, this is also situational in honoring the already practiced customs of the time. This again emphasizes Paul's intention to restore unity, and one way in which he does this is by attempting to put the disagreements and controversy in perspective and allow the Corinthians to refocus themselves on God. This is reinforced by the next verse in which Paul reminds the Corinthians that the word of God did not originate with them, nor are they the only ones it has reached (1 Cor 14:36).

In the final chapter of Corinthians, Paul makes reference to a familiar couple, Aquila and Prisca (1 Cor 16:19). This may be due to the fact that they had previously spent time in Corinth. They were well known in the community, and Paul sends personal greetings from them. Unlike in his letter to the Romans, Paul did not place Prisca's name first when addressing the couple. This might reflect the specific situate of 1 Corinthians, in that placing the man's name before the woman's name was more natural and customary for that specific place and time and may have been more acceptable to the Corinthians.

While Paul's attitudes towards woman as displayed throughout 1 Corinthians may appear on the surface to suggest that Paul's theology was not inclusive of women, I argue there is sufficient evidence to support the contrary. Paul's use of Chloe in identifying a

group of people demonstrates her importance, both as a leader and also as correspondent to Paul. Paul states the mutual obligation husbands and wives have to one another, encouraging equality in marriage. Paul's mention of Prisca suggests that she was important enough in the Corinthian community that her personal greeting given through Paul would have been appreciated. While chapter 11 remains controversial, when interpreted in light of Paul's mention and use of women throughout the rest of his letter suggest that it may have been a cultural reflection of Corinth rather than Paul's own theological perspective. Understanding Paul's motives to spread his gospel, and in the case of the Corinthian community resolve any quarreling and disagreements, he addresses issues regarding women based on the values and practices already held by the community. Paul specifically advises the Corinthians to decide for themselves, reminding them of their purpose as a community of faith.

C. 2 Corinthians

In 1 Corinthians Paul makes specific reference to women and community concerns involving women. In 2 Corinthians, the occasion of Paul's letter is somewhat different. Paul attempts to address ongoing conflicts within the community, this time specifically involving his personal relationship with the Corinthians. While 2 Corinthians does not deal directly with women, in this section I briefly discuss a few main points that support Paul's mission and overall theology.

2 Corinthians is Paul's third longest letter.[51] Dating Paul's composition of 2 Corinthians is difficult due to the fact that many scholars suggest it may actually be a compilation of fragments of multiple letters to the Corinthians sewn together to form

[51] Carolyn Osiek, "The Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians" in *The New Interpreters Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocryph.* eds. Walter J. Harrelson et al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 2061.

one.[52] It was most likely written in the later half of Paul's career in the eastern Mediterranean.[53] While the letter addresses the animosity of the community towards Paul, it continues to exemplify characteristics that are distinctly Pauline and relate directly to Paul's mission.

Paul uses inclusive language such as "all." "For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died" (2 Cor 5:14). Paul makes reference to Christ as the new covenant, encouraging forgiveness and renewal among the community (2 Cor 5:17). He advises the Corinthians to restore peace and trust in him, reminding them that they are ministers of a new covenant (2 Cor 3:6). This supports Paul's mission and reinforces his motives to bring solidarity to the Corinthian community in order that they might be most effective in their ministry. While this does not relate directly to women, it is important in that it demonstrates Paul's commitment to his mission and emphasizes Paul's unwillingness to compromise his mission. Based on the nature of 1 Corinthians and the discontent of the Corinthian community with Paul reflected in 2 Corinthians, this may be a precursor to the Deutero-Pauline attitudes and literature which are more exclusive, particularly in regards to women's involvement in the church.

D. Romans

The Epistle to the Romans illustrates specific roles women played in Paul's ministry and mission. Towards the end of what scholars refer to as Paul's third missionary journey to Greece and Asia Minor (Acts 18:23-21:15), Paul traveled from

[52] Ibid. This theory is supported by jarring transitions and abrupt change in tone and subject matter.
[53] Ibid., 2062.

Ephesus to Corinth where he stayed for three months (Acts 20:2-3). It was while in Corinth he dictated the letter of Romans to Tertius (Rom 16:22), dating to around 57 CE.[54] Paul as the author of Romans (Rom 1:1) has never been disputed. Not only does it coincide with Paul's life as portrayed in Acts, but the literary style and vocabulary is distinctly Pauline.[55] Paul's letter to the Romans is the earliest literature confirming the existence of a Christian community in Rome.[56] It is important to note that Paul had not visited the church in Rome at time of his correspondence. He intended to travel to Rome, and wrote in anticipation of his visit (Rom 1:10, 15:22) and he hoped he would receive their support for his on-going mission to Spain (Rom 15:24, 28).

