

CHAPTER 6

(MODEST) CHALLENGES TO SLAVERY AND PATRIARCHY IN PAUL

Interpreters through the years have raised the question as to whether or not Paul was a “social conservative” on matters of gender, slavery, politics, and economics. Here we enter a polarized conversation, and significant points of tension and ambiguity within Paul’s writings themselves. For some interpreters Paul is the guardian of the socio-political status quo, whether approvingly, or disapprovingly and needing censure. On the one hand, Paul is to blame for repression in the name of Christianity. On the other hand, Paul remains a visionary whose image of a transformed new world motivates liberating, world-transforming action in these domains of life.

The tension stems to a great extent from the fact that Paul was both a radical visionary and a pragmatic cell-group organizer (pastor). Thus he looked for the imminent transformation of the present evil world order and sought to live in that light. Yet, he insisted that believers should also accommodate to their present situation, the world as it still is—for the sake of getting along in the interim, both with fellow believers within the new, diverse community, and with those outside the community of faith.

The difficulty is that Paul’s restrictive, cautionary, and conservative words are the most apparent, partly because of the pastoral character of the letters that have survived. And to this day these words are often preached the loudest. Indeed, it must be admitted that Paul’s words are more easily used and manipulated by systems of domination than any other parts of the New Testament, perhaps of the Bible (even as Paul also

has some of the most inclusivist statements of the whole Bible). While some interpreters have held up Paul's advice as a warrant to maintain the current social order, others have sometimes argued that in Paul we have a kind of "failure of nerve," suggesting that Paul's own convictions should have led him to more radical steps in the real world. But some have also suggested that we actually have a more liberating and radical Paul than often thought, both in thought and in practice.¹

The classic argument for Paul's social conservatism rests on the following texts:

(1) the so-called "household codes" of Colossians 3:18-4:1 (cf. Eph 5:22-6:9), in which people of lower stations are exhorted to obey or be submissive (women, slaves, children); (2) Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24, which seem to invite believers to stay in their place (designated "callings") and not to change their situation; and (3) Paul's statements on submission to the governing authority, which seems to promote near blind obedience since the governing authorities are "God's servant" (Rom 13:1-7). This essay will limit itself to the questions of slavery and patriarchy.²

PAUL AND SLAVERY³

By the time of Paul, the institution of slavery had already been around for centuries throughout the Ancient Near East, including Israelite and Jewish society (despite Israel's origins and self-identity as liberated slaves). While ancient Israel's practice and law (well-known to Paul) was part of this widespread system, some limitations and protections were put in place. While slaves had the status of property (Exod 21:32; Lev 25:46), there were limitations on a master's power, especially excessive force leading to injury or death (Exod 21:20, 25-26). The enslavement of fellow Israelites was sharply limited: debt slaves were to be freed on the Sabbatical year (Exod 21:2; Deut 15:12; Jer 34:8-17), self-slavery was to end on the year of Jubilee (Lev 25:13, 40), and female slaves [sold by their fathers!] were given some protections (Exod 21:7-11). These limitations were based on the Exodus liberation from slavery. There were, however, hardly any limitations on foreign slaves (Lev 25:44-46) and female captives in war (Deut 21:10-14). Israelites were also supposed to grant fugitive slaves asylum (Deut 23:16-17; but cf. 1 Kgs 2:39-40). Slaves were a part of the household, fully under the master: they were to be given rest on the Sabbath (Exod 20:10; Deut 5:14) and to take part in the religious observances of the family (Gen 17:13; Exod 12:44; Lev 22:11; Deut 12:12, 18; 16:11, 14). These laws, then, became the basis of evolving Rabbinic legislation pertaining to the continuing practice of

slavery in the second temple period and beyond in the Rabbinic period of Mishnah and Talmud.⁴

Slavery as a social institution and ideology, an economic instrument, and as legally coded in the Greco-Roman world is exceedingly complex. Slavery was widespread, and provided for much of the wealth of cities and landed estates. The status of slavery was the lowest of the legal social “orders” (Latin, *ordo*) in Roman imperial society: patricians (senators, equestrians, decurions), plebians, freedpersons, and slaves.⁵ As property of their owners, slaves were given very little legal protection: they had no legal rights to marry or to have their own children; masters had absolute power—to punish, abuse, or to kill. Strict penalties were in place for fugitives and for those harbouring fugitives. Estimates are that between a fourth to a third of the population of Rome were slaves—a Roman senate proposal that all slaves be required to wear distinctive dress (so that mixing would be curtailed) was defeated since it was argued that this would allow slaves to find out how many of them there were, potentially leading to revolt. The small island of Delos in the Aegean was one of the major slave markets in the Roman empire; according to the geographer Strabo (64 BCE–21 CE) it could handle up to 10,000 slaves in one day.⁶ The supply of slaves came from the following sources: military captives, self-sale by the poor, sale of one’s child, abductions in border areas, indebtedness, and the children of slaves. A master could gain a supply of slaves through purchase, inheritance, or by home breeding (slave children were the property of the master).

The actual experience of a slave depended on the particular circumstances and character of the master: a master could range from benevolent to abusive; the work could range from that of menial, plantation labour to office-type, managerial, civil service-type work, and to medical occupations. Many of the Roman imperial civil servants were slaves; and many of the business managers of the landed elite were slaves granted jurisdiction over financial assets (“with *peculium*”), since it was held that actual business dealings were beneath the dignity of an aristocrat.⁷ Note also that in Jesus’ parables many of the business managers of landowners are “stewards” and “slaves” (e.g. Luke 16:1-12; Matt 25:14-30). In the Roman context, some slaves amassed fortunes as the business managers of rich landowners; and some in the upper classes freed their rich slaves (business managers) in reward for good service. Occasionally some of these became independently wealthy, rivalling the assets of patricians.⁸

The process of being liberated from slavery is known as manumission. One’s freedom could be bought by oneself (through savings), by others (one’s relatives or community), or could be granted freely by an owner.

