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The Role of Contemporary Psychology in Christian Counseling

Andrew Mann

Christian counseling and traditional psychotherapy have a history of conflict (Johnson, Myers, & Jones, 2010), but because both are values-oriented and seek to improve social and emotional functioning (Sanders, 2013), there are actually many areas of common ground. When counseling from a Christian perspective, drawing from the field of psychology is beneficial because it offers a wealth of effective strategies that lend themselves to a Christian framework. A comparison of Christian counseling and psychotherapy will be presented, along with arguments for integrating the two perspectives. Specific psychological theories and counseling methods will be examined to identify components that integrate easily with biblical principles, as well as areas of disagreement. For the purposes of this paper, the terms “therapy” and “counseling” will be used synonymously.

Comparison of Christian Counseling and Psychotherapy

The term “Christian counseling” can mean different things because there are multiple branches of Christianity and multiple approaches to counseling. In general, the term refers to therapy guided by biblical principles and theological perspective, in the belief that faithfulness is the key to self-improvement and lasting change (McMinn, Staley, Webb, & Seegobin, 2010). Sessions are led by clergy or qualified therapists, or by someone who functions in both roles (Sanders, 2013). Christian counseling models range from those that use only the Bible or bible-based literature (Kellemen, 2015), to those that follow biblical principles in a general sense while drawing heavily from psychological findings provided they do not contradict Christian doctrine (McMinn et al., 2010). Other models exist across the continuum, with most using a Christian framework to undergird the process and psychological knowledge to fill the gaps (McMinn et al., 2010). In general, Christian counselors agree with the broader counseling world that the quality and depth of the client/counselor relationship greatly impacts therapeutic outcomes (Sanders, 2013), and that fundamental skills like Socratic questioning and empathetic listening are essential to success.

The term “psychotherapy” refers to the use of psychological methods in therapy sessions to help clients overcome obstacles or change behavior (Myers & DeWall, 2015). Psychology is defined as the study of behavior and mind; it originated in ancient times, with insights drawn primarily from observation and reflection (Johnson et al., 2010). The use of empirical methods revolutionized the field, and its scientific findings now inform many disciplines, including counseling (Myers & DeWall, 2015). Psychological

research has given rise to hundreds of therapeutic approaches (Tan, 2011), including cognitive therapy, narrative therapy, and behavioral therapy. Clinicians may ascribe to a particular school of thought, or they may combine elements of multiple approaches. Typically, the therapist is familiar with many approaches and selects a style that best suits the client's needs (Patterson, Edwards, Chamow, Grauf-Grounds, & Williams, 2018). As with Christian counseling, the focus of therapy varies widely, ranging from comparatively minor issues to coping with devastating loss or trauma.

To distinguish psychotherapy from Christian counseling, psychotherapy is sometimes referred to as secular therapy or secular counseling (Johnson et al., 2010). Christian clients sometimes prefer therapists who share their belief system, as do people from other faith traditions, whereas non-religious clients often reject a religious approach (Sanders, 2013). However, this is not always the case, and a competent therapist will determine early on the degree to which the client wishes to include spirituality or religion (Patterson et al., 2018). It is considered unethical to counsel from a religious perspective without full disclosure and client consent because therapists should not impose personal beliefs on clients (Sanders, 2013). When client and therapist are at odds, it is sometimes appropriate to refer the client to another therapist (Thomas & Schwarzbaum, 2006).

Conflict between Christian Counseling and Psychotherapy

People seeking counseling often face major life decisions or crises (Patterson et al., 2018), and despite their unique stories, a common thread frequently exists. Regardless of religious affiliation or presenting problem, clients often have similar ultimate goals. Underlying their immediate needs is a desire for love, joy, and peace; improved relationships; and sometimes they wish to develop character traits like patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Tan, 2011). The Bible identifies these qualities as "fruits of the spirit" (Galatians 5:22-23), and Christians believe they are the byproducts of righteous living and a relationship with Jesus Christ (Kellemen, 2015) rather than the results of personal effort alone. However, the field of psychology also promotes these ideals (Patterson et al., 2018), although the terminology might differ. For example, a psychologist would likely use the term "anger management" rather than "gentleness." Christian counselors might view these qualities as signs of spiritual health, whereas the broader counseling world would likely view them as markers of mental or psychological health.

Despite these differences, the commonalities between Christian and secular counseling are undeniable. For example, they both believe that people are responsible for their behavior and experience consequences of their actions, that people need hope and meaning in their lives, and that thoughts influence feelings and behavior (Tan, 2011). Given their similarities, it seems illogical

that the two fields function separately when collaborating might be more productive.

