

B. Paul and Women

1. Paul's Advice of Gender Relations

Those who oppose women's leadership in the church believe that gender roles are different, appealing to Paul's letters to argue for their position: "Women should be silent in the churches" (1 Cor 14:34-35); "Husband is the head of wife, and woman is man's glory" (1 Cor 11:3-7). Over against the common misunderstanding of these texts, scholarly interpretation goes in multiple directions. In other words, there are more than one meaning possibility. Among others, we will examine the following three scholarly positions regarding this issue. The first position represents the hierarchical view of gender relations. The second position argues that some of these texts are an interpolation (insertion by later copyists). The third and last position argues that meaning of these texts should be confined to a local context where specific local problems are addressed.

1 Cor 14:34-35

"Women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church."

i) Hierarchical Gender Relations

Those who take this view read "women's silence in the churches" as Paul's own advice to the Corinthians and apply it to all churches in history. In this view, Paul is read as a socially conservative who affirms the gender inequality. Accordingly, women cannot be leaders in the churches. Is this what Paul meant in the Corinthian context?

ii) Interpolation (insertion) by Later Copyists or Editors

Interestingly, there is a similar passage about women's silence in 1 Tim 2:11-15, one of Pastoral

Letters (1-2 Tim, Titus). Scholars believe that these pastoral letters were written not by Paul but by later followers of Paul. Thus a possible reasoning is that later editors inserted this part of women's silence to cement a hierarchical, patriarchal household church. **Actually, Paul's view of women elsewhere in his own letters such as Gal 3:28 and 1 Cor 11:11 is very consistent.** Men and women are equal, participating in the church equally. In this view, Paul is salvaged by interpolation theory.¹

iii) Localized, Contextual Advice

Those who take this position think that Paul addresses a specific local problem in the Corinthian church. So it is a specific advice to a specific case; it is not a universal, moral, ethical principle that applies to all churches in history. Calvin also affirms that Paul's advice of women's silence is to be understood with a specific condition and context in view, not through the principle of God's law. As we see in Paul's letters, Paul loved to work with female leaders such as Phoebe and Prisca.²

What is then a local problem addressed in this situation and what is Paul's advice to it? Some scholars think that there were many women followers of mystery religions such as goddess of Dionysus or Isis. These women radically expressed feelings of their liberation from social restraints or other control of society, loosening down their long hair, falling into an ecstatic mystical experience as likely in cultic worship services. Some of these women could be part of the Corinthian church, acting like what they did in the mystery cult. Perhaps these women thought that they could freely exercise their freedom and equality in a common worship service. For example, they spoke in tongue without a sense of check and balance. But from Paul's perspective, spiritual gifts are to be exercised carefully for the glory of God, edifying the community (1 Cor 12:7). So what is checked here, according to Paul, is not women's gifts per se but the irresponsible use of gifts only for their mystical, ecstatic pleasures at the expense of the decent, orderly service in the church. According to Paul, speaking in tongue and prophesying are spiritual gifts, but they are to be exercised orderly for the benefit of the community (1

¹ Bonnie Thurston, *Women in the New Testament* (New York: Crossroads Pub., 1998), 46.

² Douglas, *Calvin*, 36, 51, 53, 54.

Cor 14:26-33).³ Some argue that women's speaking in tongue was considered inferior to men's prophesying. In other words, as for Paul, speaking in tongue was regarded as unintelligible or disruptive, whereas prophesying was orderly and persuasive.⁴ All in all, Paul's intention was to protect the Corinthian community from chaotic disruption at the service. In the same vein, Paul did not want the Corinthian community to be seen by outsiders as disorderly or irrational.⁵

Therefore we have to consider the specific, historical, contextual situation in Corinth that Paul advised the Corinthians to check women's speaking in the church. Again, Paul's intent was to maintain a newly emerging Christian community against an unnecessary misunderstanding by society. In this situation, decency and order in worship service are more important than individual spiritual experience. As we see here, what Paul prohibited was not women's active participation in worship service but specific acts of worship behavior that could disrupt the orderly worship experience. In a worship service at this time, it was not advisable for a wife to ask other woman's husband or to point out her husband's error at the worship service.⁶

Otherwise, it may be implausible to think that Paul asked women's silence, because he actually allowed women's free participation (praying and prophesying) in worship service (1 Cor 11:5). How could the same Paul contradict himself at the same time by ordering women's silence in the church and encouraging women's free participation in worship service? Thus Paul's advice of women's silence should be understood in a specific cultural context where some disorderly behaviors was an issue.⁷ That is why many believe that 1 Cor 14:34-36 cannot be applied to all Christian churches in history.⁸ Unfortunately, for so long time Korean churches have used this text to block women's

³ Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 226-233.