Paul's letter to the Romans reflects the socio-political dynamics of the city during the first century. Jews had been expelled from Rome by the emperor Claudius in 49 CE, and had returned in recent years after the death of the emperor in 54 CE.[57] The Christian community began through the presence of Jewish Christians and the gentiles who associated with them.[58] Paul's frequent use of words such as "all" and "every" illuminates his initiative to include both Jews and gentiles in the Christian movement, which is clearly demonstrated throughout Romans (1:16; 3:9, 19, 23-24; 4:11, 16; 5:12, 18). Through specific references and personal acclamation, Paul recognizes the influence

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[54] James R. Edwards, "The Letter of Paul to the Romans" in *The New Interpreters Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version* eds. Walter J. Harrelson et al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 2007.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (London: Yale University Press, 2008), 29.
[57] Edwards, "The Letter of Paul to the Romans," 2007. Cf. Acts 18:12. It is believed that the Jews were expelled from Rome due to causing certain disruptions: "The Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus" (Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars, Claudius,* 25). Whether or not Suetonius mistook Chrestus for the Latin *Christus*, the exile of the Jews would have influenced Paul's letter to the Romans in that their return influenced the cultural and social makeup of Rome at that time. See also Peerbolte, *Paul the Missionary,* 48.
[58] Fitzmyer, *Romans,* 30.

of women within Pauline churches and the early Christian movement as a whole, and seems to place them within the universal categories of “all” and “every.”

The first women Paul mentions by name in Romans are Jewish. In Romans 9 Paul makes reference to the Hebrew Bible, noting that the covenant made through Abraham does not only apply to Abraham’s direct descendents, “but the children of the promise are counted as descendants” (Rom 9:8). This reiterates Galatians and aligns with Paul’s inclusive perspective, allowing those of non-Jewish faith to receive the promise. Paul illustrates this using the examples of two women from the Hebrew Bible, Sarah and Rebecca.

God promised Sarah a son (Gen 18:10). God’s promise did not end there, for Rebecca was also able to conceive with Isaac (Gen 25.21, 23). God’s promise was made not only to Abraham’s biological descendents, but also to those whom God chose to show mercy such as Sarah and Rebecca through Isaac (Rom 9:18). The fulfillment of the law is not based on works, and therefore Israel itself was not able to fulfill the law (Rom 9:12, 31-32).

Paul uses this reference to the Hebrew Bible to support his argument that Christ ends the law, “so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes” (Rom 10:4). Paul does this in a similar way in his letter to Galatians, using the allegory of Sarah and Hagar to demonstrate fulfillment of the law through Christ (Gal 4:21-31). By using the example of Sarah, who was chosen to bear a son, Paul shows how women were and can also be chosen to receive the promise. Similarly, God chose Isaac through the woman Rebecca, with whom he would also bear children. These women chose to believe and

therefore were able to experience righteousness themselves, and in the case of Rebecca, Isaac was also.

Paul could have chosen to use examples of men, but by choosing to use women he portrays an inclusiveness he wanted to demonstrate to the Romans. This reference would have appealed not only to the Jewish Christians, but also to the gentiles. The Jewish Christians would have appreciated and grasped the concept as illustrated in the Hebrew text, while the gentiles would have appreciated the hope Paul offers by informing them of their inclusion in the covenant through Christ's fulfillment of the law. Thus Paul honors the diverse religious backgrounds from which those in the Christian community in Rome originate. This supports the argument that Paul wrote according to the needs of Romans.

Romans 16 begins a list of greetings in which Paul pays personal respects to nine women, the first of whom is Phoebe (Rom 16:1-2). The name Phoebe was frequently seen in Greek myth, and it is probable that she was a gentile.[59] Paul refers to her as "sister," which was characteristic of both his writings and of other Christian writings of time. Paul immediately identifies her as a deacon of the church at Cenchraeae (Rom 16:1). The recognition of Phoebe as a *diakonos* recognizes her ministry and suggests she held a position of responsibility within her church.[60] She is the first recorded deacon in the history of Christianity.[61]

Paul goes on to refer to Phoebe as a helper of both himself and many (Rom 16:2). The Greek word used here, *prostatis* or patron, was often used in ancient texts in

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[59] James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*. Word Biblical Commentary. Vol. 38B. eds. Bruce M. Metzger et al. (Dallas: World Book Publisher, 1988), 886.
[60] Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 398. Dunn, *Romans*, 886.
[61] Ibid., 887.

reference to the prominent roles of those in Hellenistic religious communities.[62] Being primarily of pagan religious background, the Romans would have understood this reference. This again marks Paul's acknowledgement of the cultural and religious background of the people to which he was writing.