However, disagreements between the two camps have often been heated and bitter, making cooperation a rarity (Johnson et al., 2010). Among Christian circles, the biblical counseling movement takes the most extreme position, arguing for the sufficiency of scripture in dealing with life's problems (Lambert, 2016). Advocates contend that sin-tainted secular psychology should be rejected when providing counsel because many of their theories deny God and exalt man (Lambert, 2016). Some even recommend that biblical counselors only counsel Christians because the nonregenerate mind is incapable of understanding scripture (Lambert, 2016). Likewise, psychology has often taken a dim view of religion, regarding the two disciplines as aspects of life that should not intersect (Johnson et al., 2010). At times, certain factions have even declared religion an obstacle to mental health, pointing to cases of extremism and abuse (Johnson et al., 2010). Given the conflict, is there room for middle ground?

An Integrated Perspective

While *all* Christians believe that only Jesus can fulfill one's deepest longings, many Christian counselors do not agree that non-biblical resources should be banned, and they readily acknowledge that modern psychology has something to offer (Tan, 2011). They contend that *all* people, not just Christians, are created in the image of God, and through common grace, *all* people have the potential to discern truth and make valuable contributions in any field imaginable, including psychology (Tan, 2011). If this is true, it stands to reason that many "secular" insights regarding the human psyche would pass muster with the psychologically inclined while remaining consistent with biblical principles, as the two are not mutually exclusive. Likewise, spirituality is increasingly recognized by personality scientists as a vital component of the well-being of the whole person that can and should be included in any comprehensive view of human nature (Cervone & Pervin, 2013). Out of this spirit of cooperation has arisen an attempt to integrate religious and spiritual principles with contemporary psychology (Johnson et al., 2010). From this perspective, there is value in both professional psychology and Christianity, thus combining wisdom from both disciplines is reasonable (Johnson et al., 2010), and anything less is a disservice to clients.

Psychological interventions might not be essential with a client who requests explicit Christian therapy that relies on Bible reading, prayer, and guidance from the Holy Spirit, but even then, many would argue that there is no reason to avoid "secular" strategies when they fit the situation (Tan, 2011). For example, the empty chair technique from Gestalt therapy could be used with a client who needs to address unfinished business (Patterson et al., 2018). Gestalt therapy assumes that personal growth is made possible through insight and positive relationships (Cervone & Pervin, 2013), and Proverbs 13:20

(NIV) affirms this concept: *“Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.”*

However, for a variety of reasons, some clients seeking Christian therapy prefer an implicit, indirect approach in which the therapist follows biblical principles in a broad sense but does not include prayer or make specific references to scripture, at least not in the initial stages (McMinn et al., 2010). In that situation, techniques advanced by contemporary psychology are often needed to provide structure and fill the gaps left by the absence of prayer and Bible reading. The Bible and Christian ideals provide the overarching goals, and strategies from traditional psychotherapy are useful for promoting incremental change. In either case, incorporating psychological methods is entirely appropriate as long as they are filtered through a biblical lens (Patterson et al., 2010) and rejecting them because they did not originate with a Christian could be viewed as denying the doctrine of common grace.

A relevant point is that some Christian counseling models recognize three levels of therapy, including encouragement, confrontation and/or behavior change, and enlightenment or changing underlying beliefs (Lambert, 2016). At its deepest level, Christian counseling seeks to have clients embrace the redemptive message of salvation (Kellemen, 2015), but many clients are not looking for this level of change or commitment. However, many of them could benefit from encouragement and a change in behavior, regardless of underlying beliefs. A compromise between a Christian counselor and a non-Christian client would be providing encouragement and support for behavior change, while addressing underlying beliefs at a level that is comfortable for the client. Christian counselors who are reluctant to counsel the unrepentant would do well to remember that “Jesus continued to disciple Judas, even though he knew he would ultimately betray him” (N. Moraes, personal communication, March 21st, 2019).

Psychological Approaches, Theories, and Techniques

Arguably, some of the world’s greatest thinkers hail from the field of psychology. Their work has contributed greatly to current understandings of human functioning, and some of their theories will now be examined. Freud’s psychoanalysis, behaviorism, humanistic psychology, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), and narrative therapy will be analyzed to discover areas of compatibility with Christian ideals, as well as key differences. Methods for adapting psychological techniques for use in Christian counseling will be suggested when appropriate.