The formality of manumission was customary at pagan temples, and also occurred in synagogues in Greek cities. At the temple to Apollo in Delphi, for instance, the purchase of a slave into freedom was ritually and legally brokered through the temple, such that slaves were fictionally “dedicated” to the temple, in service of the god.⁹ A freed slave was in a special legal category as a “freedman/freedwoman” (*libertus/liberta*) and was expected to be a client of the master for life (with obligations usually clarified in the negotiation of manumission) and still carried the stigma of having been a slave. Only children of “freedpersons” were fully free legally.

Challenges to the institution of slavery were extremely rare. The Jewish Essenes denounced slavery and refused to own slaves (according to Philo, who seems to have sided with this viewpoint). In some mystery religions the slave status of an “initiated” member was to be overlooked by the rest of the “initiated,” including the masters. And some Stoics proclaimed the equality of all humans based on the idea of common descent (Seneca; Justinian).

In Paul’s writings most of the references to slavery or enslavement, or to the buying (1 Cor 6:19-20; 7:23) or liberating (Gal 4:5) of slaves, are used metaphorically. For instance, Paul often likens his own role as apostle to that of “slave of Lord Messiah Jesus” (Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1) even though he assumes slavery is a degrading status (2 Cor 11:19-21; Phil 2:7). Paul employs this image for his role in both positive and ironic ways (especially when confronting the status claims of the rich), without thereby seeking to legitimize slavery as an institution. He uses the image to highlight his sense of being “grasped” (cf. 1 Cor 9:16; Phil 3:12), implying both his obligation-ownership and his status in relation to his Lord, but also a downward mobility as the proper path of Messiah and his faithful (Phil 1:1; 2:7, 22). Or, Paul uses the imagery of being “enslaved” in terms of the choice of being either enslaved to God, grace, or justice, or to sin and impurity (e.g. Rom 6).

When it comes to concrete references to slavery, we see a fair degree of tension or ambivalence in Paul’s letters. On the “conservative” side, we are confronted especially by the household codes (Col 3:22-4:1; cf. Eph 6:5-9). Codes such as these for behaviour appropriate to one’s social position were well-known in the Greco-Roman world. In these passages, Paul asks slaves to obey and be submissive (even to masters who are abusive) and for masters to be fair. Paul seems merely to Christianize without much change the hierarchical household pattern of the Greco-Roman world. In 1 Corinthians 7:21-24 Paul refers to the situation of slavery in connection with (and as an example for) his argument that believers should not try to change those conditions that are a function

of birth or birth right (sexuality, ethnic identity, legal slave/free status given by birth), and one's status as married or single—in the light of the imminent world transformation (1 Cor 7:26, 29-31), which he assumed would happen in his own lifetime.

We also find passages, however, on a “liberating” side. First we notice the acclamations proclaiming the end of social distinctions in Messiah's community, including that of slave and free (1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). The question is whether Paul meant these in some concrete way as opposed to merely figuratively or spiritually. Does Paul propose simply that an attitudinal shift must take place in how a person is regarded, while the structures of the status quo are maintained? Other texts confirm that Paul meant these not only figuratively, but also concretely as representing the vision that will ultimately be realized in Messiah's community.

Paul indicates that differences between slave and free are negated or suspended by virtue of incorporation “in Messiah,” which implies a kind of rebirth, and a change in status accompanying that rebirth. Paul understands one's legal slave status as a given by birth and not generally amenable to change, insofar as it involves life “in the flesh” or “in the world.” But “in the assembly” and “in Messiah,” which anticipates the final eschatological reordering of relationships, all this is transformed. Any hierarchical given “in the flesh” is subject to inversion in the arena “of Messiah”: “for the person called in the Lord when a slave is a freedperson of the Lord; likewise, the person called who was free is a slave of Messiah” (1 Cor 7:22; see also 1 Cor 6:19-20; 7:21-31; 12:20-26).

The case of Onesimus is exemplary. While Paul nowhere commands Philemon to free his slave Onesimus, many interpreters argue that that is essentially what Paul was saying through his crafty rhetoric. It would appear that Paul is not just giving advice on a particular personal circumstance (as is commonly thought), but actually asking Philemon to reorient his perspective on the institution of slavery. In verse 16 of Paul's letter to Philemon, Paul expects Philemon to receive Onesimus as “more than a slave,” that is, as no longer a slave. He claims further that Onesimus is dear to Philemon “as a brother” both “in the flesh (in his legal status) and in the Lord” (in his spiritual status). Paul emphasizes that as a “partner” with Philemon (vv. 17-19) he has equal claim over Onesimus, and might even have wanted the services of this slave (v. 13), thereby implying that Philemon really has no ultimate right to Onesimus. But Paul goes on to say that any loss of financial equity should, in effect, be debited to Paul's account in the partnership (vv. 18-19). Finally, the most likely scenario is that Onesimus sought out Paul in the first place

because he knew that Paul was the only patron (with something even over his legal master) that might be able secure his freedom, having heard (or heard about) his claim of the ending of social distinctions in the realm of Christ (e.g. Gal 3:28).