Paul also offers greetings to Prisca and Aquila (Rom 16:3), the same couple referenced in Paul's letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor16:19). The two were tentmakers with Paul while in Corinth (Acts 18:3). This goes back to support Reinbold's third characteristic of Paul as a missionary, that he worked with others in his mission, and this included women. According to the account of Acts, they also travelled with Paul from Corinth to Ephesus, where they stayed for some time (Acts 18:18-19, 1 Cor. 16:19). Paul gives thanks for Prisca and Aquila for taking some sort of risk for him, holding them in high respect (Rom 16:4). Paul references the church which meets in their house, offering his greetings to them also (Rom 16:5). By commending Prisca and Aquila in these ways, Paul acknowledges them as co-workers and acknowledges the importance of their work. This tells us that Paul not only included women in his mission, but also commended them for their work.

Scholars have often wrestled with why Paul chose to place the woman's name before the man's. Prisca is first mentioned in Acts as Priscilla, which is the diminutive of former.[63] The two are first mentioned in Acts 18:2, with Aquila's name presented before Pricilla's. As we have seen, Aquila's name is also placed before Prisca's in 1 Cor 16:19. The couple is referenced three times with Prisca's name presented before Aquila's (Acts 18:18, 26; Rom 16:3). It has been suggested by scholars that Prisca was the more

[62] Dunn, *Romans*, 888.
[63] Ibid., 892.

dominant of the two through providing financial resources for their church, or perhaps her name is first due to her superior intellect.[64] Despite the fact that Paul's reasoning remains unclear, the fact that Prisca's name appears at all in addition to being place first cannot be ignored. It gives added emphasis to her and her work despite her gender.

Paul also notes the work of a woman named Mary (Rom 16:6). Paul uses the verb *kopiao* meaning "work hard, toil" in reference to Mary's hard work (Rom 16:6). [65] What is interesting about this is that it is the same word Paul uses when referencing his own labor (1 Cor 14:12, 15:10; Gal 4:11; Phil 2:16). By using the same word to refer to the work of Mary, Paul demonstrates his value of her work. Just as with Phoebe and Aquila, Paul's mention to Mary supports that Paul valued women and their work.

In Romans 16:7, Paul identifies Andronicus and Junias as being "prominent among the apostles." Both names are Greek, and it is likely that they are both Hellenized Jews.[66] This is a compliment from Paul, and displays a similar pattern to Paul's reference to the work of other women in the preceding versus. He again honors the work of Junias, by complimenting the couple, making no distinction between genders.

The book of Romans supports Paul's intention to spread the gospel using cities of high economic status and his co-workers. It is clearly displayed in Romans that women were counted among his co-workers. Paul identifies the woman Phoebe as a deaconess who helped him and many (Rom 16:1-2). He notes that the woman Prisca worked beside him (Rom 16:4). Paul references the work of the woman Mary, using the same language he uses to describe his own work (Rom 16:6). Finally, Paul acknowledges Andronicus and Junias for their prominence among the apostles (Rom 16:7). These references to

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[64] Ibid., 892.
[65] Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 398.
[66] Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 894.

women are extremely important because not only do they show that Paul included women in his ministry, but that women had specific and important roles. Paul must have known that the Romans would accept his commendations of these women. He references both Jewish and Gentile women, which speaks to the diversity of the community. Paul's attitudes towards woman are fairly clear in the book of Romans in that they were his co-workers and he commended their work.[67]

E. Paul's Shorter Epistles: Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, Philemon

In this section I discuss Paul's other undisputed letters: Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon. While these shorter epistles make fewer references to women, they nonetheless assist us in continuing to paint an overall picture of Paul's mission, attitudes towards women and overall theology. In considering the socio-historical context of Paul's letters, one can draw valuable conclusions from these texts offering insight in support of Paul's motives to include women in his ministry and help understand the dynamics of his mission on a deeper level.