Psychoanalysis

Freud was a powerhouse in his day, with psychoanalysis emerging in the 1920s and remaining dominant until the 1970s (Myers & DeWall, 2015). Today, his comprehensive theory of personality is largely discounted by both

Christian and secular thinkers, due in part to its overemphasis on sexual drives and psychosexual development, not to mention the lack of empirical support (Myers & DeWall, 2015). Still, many sources affirm that his innovative “talk therapy” (the idea that simply talking about problems could reduce anxiety) was the precursor to modern psychotherapy (Tan, 2011).

Psychoanalysis involves using techniques like free association and dream analysis to uncover unconscious sources of childhood conflict that led to a current pathology (Tan, 2011), and the outlook regarding recovery is somewhat bleak. Although Freud’s psychoanalysis has fallen out of favor, he remains an influential figure, and difficulties that he identified are routinely encountered and treated through other methods by clinicians in a variety of settings (Myers & DeWall, 2015). It is noteworthy that some of his points have stood the test of time and are defensible from a Christian standpoint.

First of all, Freud introduced the idea of defense mechanisms (Tan, 2011), a concept that is tightly woven into the fabric of psychological thinking, including rationalization, repression, and denial. Defense mechanisms are coping strategies employed to shield a wounded person from further harm (Shapiro, 2015), but they can also isolate the person and block the emotional healing that is available in Jesus Christ. For instance, a person in an abusive relationship may rationalize or deny it by making excuses, accepting blame, or refusing to face facts that seem obvious to everyone else. Breaking down protective barriers is a painful process that leaves a person vulnerable and forces him or her to face facts and make decisions. Painful though it is, it can ultimately lead to healing, and is a worthy endeavor to undertake in Christian counseling. It requires facing past wounds and getting in touch with buried feelings so that the person can leave them behind and move ahead with life (Patterson et al., 2018).

Secondly, Freud believed that unexpressed emotions are toxic and can erupt later in destructive ways (Shapiro, 2015). This idea is supported by the apostle Paul’s words in Ephesians 4:26-27 (ESV): “*Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.*” This verse cautions that finding healthy outlets for anger, and by extension other emotions, is necessary to prevent one’s pain from causing further damage. Venting is now widely regarded as an acceptable way to express disappointment, anger, or frustration before it festers; this was one of Freud’s earliest observations (Shapiro, 2015), and he called the process “cathartic release.” He made an important point, because it is well documented that bottled up emotions can lead to conditions like anxiety or insomnia (Myers & DeWall, 2015). A Christian model for venting is found in Psalms 18:6 (KJ21), when David cried out to God in despair: “*In my distress I called upon the Lord and cried unto my God; He heard my voice out of His temple, and my cry came before Him, even unto His ears.*” Once negative emotions are expressed, channeling them into positive action is a common therapy goal, and Christians might do this by getting involved in causes, becoming active in

church-based support groups, or helping others in similar situations (Patterson et al., 2018).

Behaviorism

Behaviorism developed alongside and in response to Freudian psychology, and warrants a brief mention because it influenced later thinking (Myers & DeWall, 2015). Watson et al. criticized Freud for gathering clinical evidence only, and supported a scientific approach that relied on data rather than personal insight (Shapiro, 2015). Behaviorism began with animal studies that changed behavior with reinforcers, and Watson applied these findings to humans (Myers & DeWall, 2015). The approach was later criticized for its simplistic view that rewards alone determine behavior, the fact that it ignored obvious differences between animals and humans, and because it disregarded free will and internal influences (Tan, 2011).

Nonetheless, the reward principle is scriptural and undeniable, as Philippians 3:14 (NIV) makes clear: *“I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”* A caution is that sinful behavior is also rewarding, and from a Christian standpoint, therapy goals would include challenging destructive behaviors that the client finds rewarding and building healthier response patterns. Behaviorism may be simplistic, but its principles have proven effective for things like breaking bad habits and establishing replacement behaviors (Myers & DeWall, 2015).

Humanistic Psychology

Humanistic psychology developed in the 1950s in response to psychoanalysis and behaviorism (Tan, 2011), largely from Rogers’ person-centered approach and Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs. The founders regarded psychoanalysis and behaviorism as narrow and limiting, and proposed a holistic view of human nature that recognized the importance of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual factors (Cervone & Pervin, 2013). According to Tan, this perspective views people as essentially good with inherent motivation to become their best selves, provided they are given love and acceptance. Humanism emphasizes free will, ethical value systems, individualism, and reaching one’s full potential through creative interactions and choices (2011).