This interpretation goes against the traditional one that Onesimus just happened to run into Paul while Paul was in prison and was then converted. But had Onesimus run away, as a fugitive he would have kept himself clear of the authorities and far away from the prison. Moreover, since most slaves (officially) followed the religion of their master, we must assume that Onesimus knew (or knew about) Paul for some time, assuming that Philemon's commitment to Messiah occurred some time previously. Indeed, it may well be the case that Philemon sent Onesimus to Paul in the first place, to provide for his needs.¹⁰ Given how Onesimus is exceedingly useful to Paul (Phlm 11) and a valued associate (Col 4:7-9), we can surmise that he was perhaps an educated or managerial slave, not at the lowest level of slave status.

The significance of Paul's letter to Philemon, whose gravity is such that it was copied (cc'd) to the house-assembly he hosted to give it more weight (Phlm 2), is that Paul requests that the slave-owner Philemon consider the slave Onesimus free not only "in the Lord," in the sphere of the Messianic assembly, but also that he grant him freedom "in the flesh," that is, in the legal sphere. It is probably because of the perceived precedent-setting—as opposed to exceptional—character of this episode that this letter was preserved alongside other letters of Paul. The importance of Philemon among Paul's letters, then, is inversely proportional to its short length.

We also need to take a second look at 1 Corinthians 7:20-24. Paul himself realized that the situation of slavery was not the perfect analogy for his primary concern about whether to change one's marital status (7:8-16). And so Paul claims in a cryptic passage (7:21) that when one has the opportunity to be liberated that one should avail oneself of it. The elliptical Greek, *mallon chresai*, "rather make use of," however, has sometimes been taken to mean that one should "rather make use of" one's slavery (e.g. NRSV). But this translation does not suit the clear direction of the passage as a whole. Paul emphasizes that "in the assembly" and "in Messiah" matters of status, honour, and role by virtue of birth right are all both negated and inverted (e.g. 1 Cor 12:21-26). Thus those born free are "slaves of Messiah," and those born as slaves are "freedpersons of Messiah" (1 Cor 7:22). As a result, Paul invites believers to be "enslaved to one another" (Gal 5:13). And in 2 Corinthians 11:19-21 Paul excoriates the status-seeking Corinthians for adopting a servile attitude, implying that slavery condition is certainly not a positive or

inevitable institution or condition. In other words, Paul assumes that freedom for slaves is the ideal situation; slavery for him is not the norm that God has ordained.

Given Paul's commitment to the ending of social divisions in the sphere of Messiah, including slavery, how do we explain why he nowhere condemns or works against the institution of slavery as a whole? One answer is that slaves represented a considerable amount of financial equity for those slave-owners who turned to Messiah, and that Paul was reticent to demand that they divest of their assets all at once. Another answer is that Paul, quite to the contrary of thinking that slavery represented God's will for human society, thought that God and Messiah would soon directly shake things up and that believers should therefore wait for that time. Perhaps a further reason for his hesitancy was practical—slavery was so widespread and established (and even among some of his converts) that one would have to work at it through a slow process of reform and on a case-by-case basis. Another explanation is that the horizon of Paul's vision of social transformation was primarily, though not exclusively, directed to Messiah's community, the sign and microcosm of God's reign, and not to all of society (and even in this new community the vision was not applied absolutely). At any rate, we are left with a tension in Paul: he assumes that "in Christ" there is no slave or free (in more than a merely spiritual way) and he assumes that soon God will thoroughly put an end to the institution. Yet, he also allows believing masters to still have slaves and asks slaves to obey and submit. And yet again, in the celebration of the Lord's supper especially, believers are to absolutely forget about and disregard these social distinctions (e.g. 1 Cor 11)! Paul the pastor lives in the midst of considerable tension and ambivalence. Unfortunately, it has taken the western church almost 1900 years to realize that Paul indeed thought that freedom for slaves was included in the range of Messiah's final liberating work and that slavery was not divinely ordained, despite certain restrictive passages. Most crucial, then, is the directionality of Paul's premises and statements, not the content of his particular solutions. Without a doubt, what Paul asked the faithful to wait for must now be actively pursued.

In the early church after Paul, two directions eventually developed: one worked against the institution of slavery, and the other accepted it fully, accommodating to prevailing Roman social values. First Peter 2:18-21, similarly to Paul's household codes, exhorts slaves to submit, even to abusive masters. There is no corresponding exhortation to masters, indicating either that masters were not typically members of the community, or that their behaviour was not thought to be a problem. In the Pastoral Epistles, the household codes also only address slaves, who

are asked to submit, even to believing masters (1 Tim 6:1-2; Titus 2:9-10). Masters are not addressed reciprocally, even though it is clear that masters are included in the Christian community. Overall, the Pastoral Epistles promote the Roman institution of the patriarchal household and Christianize it by claiming that the church and the Christian family are to mirror the ideal patriarchal household. Nevertheless, in one text, “slave-traders” are included in a list of those who will not enter the kingdom of God (1 Tim 1:9-11). Similarly, Revelation (18:13) includes an implicit prophetic denunciation of the slave trade by humanizing the “cargo of bodies” as representing “souls of humans.” In the post-apostolic period, some texts show the church struggling against slavery. In 1 Clement (96 CE) and in Hermas (mid-second century) we see the church financing manumission for its members and proposing that members free their own slaves. And in the letter of the governor Pliny to the Emperor Trajan, we hear that two slave-women were included in the ranks of the “ministers.”¹¹ However, a different trend became the norm in post-Constantinian Christianity. Already in Ignatius (120s CE) we see moves to retain slavery in opposition to these liberating measures: he advises that slaves “not desire to be set free from the common fund” (*Letter to Polycarp* 4.3). And in the Apostolic Constitutions (fourth century) slaves are not permitted ordination.¹²

PAUL AND PATRIARCHY¹³

Paul’s perspective on gender dynamics is similarly multivalent, ambiguous, and fraught with tension. Some interpreters find in Paul a biblical mandate to preserve some kind of gender hierarchy (or gender-based division of labour); others find Paul’s words on women to be straightforwardly marginalizing and irretrievably oppressive; some have sought to reconstruct the voice of the silenced women in Paul’s circles; and still others find in Paul pointers toward a vision for gender equality and mutuality.