1. Philippians

The city of Philippi was located in northern Macedonia. It was the center of a Roman colony and the area was well known in the Roman world as the battle ground where Brutus and Cassius were defeated by Antony and Octavian in 42 BC. [68] Octavian (Augustus) created a military outpost for Roman forces there. It was under Roman rule

[67] Paul mentions four more women in chapter 16; Tryphaena and Tryphosa, the mother of Rufus, and Julia (Rom 16:12-15). Although none of his commendations are as noteworthy as those mentioned in his other letters, he does choose to reference these women as well.

[68] Jouette Bassler, "The Letter of Paul to the Philippians" in *The New Interpreters Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha.* eds. Walter J. Harrelson et al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 2099. See also Gerald F. Hawthorne, "Philippians" in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*. Metzger, Bruce M. and Michael D. Coogan. eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), xxxiii.

when Paul founded and visited the church at Philippi. After establishing the church (Acts 16:6-40) he paid visits once or twice to the community (1 Cor 16:5-6; 2 Cor 2:13; 7:8).[69] Writing around 59 CE[70] while incarcerated (Phil 1:13; 4:22), Paul letter reflects personal joy in his letter despite his circumstance.[71] Even in prison, he remained deeply committed to his work and he writes with reassurance of a positive outcome (Phil 1:12-26). He commends the Philippians for their work (Phil 1:3-11) and thanks the community for their constant support and friendship (Phil 4:10-20). Paul utilized Epaphroditus as his messenger, a member of the church who had presented a gift from the community to Paul (Phil 2:25-30, 4:18).

This letter is particularly important in that Paul continues to be an active missionary from prison (Phil 1:12-14). He demonstrates this by addressing specific issues and concerns of the community in his letter. One such issue was the conflict between two women, Euodia and Syntyche. Paul urges the two women to reach an agreement in the Lord (Phil 4:2). The text does not explicitly reveal the subject of their disagreement. However, Paul's appeal for peace is likely due to the influence of the women in the community. Their status and dispute must have been of substantial importance in order for Paul to choose to address the issue in his letter. This may suggest they held prominent roles in the church at Philippi. Paul requests the assistance of a third party in settling the dispute between the two women (Phil 4:3). Together the community is to support the women in reconciling their differences.

Paul identifies the women as his co-workers and notes that they shared in his struggles in spreading the gospel (Phil 4:3). He uses the verb *synathleo*, meaning

[69] Jouette, "The Letter of Paul to the Philippians," 2099.
[70] Hawthorne "Philippians," xliii.
[71] Jouette, "The Letter of Paul to the Philippians," 2099.

"struggle together."[72] This language appears only here and one other verse in the New Testament (Phil 1:27). It depicts the shared struggle between Paul and Euodia and Syntyche as they worked together to share Paul's gospel. Paul displays respect towards the women as he encourages reconciliation.[73]

Paul's reference to Euodia and Syntyche and his expressed desire for the two women to settle their quarrel suggests a certain level of prominence and respect of women in the church at Philippi. The urgency of Paul's writing for the women to settle their dispute suggests they were highly valued both by Paul and in the church. Paul's language advocates for these women as his fellow co-workers in Christ. Perhaps the most influential piece is that the women shared in Paul's struggles with him. This demonstrates that not only were the women actively involved in Paul's mission, but that they shared in a certain understanding of the importance of the spread of the gospel despite the resistance the church faced. Euodia and Syntyche fought with Paul to spread the gospel. Once again, Paul acknowledges prominent women in his churches and ministry.

2. 1 Thessalonians

Although Paul's letter to the Thessalonians is short and does not mention women directly, its overall content speaks to Paul's missionary motives and theology. It is one of Paul's earliest letters, and is important for Paul in that the letter itself was an extension of his mission to that community as he was unable to revisit. The demographics of the community appear to be relatively diverse, however the presence of a synagogue proved to be an excellent resource for Paul. Through his involvement and attendance in the

[72] Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1692.
[73] Hawthorne, "Philippians," 180.

synagogue, Paul was able to reach both Jewish and Gentile converts who also attended. The majority of his converts in the community, however, were actually pagans.[74]

The text itself captures Paul's intentional mission to provoke the community to live lives that are pleasing to God (1 Thess 4:1-9). Paul iterates the importance of peace and encourages members of the congregation to love one another as such practice would become visible to those outside of the community (1 Thess 4:9-12). Paul also emphasizes the importance of respect for church leadership and encourages the community to work with one another in their mission (1 Thess 5:12). While these ideas do not demonstrate incredible detail of Paul's attitudes specifically towards women, they do offer insight into Paul's overall theology, which as we have seen is consistent throughout his undisputed letters. That is, Paul's teachings remain centered on communal peace, fueled by his desire to spread his gospel. Considering 1 Thessalonians within the context of Paul's other letters and overall theology, it reflects Paul's goals as a missionary which included women in Pauline churches.