Tan explains that client-centered therapy developed from this outlook; it deemphasized technique, and instead regarded the client/counselor relationship as the crucial factor for successful therapy. The counselor functions not as an expert but as a facilitator. Rather than solving problems, the focus is discovering and building upon the client’s strengths (2011). According to Ivey, Ivey, & Zalaquett, the therapist offers unconditional positive regard and creates a safe environment where clients can heal and grow. Instead of looking to the past to find a pathology, the client is encouraged to

examine the current environment to determine whether particular elements enhance or limit growth potential. By doing so, clients take responsibility for their problems, avoid assigning blame, and gear their actions toward positive growth (2014).

There are several aspects of humanistic theory that are theologically sound from a Christian perspective. First of all, person-centered therapy's emphasis on the working alliance in counseling is consistent with the Bible's focus on the importance of relationships, and this concept is supported by research (Ivey et al., 2014). Also, its emphasis on an individual's right to make independent choices is justified. However, Tan states that there are areas of distinct disagreement, including the view that man is essentially good and tends toward positive growth if given unconditional love. A Christian view of mankind certainly includes the potential for goodness, but it also includes the darker side of human nature. Christians agree that effort and a positive attitude are helpful, but would disagree with the overly self-sufficient nature of this philosophy (2011).

While client-centered therapy did not originally endorse specific techniques, motivational interviewing (MI) is a contemporary version that offers several helpful suggestions (Tan, 2011). For example, developing discrepancy is a technique in which the therapist distinguishes between clients' deeply held beliefs and their current behavior and points out discrepancies in an effort to get the client's attention and bring about change (Tan, 2011). This technique could prove useful in Christian counseling if a client's behavior is incongruent with his or her values, and is consistent with the scriptural mandate to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). An important point is that Christian therapists can implement helpful strategies without adopting the underlying philosophies of their advocates (Johnson et al., 2010).

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

With an emphasis on changing destructive thoughts, feelings and behaviors (Ivey et al., 2014), cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is an evidenced-based approach that is easily adapted to a biblical perspective. CBT emerged in the 1960s, growing out of Watson's behaviorism, which originally developed in opposition to Freud (Myers & DeWall, 2015). According to Shapiro, the updated version was adapted to include cognitive aspects that earlier behaviorist theory ignored, emphasizing reflection and self-awareness over mindlessly changing behavior with reinforcers (2015). Client and therapist form an alliance and work as a team to set goals, look at problems differently, and find practical solutions (Tan, 2011).

Like client-centered therapy, CBT deals with specific issues in the here and now (Shapiro, 2015). According to Patterson et al., it may not be the best approach to address problems stemming from unresolved issues or childhood traumas, and is best suited for changing behavior stemming from a particular mindset. From this perspective, destructive thought patterns

maintain problem behaviors, and the goal is to break the cycle by changing cognitive distortions (2018). For example, people with distorted thinking may see themselves as failures and give up if they do not achieve desired goals, whereas people with healthier attitudes are more likely to keep trying.

There are obvious parallels between CBT and a Christian perspective in that both approaches focus on looking forward rather than living in the past. In Philippians 3:13 (CEB), the apostle Paul writes, *“Brothers and sisters, I myself don’t think I’ve reached it, but I do this one thing: I forget about the things behind me and reach out for the things ahead of me.”* Likewise, both Christianity and CBT emphasize the connection between thoughts and actions, and seek to correct faulty thinking in order to change behavior (Tan, 2011); a typical therapy goal is aligning thought patterns and behaviors with beliefs. From a secular viewpoint, one’s personal moral compass sets the standard for proper thoughts and behaviors (Lambert, 2016). With a Christian approach, faulty thinking and positive behavior change are defined by biblical principles. In Romans 1:2 (NIV), Paul advised, *“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

When dealing with difficult issues like divorce or abortion, Christian counselors neither condone nor condemn, but instead help clients deal with harsh realities and seek healing and forgiveness (Patterson et al., 2018). As in client-centered therapy, this is best accomplished when the therapist has developed a warm, empathic, and genuine relationship with the client. Counseling goals would likely involve putting the past in proper perspective and moving forward; emphasizing the Holy Spirit’s role in bringing about inner healing; as well as cognitive, behavioral, and emotional change.