A very brief summary of Paul’s social context is appropriate. Institutionalized and internalized (that is, unconsciously assumed) patriarchy was the pattern throughout the Greco-Roman world, including the world of Judea.¹⁴ In Roman law, women were accorded greater rights than in Judean law (e.g. right of divorce, or to represent oneself in court), but this difference should not be exaggerated. Male heads of household had total control over all aspects of their household, including the women, as enshrined in Roman law (*potestas patria*, right/power of fatherhood). Girls and women were generally not permitted the same educational advantages as boys and men. Women were commonly assumed to be

not only physically, but also intellectually and spiritually inferior to men (1 Pet 3:7). To call someone “womanish” (*gynaikarion*, e.g. 2 Tim 3:6-7) was considered a particular insult. Indeed, given the low status and values accorded to women, both socially and economically, female infanticide was practiced and accepted (to some extent) throughout the Greco-Roman world. While the Jewish community would never accept such a practice, the status of women in the Jewish community was not substantially different from that of the rest of the world. The exceptions to this pattern of patriarchy in Paul’s world were extremely rare and even the most liberal of Greco-Roman philosophers went only so far as to suggest that women ought to be educated so that they could be even more effective in domestic duties (e.g. Epictetus).

Given this context, we should already ask how different we should expect Paul to be in relation to his environment. We proceed by looking first at those texts where Paul’s perspective appears to move against the prevailing patriarchy of his day, in giving women significant value and roles in the Messiah-loyalist community.

1. Numerous women named as “co-workers”

While Paul’s innermost circle of associates was staffed by men, it is crucial not to miss the numerous women that he includes within the ranks of his trusted “co-workers.” For instance, among the many names of individuals to whom greetings are to be sent in Romans 16, a third are women, and many of those designated with some honourific term in service of the gospel. Most prominent is Phoebe (Rom 16:1-2), called a *diakonos* (“minister,” not just “deacon”) and *prostatis* (“patron” or “leader,” not “helper”). The latter is the noun form of the verb denoting the act of leading congregations (1 Thess 5:12).¹⁵ While not much is known about Phoebe, what is clear from Paul’s recommendation is that she is most likely the trusted letter carrier of Paul’s letter to the Roman congregations, and his designated spokesperson and interpreter. Like Lydia, she appears to be an independent, relatively wealthy woman (not under a male head), and perhaps traveling to Rome on business,¹⁶ although it is just as likely that her trip is financed by the assemblies of Corinth.

First in the list of those to receive special greetings are Prisca and Aquila (Rom 16:3-5). They are always referred to as a duo, with Prisca (or the diminutive Priscilla in Acts) regularly listed first (except in 1 Cor 16:19), leading many to conclude that she was the more gifted and prominent of the two “co-workers.”¹⁷ Also near the head of the list of greetings is a certain Mary (Miriam), applauded for her “hard work”

among the faithful (Rom 16:6). Similarly, three other women—Persis, Tryphena, and Tryphosa¹⁸—are congratulated for having “worked in the Lord” (Rom 16:12), a phrase that Paul often uses for apostles or workers in the assembly whose leadership should be recognized (Gal 4:11; 1 Cor 15:10; 16:16; 1 Thess 5:12). It is quite likely that these individuals are to be understood as leaders of particular household assemblies in Rome.

Junia and (apparently) her husband Andronicus (Rom 16:17) are named as “noted apostles,” and also specially distinguished as Jewish kinsfolk, Paul’s fellow prisoners (thus recent migrants to Rome), and as being “in Christ” well before Paul himself. Later editors of the New Testament tried to give the female name Junia (Lat. Juno, after the moon goddess) a masculine ending (Junias, otherwise unknown in Greco-Roman literature) so as to obscure the fact that a woman is called an “apostle.”¹⁹

Women also appear to be particularly prominent in the leadership of the assembly in Philippi. Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2-3) are called “co-workers” and are probably to be included among the overseers and ministers that are specially addressed in the salutation (Phil 1:1-2). They appear to represent partisans in a leadership squabble, and thus are singled out in the letter. Indeed, it is also possible that the person invited to mediate their conflict was a woman, named obliquely as “genuine Syzyge” (Phil 4:2-3).²⁰ Some have associated this ambiguous reference with Lydia, known from the account of Acts as the independent head of a household, merchant of textiles, migrant to Philippi, and patron of Paul and the congregation (Acts 16:11-15, 40). She is presented as a named example of the many “leading women” who joined the assembly (Acts 17:4, 12, 34).