⁴ Anders Eriksson, "Women Tongue Speakers, Be Silent: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric," *Biblical Interpretation* 6.1(1998):80-104.

⁵ Fiorenza, 232.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 230, 232-233.

⁷ Oo Jung Lee, *Feminist Theology* (Korean), 146-147.

⁸ Thurston, *Women*, 32.

leadership in the church.⁹

1 Cor 11:3-12

“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. ... 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. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God.”

i) Hierarchical Gender Relations

In this position, a focus is placed on a hierarchical language of the head: “the husband is the head of his wife” and on woman’s being created for the sake of man. Therefore, Paul was said to believe that man and woman are not equal; and women’s leadership in the church is inconceivable.

ii) Interpolation (insertion) by Later Copyists or Editors

As 1 Cor 14:34-35 can be an interpolation, the same thing applies to 1 Cor 11:2-16. In this view, Paul consistently affirms equality between men and women throughout his letters (seven undisputed letters). That is why many scholars believe that these verses could be a voice of later Christians after Paul.¹⁰ John Dominic Crossan also argues that these texts were inserted by later editors or copyists who wanted to secure a hierarchical structure of the church. As time went by, the Christian churches became larger and Paul’s radical theology of equality was replaced by a conservative, reactionary theology, which did not allow gender equality and equal participation of its members, men and women.¹¹

⁹ Fiorenza, 231.

¹⁰ Thurston, *Women*, 43.

¹¹ John D. Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *In Search of Paul* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 75.

iii) Localized, Contextual Advice

Calvin points out that 1 Cor 11 (“women’s head-covering and the husband’s being head of his wife”) does not cohere with Gal 3:28 (“equality between men and women”). Paul’s advice (head-covering) in 1 Cor 11 is not a universal truth that applies to all churches in history; rather, it should be understood as a specific advice that addresses a specific, historical problem. In Paul’s view, both men and women are recovered from the old Adamic self and become new creation in Christ.¹²

The specific local problem, addressed by Paul, has to do with unruly behaviors of women as we saw before. In this view, Paul makes it sure that worship service should be conducted orderly. The aim of the Christian community is to proclaim the gospel and to build the community strong. The loosening of hair was considered unholy and unclean in Jewish Christian communities. For instance, “the person who has the leprous disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be disheveled; and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean’” (Lev 13:45).¹³

In this view, Paul is concerned about women’s unruly behaviors at worship service. He wants the Corinthian church to be socially acceptable to outsiders.¹⁴ Of course, Paul’s view of women is very different from society. First, in Pauline churches women prophesy and participate in worship service. The only problem for women is certain behavior or act at worship service. Second, conflict between genders can be resolved “in the Lord.” “Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God” (1 Cor 11:11-12). Therefore, either man or woman cannot dominate the other. Their relationship is interdependent.¹⁵

Thus far we examined three positions on the interpretation of 1 Cor 14:34-35 and 1 Cor 11:3-5.

¹² Ibid., 22, 34, 35, 36, 39.

¹³ Fiorenza, *Memory*, 227, 232, 233.

¹⁴ Oo Jung Lee, *Feminist Theology*, 137-138.

¹⁵ Ibid., 142-144; Crossan and Reed, 113-114.

Many Korean churches have taken the position of a hierarchical gender relations at the sacrifice of other important options. In fact, as we saw before, Paul did not reject women's free participation in worship service and their leadership roles. We want our churches to be more progressive for women's leadership. We need to follow Paul's radical theology of inclusion and equality of all people. In the next section we will delve into Paul's theology.

2. The Principle of Gender Equality in Paul's Theology

Thus far we examined and challenged some interpretations that oppose women's ordination or leadership roles in the church. In fact, Paul's theology of gender equality permeates throughout his letters. We will focus on the following four points and their related texts:

- “One is justified through faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal 2:16)
- “There is no longer male and female in Christ” (Gal 3:28)
- “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Cor 5:17)
- “Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God” (1 Cor 11:11-12).