3. Philemon

Paul's shortest letter is not to a church or community, but rather to an individual by the name of Philemon. As this is Paul's only letter addressed specifically to a single person, it has a unique dynamic from Paul's other letters. Written around 61-63 CE,[75] the letter itself does not mention women; however, its content directly supports Paul's

[74] F.F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*. Word Biblical Commentary. Vol. 45. eds. Bruce M. Metzger et al. (Waco: Word Books Publisher, 1982), xxii.

[75] Bruce M. Metzger. "The Letter of Paul to Philemon" in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible With Apocrypha: Revised Standard Version* eds. Bruce M. Metzger and Ronald E. Murphy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 1453.

inclusive ideas as iterated in Galatians, that all are equal in Christ. While in prison, Paul became a father figure for the man Onesimus (Philemon v. 10). Although Paul does not directly state that Onesimus was Philemon's slave, it is implied through the text (Philemon v. 13-14). In his letter Paul states that he will be sending Onesimus back to Philemon (Philemon v. 12). Paul appeals to Philemon, suggesting that he receive Onesimus not as a slave, but more as a brother "both in flesh and in the Lord" (Philemon v.16).

Paul states, "So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me" (Philemon v. 17). This statement reflects the same inclusive theology we have already seen. For Paul to suggest to Philemon that he should receive his former slave the same way he would receive Paul is radical. Philemon would not treat a slave in the same manner as he would treat a friend. Through his letter to Philemon, Paul seeks to bring peace to Philemon's home by suggesting that Philemon receive Onesimus as he would Paul. This supports what we have seen regarding Paul's overall theology: that Paul exemplified inclusivity of all people in his churches, and women were no exception.

IV. Deutero-Paul: 1Timothy

The Deutero-Pauline letters are texts that identify Paul as their author but that many scholars suggest were probably not written or dictated by Paul.[76] This was a common practice called pseudonymity, which means "false name." It is likely that the original author or authors used Paul's name because they wanted the text to be received as authoritative. This would have been acceptable, especially if Paul had died before the composition of the letters. It is likely that the original author considered his thoughts to

[76] Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 585.

be an extension of Paul's theology, and considered himself a worthy administrator of Paul's teachings.[77]

The Deutero-Pauline letters demonstrate a shift from Paul's inclusive perspective to a more exclusive view, particularly in regards to women. In this section I will examine this shift using one example of Deutero-Pauline text, 1 Timothy. While six[78] of the epistles are considered to be Deutero-Pauline literature, for the purpose of this paper I will only use one example that demonstrates this shift and can assist us in assessing Paul's desired outcome of his mission versus the actual outcome as displayed in the Deutero-Pauline texts.

1 Timothy is the longest of what scholars have labeled as the Pastoral Epistles which also includes 2 Timothy and Titus.[79] As Paul is most likely not the original author, the date of composition is uncertain. However most scholars suggest they were written after Paul's death.[80] The letter is addressed to Timothy who is identified in Acts as Paul's traveling companion and co-worker (Acts 17:4; 18:5; 19:22; 20:4). The letter as a whole appears to have been written in response to unorthodox teachings that were circulating through Ephesus in southwest Asia Minor.[81] Smith argues that the main purpose of the letter was to define and advocate for proper behavior within the church in order to augment its mission and image in the greater world.[82] This assessment reflects the content of the letter, specifically in regards to the role of women in the church as displayed in 1 Timothy 2:8-15:

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[77] Ibid., 586.
[78] The Deutero-Pauline epistles include 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Colossians, and Ephesians.
[79] Abraham Smith, "The First Letter of Paul to Timothy," in *The New Interpreters Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocryph.* eds. Walter J. Harrelson et al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 2129.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.

> I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument; also that the women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided, or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes, but with good works, as is proper for women who profess full submission. I permit no woman to each or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through Childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty (1 Tim 2:8-15).