Finally, we should note Nympha (Col 4:15), the host for a house church in Colossae (or Laodicea), and probably the female head of a household, and Apphia (Phlm 2), an originally Phygian name and someone who filled an important leadership position in the Colossian assembly (“the sister,” as a counterpart of Timothy “the brother”).²¹ In the case of Nympha, the manuscript tradition clearly indicates some discomfort with her leadership role.²²

In this connection, Thekla (Thecla) of Iconium who appears in the early third-century Acts of Paul could also be mentioned. While the current form of the text is overladen by multiple legendary features, there is evidently a historical kernel around which further accretions developed. The story of Thekla was transmitted orally for generations before being written down around the year 160 CE. Thekla was from a family of high social standing, was drawn to Paul’s preaching and

then spurned the high ranking man to whom she was betrothed. After surviving a series of horrific ordeals for her faith, she eventually becomes Paul's associate. Paul commissions her as itinerant missionary "equal to the apostles," and she remains celibate (so as not to be under a man), and cuts her hair short (to look like a man) to indicate her independence from social norms. The church father Tertullian complains that her story is widely being used to endorse the presence of women in positions of leadership in the church.²³

2. The Messianic charter of divisive hierarchies suspended

Another key text appears to cite part of an early baptismal liturgy:

For in Messiah Jesus you are all children of God through [Messiah's] fidelity. As many of you as were baptized into Messiah have clothed yourselves with Messiah.

There is no longer Jew or Greek,
there is no longer slave or free,
there is no longer male and female;
for all of you are one in Messiah Jesus.

And if you are of Messiah, then you are Abraham's seed,
heirs according to promise. (Gal 3:26-29)

Paul's primary interest in the context of this passage is to break down the priority of the Jew relative to the Gentile (Gal 5:6; 6:15). But he goes beyond this particular duality, apparently quoting the traditional liturgy. The core imagery is of a re-birthing in Messiah²⁴ and re-clothing of Messiah that suspends those prior statuses or identities that are the product (mainly) of birth or birth right. We should surmise that this fuller expression of the baptismal charter was widely used in the early communities,²⁵ and that it signalled something more than the merely spiritual status of equality obtained in the realm of Christ.²⁶

3. Gifts not gendered

A core feature of Paul's understanding of the Messianic assembly is that it is infused with God's spirit, which results further in the giftedness of all members for the common good. What is important to note is that in lists of "gifts" that are distributed to members of the congregation, Paul makes no distinctions according to gender (see Rom 12; 1 Cor 12). Indeed, he assumes that women will also express the most desired gift in worship settings, namely prophecy (1 Cor 11:4-5; cf. 14:1).

4. Passages assuming mutuality

Paul also makes a number of statements that indicate an assumed mutuality between men and women. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 he observes that women have equal legal right to divorce, although he discourages that option for both husbands and wives. As for conjugal relations, he argues that wives and husbands have equal rights over each others' bodies (1 Cor 7:2-5), a statement different from conservative Greco-Roman moralists who assert that in this area husbands have greater rights over their wives. Related to this, Paul puts the onus and responsibility on men "to manage their tools" (1 Thes 4:4), a euphemism covered up by modern translations.²⁷ Paul thus refuses to accept the "myth of the seductress" by which men blame women for their own deficiencies. Moreover, Paul claims that celibacy is a virtue for either men or women (1 Cor 7:32-35). Most other moralists assume that celibacy was reserved only for men, and assert that women should get married and fulfil domestic obligations.

5. Passages indicating subordination for women

Despite the remarkable texts just cited, a number of passages go in the opposite direction. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Paul asserts that women will pray and prophesy in gatherings, requiring only that they wear veils when they do so. But to argue this case, Paul makes the following claims: "Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of his woman" (11:3) and "[the original] man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. 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." On the basis of these arguments for a hierarchical order established in creation (by which Genesis 1 is read in light of Genesis 2), he asserts that it is self-evident that a bare head is a shame for a woman, and that an unveiled woman is tantamount to a shaved head (11:4-7), and follows this with the oblique argument that veils for women are necessary so as not to offend or entice the angels (a reference to Genesis 6?), and an argument of attire based on the evident teaching of "nature" (confused with "culture"). But realizing that his readers might not have been convinced, Paul appeals simply to "what is proper" (11:13b), and to "common practice" (11:16).

Paul's difficulty or ambivalence can be seen in the disclaimer he adds in verses 11-12, by which he appears intent on forestalling any extreme marginalization of women based on his argument: man and woman are truly interdependent, and all is from God, not from the prowess of man

(11:11-12). For years interpreters have tried to ascertain the convoluted argument or the actual situation that caused Paul to respond in this way. Most have concluded that it was for some practical reason of balancing various attitudes regarding women's roles and attire. The mystery, then, is why Paul uses the theological argument of a male-female hierarchy to bolster his exhortation—why didn't he just say, "We should be cautious so as not to offend those with different scruples" (as he does, essentially, in 1 Cor 8-10 and Rom 14-15)? The answer is to be found in the prevailing ideology and practice of patriarchy that is never named directly.²⁸

The same posture is evident in Colossians 3:18-19, expressing the typical pattern of so-called Greco-Roman "household codes": "Let the women [wives] be subordinate to the men [husbands], as is proper in the Lord; let the men [husbands] love the women [wives] and not be harsh toward them." While many regard Colossians as deutero-Pauline, such that this passage is not thought to represent the historical Paul, it is not possible to be that confident about this claim.²⁹ Especially when one considers the rhetoric of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, the social teaching in Colossians 3:18-19 should not come as a surprise. The text reflects a common pattern for social morality in the Greco-Roman world (and should not be treated as a natural extension of the social teaching of Jesus), promoting the "subordination" of women in the patriarchal household. Paul, however, does soften the similar advice of other moralists by adding that the male heads of households should "love" their wives, not "manage" or "rule over" them. Moreover, he contextualizes the propriety of subordination of those of lower stations as a pattern of conduct appropriate to the realm of the Lord (perhaps as a kind of concession), without enshrining the command itself as a universal, timeless principle. Even here, then, we see Paul as participating in the prevailing patriarchy of his day, while attempting to modify some of its extremes in a sort of "love patriarchalism."³⁰