“Justification through faith” (Gal 2:16)

As Cousar argues, Paul's gospel, preached to the Gentiles (“justification through faith in Jesus”), aims at including the Gentiles into the household of God. So justification is a gift of God for them and they are required to live a righteous life.¹⁶ Now a new community of faith dawned for all people,

¹⁶ Charles B. Cousar, *Biblical Commentary on Galatians* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 56-57.

regardless of their gender or class. In this new community all are included: male and female, Jews and the Gentiles.

“All are one in Christ” (Gal 3:28)

“For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 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 Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26-28).

Many believe that Gal 3:28 is part of a baptismal formula in early Christian communities. In baptism all are equal, with no discriminations made on the basis of race, gender or class. This means that a new order of community was created, moved away from the old order of discriminations. Human equality expressed in Gal 3:28 became a foundation for UN Human Rights Declaration.¹⁷ As many scholars agree, Gal 3:28 was a baptismal creedal formula practiced in early Christian communities, and Paul used this same formula in Galatians to ascertain equality of members in Christ, regardless of their origin, race or gender. New members of the Christian communities expressed their equal identity in Christ, rejecting Greco-Roman values of hierarchy.¹⁸ Gal 3:28 is a conclusive case for Paul that he believed the equality of people in Christ. Within the community of Christ all are equal: Jewish Christians, Gentile Christians, male or female, freed persons or slaves.¹⁹ Indeed, Gal 3:28 shows a fundamental principle of gender ~~relations~~ equality in Paul's theology, and within the community all become God's people through faith (Gal 3:24), not by any human standards or dominating ideologies such as ethnicity, class, or gender.²⁰ For many centuries the teaching of Gal 3:28 had been greater charter of gender equality in the Christian community.²¹

¹⁷ SangNim Ahn, *Feminist Theological Story* (Seoul: DaeHan Kidok Seohoe, 1992), 300.

¹⁸ Oo Jung Lee, *Feminist Theology*, 229.

¹⁹ Crossan and Reed, *Paul*, xiii.

²⁰ Thurston, *Women*, 37.

²¹ Oo Jung Lee, *Feminist Theology*, 179, 224.

“New Creation in Christ” (2 Cor 5:17)

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”

According to Paul, anyone in Christ becomes a new creation. This means we do not judge people according to their physical, outer appearances. In Christ there is no role of circumcision or uncircumcision (Jews and Gentiles); men and women freely participate in the church. All who are in Christ are entitled to serve as priests, prophets, or any roles, using their gifts. Gender has no place in this regard.²²

“All things from God” (1 Cor 11:12)

“Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God” (1 Cor 11:11-12)

“For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Cor 12:13)

There is no longer male and female in Christ; thus males and females are to work together as coworkers of ministry. In Paul’s theology men and women are equal at home and in the church alike; there is no distinction between men’s role and women’s role in the church. In Christian communities nobody can exercise his or her power over others. Nobody is superior to others, but all are equal.²³

The above scriptures demonstrate Paul’s principle of gender equality.

²² Ji Chul Kim, “A Biblical Approach to Women’s leadership,” in *Status of Women’s ordination in the Korean Presbyterian Church (TongHap)* (Seoul, Korea: National Female Ministers Association of the Presbyterian Church (TongHap), 1992), 110.

²³ Crossan and Reed, *Paul*, 110.

In sum, Paul's view of gender relations is radical. It is his conviction that there is no longer female and male in Christ. Those who insist unequal gender relations in Korean churches need to rediscover Paul's radical view of gender equality. For this purpose, Paul's letters need to be carefully analyzed as we showed before. Namely, Deutero-Pauline (Colossians and Ephesians) and Pastoral letters (1-2 Tim and Titus) should be distinguished from Paul's seven undisputed letters. A gendered hierarchy is clearly observed in those later letters (Deutero and Pastoral letters). We should know that if we exclude women from the leadership roles, we also reject Paul's view of gender equality. Paul affirms all clothed with Christ equally participate in the ministry of the Lord. Now is the time for all Korean churches to adopt Paul's view of gender equality and to embrace both men and women in leadership positions. If we do so, we can participate in "new creation" – a new community of equality and diversity.