This passage clearly demonstrates a radical shift from Paul's inclusive and affirming attitude towards the roles of women in the church as displayed in his undisputed letters. While Paul's undisputed letters contain commendations of women and reflect positively on women's roles in the church, 1Timothy and the Deutero-Pauline literature suggest that this inclusivity was temporary. It is possible that Paul's inclusivity of women was not well received by the communities to which he wrote, and thus the content of 1 Timothy could be a direct reflection of this discontent and is meant to provide reconciliation and a reassessment of women's roles which would have been more acceptable to the first century communities. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians supports this idea as it reflects the community's opposition to Paul's previous teachings which may have been perceived to be more radical and inclusive than the church at Corinth was willing to embrace.

Given what we know about the roles of women in first century culture, I suggest that it may have been imperative for the survival of Paul's churches and the early Christian movement to shift to a more exclusive attitude towards women in order to appeal to the larger world which was rooted in patriarchal values and tradition. The book of 1 Timothy demonstrates this as do the other Deutero-Pauline epistles. Thus while I

argue that Paul's inclusive attitude towards women may have assisted Paul in his mission to spread his gospel at first, it was not maintained.

V. Conclusion

Through analysis of Paul's undisputed letters, it is clear that Paul had an inclusive attitude towards women and that women held leadership roles in Pauline churches. Paul believed in Christ's imminent return and as a missionary Paul worked to spread his gospel to as many people as possible. Reinbold's missionary characteristics of Paul illustrate Paul's mission. Paul traveled and lived in certain places in order to draw in believers and spread his gospel to as many people as possible. Paul utilized his co-workers to help him in his mission.[83] Each of Reinbold's missionary characteristics of Paul are demonstrated throughout Paul's undisputed letters.

Paul's letter to the Galatians illustrates Paul's inclusive theology. The gospel was not limited to Jews, but God was revealed to Paul so that he could spread his gospel among the gentiles as well (Gal 1:16-17). Paul exhibits the same inclusive attitude towards slave and free, male and female in Galatians 3:28. Paul states that in Christ all distinctions are dissolved (Gal 3:28). This is the foundation of Paul's theology and clearly contributes to the establishment of Pauline churches. While in other social institutions there may be separation in class, culture, and gender, in Christ there is no separation. This is fundamental in Paul's missionary work. This theological perspective allows for Paul to not only include women in his churches but allow them to hold leadership roles as well.

It is apparent through the rest of his undisputed letters that Paul builds his churches on the foundation set in Galatians 3:28. He mentions women by name

[83] Peerbolte, *Paul the Missionary*, 14.

throughout his letters. Even in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians where on the surface his attitudes towards woman appear ambiguous, Paul begins the letter by referencing Chloe's people (1 Cor 1:11). This shows that a woman, Chloe, must have played a role of enough importance to receive mention in Paul's letter and to be used to identify a specific group of people. Paul uses the information he received from Chloe's people to address specific problems in the Corinthian community including issues regarding the status and role of women in marriage and the church. Paul states that husbands and wives have a mutual obligation to one another (1 Cor 7:3), requiring both men and women to take responsibility in their marriage.

1 Corinthians is perhaps the most difficult letter from which to assess Paul's attitudes towards women. Paul discusses the proper conduct of women in church. Paul states that women are to worship with their heads veiled and are to remain silent in church (1 Cor 11:7; 14:34). While these statements reflect a more exclusive attitude from Paul towards woman than I advocate for, Paul's responses are twofold. Paul's statements directly reflect first century Jewish culture[84] and Paul's mission to spread his gospel. The text shows that Paul was willing to adhere to certain societal customs and traditions regarding women in order to keep peace within the church at Corinth. There is greater evidence to support Paul's inclusive attitude towards woman throughout his undisputed letters than the rather ambiguous verses found in 1 Corinthians. Paul ultimately encourages the church to make their own informed decision regarding women's roles in order to reconcile their differences and remain effective in their ministry. Paul displays a similar attitude in 2 Corinthians when he reminds them that they are the ministers of a new covenant (2 Cor 3:6). Paul's letters to the Corinthians reflect his missionary motives,

[84] Lacks, *Women and Judaism,* 159.

and to suggest that Paul held negative attitudes towards women may not be an accurate portrayal based on Paul's theology as displayed in his remaining undisputed letters.