How are we to understand or explain the evident tension in Paul's letters on this matter? (1) Some have been tempted to explain this in terms of Paul's hybridized cultural identity (e.g. his Judaic vs. Roman heritage). But while there might have been some modest legal protections and freedoms for women in the Roman world relative to that of Judea, these are relatively insignificant in the overall picture of endemic Mediterranean patriarchy. Moreover, this generalization can easily lead to an anti-Semitic reading of emerging Christianity. (2) Also off the mark is the notion that Paul's subordinationist rhetoric reflects an idiosyncratic misogyny. (3) More promising is the evident tension in Paul's assemblies (and no doubt within his own person) between "charisma" and "order."

The leadership and ministry roles for numerous women (e.g. Rom 16) can be explained as expressions of Spirit-infused “charisma,” the giftedness of the assemblies without regard to gender and other divisions that interrupt prevailing patriarchal norms for ordering communities. At the same time, however, it appears that the concern for “order” (*taxis*, Col 2:6; cf. 3:18-4:1) or the preoccupation with what is customarily “proper” (1 Cor 11:13-14) sometimes overtakes the liberating or democratizing winds of the Spirit.³¹ (4) A related way to put this dynamic is in terms of the dialectic of Paul’s apocalyptic, visionary “passion” and his pragmatic “sobriety.”³² On the one hand, the imminent arrival of the apocalypse means that the structures of this age could already undergo alternation within the sphere of Messiah’s community, in which the Spirit resides as a “down-payment/pledge” that signals the imminent arrival of the age to come (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5).³³ But at the same time, Paul made numerous practical or tactical compromises for the interim period prior to Messiah’s *parousia*, in the same way that slave masters could retain slaves short of the complete transformation of the world, while eating the Lord’s supper only as absolute equals.

EXCURSUS: PATRIARCHY IN PAUL’S NAME

The most strongly restrictive or subordinationist texts of the New Testament are found in texts written in the name of Paul some years after his death, and do not reflect the perspective of the “historical Paul.” In 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, “Paul” legislates that women should be silent in the assembly and learn from their husbands at home. This text is widely understood to represent a later insertion by a pious, traditionalist editor some years after Paul for the following reasons: (1) the text-critical evidence, including evidence that some manuscripts consider these verses as a variant reading not found in all manuscripts, and signs of textual dislocation of the sort to be expected when sentences originally inserted into the margin of a manuscript are then inserted at different places; (2) the two verses flatly contradict an earlier chapter where Paul assumes that women will pray and prophesy in assembly gatherings as long as they have veils (1 Cor 11); (3) the verses intrude into the present context, breaking the natural flow from verses 33 to 36; and (4) they conflict with Paul’s obvious practice of numerous women leaders in his assemblies (above).³⁴

First Timothy 2:8-15 promotes the same restriction as in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, but with further elaboration and reasons: women are morally and intellectually deficient; Adam was formed first; Eve was

responsible for Adam's sin; women will come safely through childbearing (the ideal role of women) if they live pure lives. The Pastoral Epistles (1-2 Tim; Titus) promote other restrictions on the ministry of women and show a consistently negative attitude toward women (see 1 Tim 5:3-16; Tit 2:3-5; 2 Tim 3:6-7). Either Paul has turned 180 degrees from his earlier welcoming of women in his earlier career or someone else is writing in his name. There is compelling evidence that the Pastoral Epistles were not written by Paul but by an admirer sometime after his death, who wished to pass on what Paul would have said to the next generation.

CONCLUSION

Paul's Messianic proclamation included the claims that, in Christ (in the Messianic age/sphere, and in his person, the body of Christ), the divisions based on birth or birth right that separated Jew and Greek, slave and free, and male and female were overcome (Gal 3:26-29). Paul did not work equally hard on all three of these fronts, but seems to have chosen his battles. Paul is most consistent in his tireless work to overcome the Jew/Gentile divide. This is Paul's most enduring legacy. When it comes to the male/female and slave/free divisions, however, Paul embarked on modest steps in the direction of realizing the vision, though not as rigorously or as consistently as in the case of the ethnic divide that separates and excludes people.

Paul's specific teachings or interim (and cautionary) positions in this drama when taken in isolation often appear not to measure up to his own visionary dreams, let alone modern sensibilities, especially in the areas of slavery and patriarchy. Not to be missed, however, is the directionality of his vision within a set of ambiguous and ambivalent statements.

What became of his somewhat mixed legacy? What follows is a tragic story of moving backwards. (1) Within a generation after Paul, early Christian leaders assumed that the church was comprised of Gentiles only, and moved to sharply distance itself from the Jewish world, even expelling Jesus Messianists who sought to retain their Jewishness, and claiming exclusive rights over the previously Jewish scriptures. One can hardly imagine a sharper 180 degree betrayal of Paul's vision proclaimed in Romans. Paul's most extreme statement in Galatians, which in many ways he sought to moderate in Romans, became the canonical statement against Judaism. And Romans eventually came to be read as purely an attack on Judaism, while its even stronger attack on Gentile arrogance was overlooked and forgotten. Paul's vision of ethnic inclusivism in Messiah was rendered exclusivist. (2) With respect to the short advances

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that Paul made toward the overcoming of slavery and patriarchy, these too were quickly interrupted, as Christianity accommodated itself to prevailing social norms, and the disruptive freedom of the Spirit was institutionally routinized.