Regardless of one’s theoretical orientation, CBT is useful for challenging negative thinking. According to Shapiro (2015), cognitive restructuring is a fundamental tool of CBT that uses self-statements to challenge automatic, maladaptive thoughts with counterthoughts. For instance, when the client is faced with a difficult task, he or she may automatically think, “I can’t handle this.” The client practices replacing the negative thought with a positive self-statement, such as, “I am capable, and I can do this.” Effective self-statements are not overly optimistic; they acknowledge the difficulty of the situation but reframe it as manageable (Ivey et al., 2014). From a Christian standpoint, this technique could be used in a number of situations, such as when a client feels tempted to engage in sinful behavior. An automatic thought might be, “I’ll only do it just this once.” A positive counterthought might be, “I am a child of God, and the Holy Spirit will help me resist this temptation.”

Narrative Therapy

Narrative therapy is based on the idea that “people must see themselves as the hero of their own narrative in order to have hope for the future” (Patterson et al., 2018, p. 44); it involves a cognitive shift rather than a

behavioral shift. It developed in the 1970s from the constructivist view that people encounter problems because of the way that they frame their experiences, primarily focusing on the negative and dismissing the positive as insignificant (Shapiro, 2015). Therapists assess the stories that clients tell about their experiences to discover the underlying themes, listening for positive references that can be used to encourage them to see their lives in a more hopeful, positive light, and to tell their stories differently (Patterson et al., 2018).

Narrative therapy has been criticized for being a social constructionist view in which truth is relative, and is determined by cultural influences or a desire to cast oneself in a flattering light (Tan, 2011). For example, the concept of “changing the narrative” is frequently heard in the political arena, when candidates “reframe” stories to suit their agendas. Nonetheless, deception is not always the motive. The concept of telling one’s story differently is powerful, and can be a useful tool for Christian counselors. A shining example of telling a new story in Christ is found in the words of the beloved hymn, “Amazing Grace” (Newton, 1779): “I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now I see.”

Conclusion

The field of psychology boasts some of the most brilliant minds in history, and their work has contributed greatly to the understanding of human thought, emotion, and behavior. Researchers in the field have spent decades developing and testing strategies that have helped a great number of suffering people. However, many giants in the field are not Christians, and some see that as a problem. The biblical counseling movement in particular acknowledges the contributions of psychology but rejects drawing from them when providing counsel (Lambert, 2016), claiming that solutions for spiritual problems cannot be found apart from the Bible.

Others point out that psychology can be used as a tool without embracing underlying theories that deny God (Johnson et al., 2010). From this perspective, all truth is God’s truth, and Christian counselors do clients a disservice by rejecting effective strategies on the basis of their origin (Patterson et al., 2018). As outlined in this paper, aspects of Freudian theory, behaviorism, humanism, cognitive behavioral therapy, and narrative therapy are compatible with the Bible, regardless of whether their proponents were Christians. In the words of the great John Calvin, “If we regard the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God. . .” (Horton, 2014, p.142-143).

Christian counselors wishing to honor God and advance client welfare will consider all available strategies as long as they do not contradict scripture, and can have confidence that faith and reason will guide their efforts to choose wisely. According to Patterson et al. (2018, p. 50), “Combining the

truths of the Christian faith with psychological wisdom provides a rich context from which to help clients solve their problems.” As for the assertion that Christian counselors should only counsel other Christians, this is akin to saving drowning people only if they can swim. As the apostle Paul states in Romans 15:1-2 (NIV): “*We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up.*” Christians are called to show Christ-like care to everyone, *especially* the floundering, and anything less is unacceptable.

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New Covenant Promise of Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Its Fulfillment in the Church

Cleverson B. Vieira

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (Jeremiah 31:31).

This quotation from the book of Jeremiah has been the object of many studies and discussions throughout the centuries. Not only in Academia but also in the church. This prophecy, along with others that deal with the same issue, is at the center of a debate among those who think that the prophecy is yet to be fulfilled, has partially been fulfilled or has been completely fulfilled.

On one side is the dispensational school which affirms basically that the New Covenant will find its literal fulfillment in the future millennial kingdom where all the Old Testament prophecies concerning the restoration of Israel will follow. Even though there may be different approaches within the dispensational view, it is clear that a sharp distinction is made between Israel and the church. The two are separate entities that take part in the New Covenant through Christ but with different applications: a present application to the church and a future application to Israel.¹

This view claims that the provisions of the New Covenant made by Jeremiah, Isaiah and Ezekiel have not yet been fulfilled. As stated by Walvoord, “The factors which are in context of the major passages are lacking. Israel has not been gathered, nor brought as a whole to Jehovah, not blessed as a nation before the world, does not possess the land, does not have one heart to serve God, is not forever secure from the departure from God and does not know the Lord from the least to the greatest.” And he concludes by saying that there is no justification in these passages for the idea that the church as a whole fulfills the covenant.² Another scholar representing this school emphasizes that the reason for this prophecy to be fulfilled in the future millennial kingdom is due to the rejection of the Messiah by the Jewish people.³ Even though, those who are in Christ already enjoy the benefits of the New Covenant, this does not negate the future fulfillment of the New Covenant with Israel.