3. Paul's Female Coworkers

We saw in chapter 5 that female leaders had important roles in the early Christian churches. Early Christian movement began with small house churches and most of their leaders were women. In this section we will introduce female leaders, Paul's coworkers: Phoebe, Prisca, Lydia, Junia, and Dorca. This is evidence that Paul practiced his view of gender equality in the church.

Phoebe

"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, **2so** that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well" (Rom 16:1-2).

In Rom 16:1, Paul introduces Phoebe as *diakonos* (deacon), which means "service." Outside of the New Testament, this word is often used with serving on the table. However, according to a Jewish historian in the first century C.E, Josephus, the meaning of *diakonos* in Judaism was expanded to

include priestly works. In the New Testament, Jesus used it as referring to God's love, moved away from the typical use of the Greco-Roman world. In other words, *diakonos* (service) means also work of loving sacrifice for others. To serve the little ones is equal to serve Jesus (Mt 25:40). *Diakonos* is also used for apostles: "servant of the gospel" or "servant of Christ/God" (2 Cor 11:23).²⁴

Paul uses it to himself (1 Cor 3:5), to Apollos (1 Cor 3:6), and to Christ (Rom 15:8). In this context of usage of the word, Phoebe (as deacon) must have been a church leader and an apostle of the gospel at Cenchreae.²⁵ However, interestingly, when *diakonos* is used for a man, many English translations have it servant/minister (Eph 3:7; 6:21; Col 1:7, 23, 25; 4:7; 1 Thess 3:2; 1 Tim 4:6); but when it is used for a woman, they translate it **as a** deacon (implying that she was not a minister or leader).

Phoebe's other title is *prostatis* (Rom 16:2), which can be translated as benefactor or helper. In Greco-Roman world, *prostatis* means a person's powerful position, like a wealthy benefactor who could function as a leader of the household and as a supporter of other members belonging to him. Thus it is believed that Phoebe was taking the role of leadership at the church of Cenchreae. Thus the translation of "helper" for *prostatis* is not good one. The other meaning of *prostatis* is "presiding officer" (1 Tim 5:17) and its verbal form is used for elders (presiding elders). Thus we can say that Phoebe could be also a leading elder. The same verb of *prostatis* was also used to mean "to rule" (Rom 12:7-8; 1 Thess 5:12). In the writings of the church fathers, the masculine noun of *prostatis* was used to those who executed the Lord's Supper. However, translations of Phoebe's title (*prostatis*) were not done well. Phoebe was not a mere female helper but a leader (pastor) of the church.²⁶ It is believed that Phoebe played a significant leadership role in the church and worked with Paul.²⁷

²⁴ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub., 1985), 153. See also the RSV Interlinear Greek-English New Testament (Marshall).

²⁵ Soo Am Park, *Women Ordination in the New Testament*, 1992, 94.

²⁶ Richard and Catherine Kroeger, *Female Elders Called by God* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church USA, 1980), 16.

²⁷ HyunSook Nah, *Right, the Lord* (Seoul: Presbyterian Church Women Association, 1994), 133.

Prisca and Aquila

“Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ” (Rom 16:3-5; cf. Acts 18:2, 18, 26; 1 Cor 16:9; 1 Tim 4:19).

Prisca and Aquila are a married Jewish couple and are highly commended by Paul. The name of this couple appears six times in the New Testament, four of them appearing with Prisca mentioned first. According to Acts 18:2, they had become followers of Christ before Paul came to Corinth. Prisca and Aquila were part of Jews, expelled from Rome by the edict of Claudius. This couple worked together with Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:3). They went to Ephesus along with Paul and built a house church (Acts 18:18-19; 1 Cor 16:9). Paul calls them coworkers in Rom 16:3, and they served as leaders of a house church.²⁸ Their house was used as a gathering place (church), and they played a leadership role in the early house church. This Jewish Christian couple taught Apollos. This is evidence that both men and women exercised leadership roles in early Christianity. “He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately” (Acts 18:26). Note here too that name Prisca is mentioned before Aquila, her husband.

Adolf Von Harnack claims that Prisca is the author of the Letter to the Hebrews. Prisca and Aquila risked their necks for the mission of Christian gospel (Rom 16:3). As we saw earlier, women in early house churches equally participated in the church by prophesying or praying in public service (1 Cor 11:5).²⁹ It is believed that Prisca also served as a leader.