What is crucial to remember, to recover, and to realize now is the directionality of Paul's Messianic vision.

Citizenship

41-73. For a review of recent attempts at a “poverty scale” for the early Roman empire, see Longenecker, *Remember the Poor*, 36-59, 317-332.

77. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty, and Survival*, 73.

78. For a more pessimistic conclusion, see Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty, and Survival*, 164-71; for a more optimistic, but still measured appraisal, see Longenecker, *Remember the Poor*, 60-107.

79. These could involve “the removal of dependants from the household (through exposure, ejection, or sale), emigration, begging, crime or asset stripping (which could take a number of forms, from the sale of clothing, household utensils, furniture, stock or tools).” See Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty, and Survival*, 165-66.

80. See Longenecker, *Remember the Poor*, 108-31.

81. 1 Cor 1:9; 9:23; 10:16-18; 2 Cor 1:7; 13:13; Phil 2:1; 3:10. Also crucial here would be Paul’s “in Christ” and “body of Christ” ecclesiology (e.g. 1 Cor 6:15; 10:16; 12:27; Rom 12:4-6), tied to a corporate pneumatology (e.g. 1 Cor 12:13).

82. Rom 12:13; 15:27; 2 Cor 8:4, 23; 9:13; Gal 2:9-10; 6:6; Phil 1:5, 7; 4:14-15; Phlm 17; Gal 6:6.

Chapter 6

1. Neil Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994), 31-52; Justin Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), Appendix 1, Paul’s Social Conservatism: Slavery, Women and the State, 181-88.

2. On Paul’s approach to the ruling authorities, and his rhetoric of submission or subordination to the political rulers, see Gordon Zerbe, “The Politics of Paul: His Supposed Social Conservatism and the Impact of Postcolonial Readings,” *Conrad Grebel Review* 21/1 (Winter 2003): 82-103. Reprinted with minor revisions in *The Colonized Paul: Paul through Postcolonial Eyes*, ed. C. Stanley (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 62-73.

3. For a review of research on slavery in Paul, and in the Greco-Roman world, see John Byron, *Recent Research on Paul and Slavery* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008). For a helpful survey, see S. Scott Bartchy, “Slavery (New Testament),” *ABD* I, 65-73.

4. Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Slavery in Antiquity* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

5. Social, political, and legal status in the cities of the empire was also graded according to whether one enjoyed citizen status as a Roman, Latin, Greek (e.g. citizens of city-states with varying levels of status), or finally any other conquered city or people (e.g. Judeans, Egyptians, etc.). Slaves owned by Romans could, upon manumission, become Roman freedpersons, and their children, common Roman citizens.

6. Strabo, *Geography* 14.5.2. See J. D. Crossan and J. L. Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus’s Apostle Opposed Rome’s Empire with God’s Kingdom* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 41-47.

7. See Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 35-94.

8. The celebrated example is the notorious Trimalchio of Petronius' *Satyricon* (ca. 60s CE), the Great Gatsby of antiquity.

9. See Crossan and Reed, *In Search of Paul*, 209-213, which includes samples of dedicatory formulas for manumission in the synagogue from the first century.

10. This would then provide a parallel scenario to that of Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25-30).

11. Pliny the Younger, *Letters to Trajan* 10.96. For the text, see Chapter 3, p. 71.

12. See J. Albert Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1995).

13. The literature is by now voluminous. See Ross Kremer and Mary D'Angelo, *Women and Christian Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Sandra Polaski, *A Feminist Introduction to Paul* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005); for a brief review, see also Polaski's "Paul and Real Women," *Word and World* 30/4 (2010): 391-98.

14. For a review of primary source materials, see Mary Lefkowitz and Maureen Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Source Book in Translation*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

15. See also Rom 12:8; cf. 1 Tim 3:4, 5, 12; for the noun Paul uses as referring to the "presider" of the congregation, see Justin, *First Apology*, 66-67.

16. Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 60.

17. When comments in both Paul's letters and Acts are correlated, the following profile emerges. They were expelled with all Jews from Rome in 49 CE (Acts 18:1-2). Meeting Paul in Corinth, they serve in Corinth with him for 18 months (Acts 18:1-18). They travel with Paul to Ephesus on his way back to Antioch (Acts 18:18-19), and at Ephesus they correct the theology of Apollos (Acts 18:26). They are with Paul when he writes 1 Corinthians from Ephesus (1 Cor 16:19), and it is probably in Ephesus where they "risk their necks" for Paul's life, during Paul's ordeal with the Roman imperial authorities (Rom 16:4; cf. 2 Cor 1:8-10; 2:14-16; Phil 1:12-30). They were hosts of a house assembly in Ephesus (1 Cor 16:19), and they are back in Rome when Paul writes Romans, presumably returning after the expulsion is lifted in 54 CE., and again host to a house assembly. Paul greets them as "fellow workers in Christ Jesus," and compliments them on their risks as his associates (Rom 16:3-5).

18. Persis is relatively rare among names in Rome; the name recalls a geographical area (Persia) and was a typical slave name; she was probably a migrant to Rome from the East. Tryphena and Tryphosa were also probably freedwomen. See P. Lampe, "Persis," *ABD* V, 244; idem, "Tryphena and Tryphosa," *ABD* VI, 669.

19. Eldon J. Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).

20. Paul is either using a name or nickname, or a kind of term of endearment: the word means "co-yoked." Paul uses the vocative case, and it could be taken as either male (Syzygus) or female (Syzyge).