Paul's inclusive language is consistent throughout his undisputed letters. In his letter to the Romans, Paul states that there is righteousness for all who believe (Rom 10:4). This language continues to support Paul's inclusive theology displayed in Galatians 3:28. Paul uses the allegory of two women, Sarah and Rebecca, to illustrate Christ's fulfillment of the law (Rom 9:18-32). Just as he did in Galatians 4:21-31 using the allegory of Sarah and Hagar, Paul chooses to use women to symbolize Christ's fulfillment of the law. In Romans chapter 16, Paul pays personal respects to nine women. He references them as his co-workers in Christ. He refers to Pheobe as a deacon and patron (Rom 16:1-2). He states that the woman Junias is prominent among the apostles (Rom 16:17). Paul's commendations defend and support women's roles in the church, emphasizing the importance of their work.

Paul's shorter undisputed letters also display Paul's inclusive theology. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul addresses a quarrel between two women, Euodia and Syntyche, encouraging the women to make peace and the community to support them in reconciling their differences (Phil 4:2). Paul states that Euodia and Syntyche shared in struggles with him (Phil 4:3). This is incredibly important in considering Paul's attitudes towards women. Not only did Paul work with these two women, but they also shared in his struggles. This strongly supports my argument that Paul had an inclusive attitude towards women and that they held important roles in Pauline churches and were Paul's co-workers. Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians encourages the community to love one another as they set an example for those outside the church and community (1 Thess 4:9-

12). Paul's inclusive theology is also iterated in Paul's letter to Philemon. Paul tells Philemon to receive Onesimus and love him like a brother in the Lord (Philemon v. 16). It is clear that each of Paul's letters displays his inclusive theology respectively, and this theology is reflected in women's roles in Pauline churches.

While the inclusion of women in Pauline churches supports Reinbold's missionary characteristics of Paul, the Deutero-Pauline letters reveal a shift from the missionary's inclusive theology to a much more exclusive attitude towards women. This shift is seen through an analysis of the Deutero-Pauline text 1 Timothy. While scholars do not suggest Paul was the original author, Paul's name was used, most likely to represent an extension of his theology and in hopes the text would be taken as authoritative.[85] As Paul's goal was to spread his gospel to as many people as possible, through his undisputed letters we know that women contributed to this and played specific roles in Paul's churches and mission. Women contributed to the spread of Paul's gospel. By including women in Pauline churches, Paul's gospel was able to reach and appeal to a wider audience. While women may not have held prominent roles in other societal institutions in the first century CE, it is clear that they did in Paul's churches.

I ultimately suggest that while the inclusion of women was imperative for the survival of Pauline churches, Paul's inclusive theology was only temporary. In the absence of Paul's authority, his original inclusive theological perspective shifted to be more exclusive in order to adhere to the patriarchal values of first century culture and a predominantly male society. Therefore the early Christian movement would have been more appealing to and accepted by society as a whole. This would have had an impact on the role of women in the church. In light of the research presented here, I suggest a

[85] Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 586.

further analysis of all of the Deutero-Pauline texts would be the next step in continuing the study on Paul's attitudes towards women. In addition, a comparative study of the roles of women in Pauline churches in the first century CE to early Christian churches in the second and third centuries CE would more clearly demonstrate the presence and affects of a theological shift.

VI. Limitations of the Project and Future Prospects for Research

The research presented here initiates further consideration of sources beyond Paul's undisputed letters. Acknowledging that the evidence examined here is the first step, I suggest a closer reading of each of the Deutero-Pauline letters would allow for a more complete understanding of the differentiation between Paul's inclusive attitudes as displayed in his undisputed letters from the more exclusive attitudes displayed in the Deutero-Pauline letters. In addition, a closer reading of Acts would assist in contextualization of Paul's missionary journey as it offers a third party perspective of Paul and his work. Inclusion of Luke in correlation with Acts may also offer further evidence of Paul's attitudes towards women in relation to what Paul believed about Christ's imminent return and how Paul's theology was reflected throughout his missionary work.

In addition to further consideration of biblical texts, considering non-biblical primary texts would also be valuable. This would assist in contextualizing the world in which Paul was working by examining further writings pertaining to the status and roles of women both in and outside of Pauline churches. Considering the works of ancient historians outside of the movement may also offer insight as to why and in what ways

Pauline churches were more inclusive than other societal institutions during the first century CE.

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