²⁸ Soo Am Park, 93; JiChul Kim, 112-113.

²⁹ Oo Jung Lee, *Feminist Theology*, 246-248.

Lydia (Acts 16:11-15, 40)

In 50 C.E, Paul preached to a group of women praying outside of the city of Philippi on the day of Sabbath. They gathered at Lydia's house. This is the beginning of the Philippians church (Acts 16:15, 40). Paul built the first church in the west by the initiative of Lydia and other females as central leaders. This church had very warm relationships with Paul, as we know from its financial support of Paul's ministry. This first European church had women leaders. Actually, this church was founded by Lydia and her female friends after they prayed and met Paul.

Junia

"Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was" (Rom 16:7).

Junia is common name and it appears 250 times in historical documents. We find that some translators/copists translated (changed) this female name Junia to Junias, which is a male name. As we read in Rom 16:6, Andronicus and Junia are a couple. But as time passed by, some people in later time did not like that fact that a female was an apostle along with her husband, not mere apostles but among prominent apostles.³⁰

John Chrysostom, a great bishop of the Greek church in fourth century C.E, also acknowledged Junia's apostleship: "To become a disciple is great. How great women's dedication is! She deserves to be an apostle."³¹ Junia and Andronicus were among outstanding apostles.³² They seemed to be a couple like that of Prisca and Aquila. They were imprisoned together with Paul.

³⁰ Crossan and Reed, *Paul*, 115-116.

³¹ Kroegers, *Female Elder*, 17.

³² Sang Nim Ahn, *Feminist Theological Story*, 267.

Dorcas (Tabitha)

“Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity” (Acts 9:36).

Dorcas is called disciple, the only woman disciple (*mathetria*) explicitly mentioned in the Bible. In some Korean Bible she is a *female believer*, instead of disciple, but NRSV correctly translates it as a female disciple. *Mathetria* is not equal to a female believer; thus such a translation of a female believer is a critical mistake. Dorcas was a female disciple. As we saw before in Rom 16, Paul lists many woman co-workers who closely worked with him as leaders of the church. Prisca (wife) was named first before her husband, Aquila, in Rom 16 and elsewhere, which signals that Prisca was influential in ministry. In Paul’s greeting list of names in Rom 16, ten among twenty seven are women. Paul especially commends five women (Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, and Rufus’ mother) and six men as well. Women listed in Rom 16 functioned as deacon, patron, fellow worker, and apostle. There is no difference between men’s role and women’s role. Put differently, leadership role was more important than gender role.³³

According to E. Eral Ellis, as for **Paul**, coworkers (*synergos*) means the ones who participated in his mission journeys while *brothers* means local church members in general. *Diakonos* means someone who preached or taught with charismatic gifts as leaders of the local churches, while *apostolos* means all apostles beyond the Twelve, including Paul. Women have all these titles as we see in Rom 16.³⁴

In conclusion, Paul respected women and worked with female workers – leaders of the church. In this respect, “women’s silence in the church” is impossible for Paul. As 1 Cor 14:34-35 was discussed

³³ Crossan and Reed, *Paul*, 115.

³⁴ Thurston, *Women*, 53.

already, Paul is salvaged through an interpolation (insertion) theory that his advice of women's silence is to be applied to a specific situation of the church. Paul acknowledged women's leadership roles in the church (Rom 16:7; Acts 9:36). Women were his coworkers (Rom 16:1; Phil 4:2). Church was a dynamic, vibrant community in which all members, men and women, are interdependent with one another. Paul's view of women and equality of genders in Christian ministry was a revolutionary one, because society was run by a gendered hierarchy. As we saw earlier, in early Christianity there were many women followers of Christ, many of whom played a significant role in the church. In our church situation today, Paul's radical view of gender equality and equal leadership roles should be brought back to our life. We need to reclaim Paul's theology of radical equality in Christ. Our portrayal of Paul should not come from later epistles written after Paul's death (for example, 1-2 Tim), in which we see a clear language of hierarchy between masters and slaves, between a husband and a wife, and so forth. The next legitimate question is: Where did Paul learn his radical reforming theology and insights of gender equality and equal leadership roles between men and women?