21. See Florence Gillman, "Apphia," *ABD* I, 317-18.

22. Some later manuscripts changed the original "her" house to "his" or "their." See Florence Gillman, "Nympha," *ABD* IV, 1162.

23. Thekla is a popular virgin martyr ("witness") and saint of the Eastern Church; sites associated with her (Ephesus, Seleucia, Iconium, Nicomedia) become important pilgrimage destinations in the first centuries of the church. In the Eastern Church she is recognized with the designations "equal to the apostles" and "proto-martyr" ("first suffering witness" in a locality). Tertullian (African church father, 160-230) says that the story about her was composed shortly before his time "out of love for Paul" by an elder from the province of Asia, who was then convicted of the deception and removed from his office. Tertullian complained that some Christians were using the example of Thekla to legitimate women's roles of teaching and baptizing in the church (*On Baptism* 1.17). The date of it may therefore be about 160 CE, though undoubtedly based on a long history of oral tradition. See Dennis MacDonald, "Thekla, Acts of," *ABD* VI, 443-44. For an accessible translation, see <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/actspaul.html>, accessed May 29, 2012.

24. Thus to be "in Messiah" is to be (or to signal) "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17).

25. Cf. 1 Cor 12:13 and Col 3:11 which, however, omit the male/female binary.

26. See further, Chapter 4.

27. Alternatively, this ambiguous text could refer to "managing wives."

28. For a recent treatment, see Jennifer Bird, "To What End? Revisiting the Gendered Space of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 from a Feminist Postcolonial Perspective," in *The Colonized Paul: Paul through Postcolonial Eyes*, ed. C. Stanley (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 175-85.

29. For other examples in the NT, see Eph 5:21-6:9; 1 Pet 2:18-3:7; Tit 2:2-6, 9-10; 1 Tim 3:4-5, 12b; 6:1-2. I consider these more definitely post- and non-Pauline.

30. See Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 76-80, 205-35, 251-59. She takes Colossians as written by a disciple of Paul, and representing a patriarchal routinization (already started by Paul) of the more egalitarian expression of the earliest forms of the Christian movement.

31. Other texts expressing an explicit concern for communal "order" are 1 Cor 14:40 (*taxis*), 1 Cor 7:35 (*euschēmon*, decorum, good form), 1 Cor 14:33 and 2 Cor 12:20 (speaking against *akatastasia*, disorder), and 1 Thess 5:14 (contra the *ataktōi*, the disorderly). In 1 Cor 14:33, however, the concern for "peace" somewhat constrains the quest for "order."

32. J. Christiaan Beker, *The Triumph of God: The Essence of Paul's Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 35-36. For the visionary side of things with respect to spousal relationships, see 1 Cor 7:29.

33. For the power of the eschatological now, compare the claim by Babi prophets at the Conference of Badasht (1848) that the presence of paradise now (the arrival of the Messianic age) meant that women could be freed of wearing veils, marking to both the Islamic mainstream and the Babi movement (which generated the Baha'i Faith) the formal split between the two. See Abbas Amanat,

Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844-1850 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Negar Mottahedeh, "Ruptured Spaces and Effective Histories: The Unveiling of the Babi Poetess Qurrat al-'Ayn-Tahirih in the Gardens of Badasht," *UCLA Journal of History* 17 (1997): 59-81.

34. See Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 699-708; Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 252-61.

Chapter 7

1. John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1992), ix.

2. Space does not permit a thorough survey of the divergent streams within the emerging messianic movement, which in the time of Paul was still self-understood as a sub-unit (denomination) within the religio-political entity of Israel/Judaism (cf. Acts 16:20; 24:5, 14; 28:22, where the Jesus Messianists are a "party" within the people of Israel). These streams or divisions (evident both between and within regions of Paul's work) were based, as today, both on social factors (broadly speaking: linguistic-ethnic-cultural, economic-class, and status-rank-legal factors) and on the impact of key personalities that embody or express these factors (Cephas, Apollos, James, Barnabas, Paul; cf. Antioch in relation to Jerusalem; Paul's Greek-speaking congregations in relation to the "saints in Judea"; the agitators and "men from James" in Galatians; the super-apostles and their adherents in 2 Cor; rival preachers in Phil 1:15-18). Acts 6-8 also attests to divergent streams, that of Stephen and the "Hellenists" and those of Peter and James and the "Hebraists," including even more Torah-committed messianic Pharisees (cf. Acts 14:4; 21:20-21). That only the "Hellenists" were subjects of the persecution in Acts 7-8 confirms that there were significant differences in their approach to the Torah and the temple, the immediate cause of the persecution. Subsequent to Paul's ministry, a Johannine stream can be distinguished (along with schismatics from it; 1 John 2:18-25; 4:1-6; 2 John 7), as can a Petrine stream (Matthew). While considerable diversity is evident from the beginning of the messianic movement, such that one must recognize polygenesis, what is especially difficult is to provide appropriate descriptive terms or adequate characterization of the various streams. For instance, the terms "Jewish Christianity" or "Hellenistic Christianity" are certainly problematic, and even the term "Christianity" is significantly anachronistic for Paul's time and for his theology. See Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); J. D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, 3rd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2006). While Paul takes pains to resolve emerging diversity and tension within the messianic movement itself, an equally crucial question for Paul is the growing "intramural" rift within Israel more generally, as a result of adherence and non-adherence to Messiah.

3. For a consistent apocalyptic-eschatological framework for Paul's ecclesiology, see esp. J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God*