¹ John F. Walvoord. “Eschatological Problems X: The New Covenant with Israel,” Accessed February 10, 2019, <http://www.walvoord.com>.

² Ibid.

³ Larry D. Pettegrew, “The New Covenant” *The Masters Seminary Journal*, Vol.10/2 (1999): 266.

On the other side an important hermeneutical lens sees this debate differently. Developed in the period of the Protestant Reformation, Covenant Theology is a theological approach that tries to explain the unity of biblical revelation and the continuity of redemption history as being a unified plan of man's salvation. This means that throughout history God has had only one plan, one covenant and one people. This view takes the church to be the new Israel in the New Testament and considers that God has no separate purpose for Israel and for the church.⁴ Still, regarding all the provisions made by the prophets of the New Covenant, Reformed Theology affirms that they have either been fulfilled in the church or through Christ.⁵

Clearly, these two approaches view salvation history from very different perspectives. This is the reason for the difference in the interpretation of the prophecy in Jeremiah 31. It is critical then that an analysis be made in order to demonstrate what is really meant by the New Covenant promise made with the house of Israel and Judah. The people of God had broken the Old Covenant so many times that unless there was a new one, His people would never have been able to walk in the ways in which God had commanded. Therefore, a brief definition of the word "Covenant" and the purpose of God in making a covenant with human beings is necessary for one to understand what is behind this verse.

The Definition of "Covenant"

Cambridge Dictionary defines "covenant" as "a formal agreement between countries, organizations or people."⁶ Even though this definition is superficially clear, a deeper biblical explanation about the term should be considered.

The word "covenant" appears in the Bible more than 300 times, 290 in the Old Testament. Thus, very few words are as important to the narrative as the word "covenant."⁷ It first appears in Genesis 6:18 when God establishes His covenant with Noah. The Hebrew word used is "*b'rit*," a pre-existing settled relationship between two parties to which, by formal ceremony, they gave binding expression.⁸ Dumbrell asserts that Genesis 6:18 refers to an

⁴ Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1979), 199.

⁵ J. Ligon Duncan III, "Covenant Theology vs. Dispensationalism," Interview by Nancy Guthrie, Feb.7, 2019, Accessed March 1, 2019, <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org>.

⁶ Cambridge Dictionary, "Covenant," (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/covenant?q=Covenant>.

⁷ Duncan, Ibid.

⁸ W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A theology of Old Testament covenants* (Oregon: WIPF and Stock publishers, 1984), 20.

already existing arrangement presumably imposed by God without human concurrence.⁹

Furthermore, O. Palmer Robertson defines "covenant" as a bond in blood sovereignly administered, indicating that the relationship initiated by God with man is not a casual one. The implications of this relationship extend ultimately to the point of life and death and involve a very serious commitment between the parties. Once it is made, nothing less than life itself is required of him who violates the covenant.¹⁰ This clarifies why the term "make a covenant" in the Old Testament literally meant "to cut a covenant."¹¹

Also important to note is the word "sovereignly" in Robertson's definition. Agreeing with Dumbrell, he argues for the unilateral origination of the covenant. No bargain, no exchange or contract characterizes divine covenants in the Bible. The sovereign Lord of heaven and earth is the one who dictates the terms of His relationships.¹²

The Purpose of a Covenant

Scripturally, "covenant" has indicated a "promise," "redemption" and a "relationship."¹³ Robertson queries:

What is the point of the covenant? It is to establish a oneness between God and His people. That oneness which was interrupted by the entrance of sin must be reconstituted through the covenant of redemption. "I shall be your God and you shall be my people" functioning as the central unifying theme of the covenant, underscores the role of oneness as the essence of the goal of the covenant.¹⁴

According to Robertson the ultimate goal of the covenant is relationship. This covenant-based relationship is the means through which God communes with man making Himself known and establishing the only way to bring joy and fulfillment to human beings. As one scholar says, "The major implication of being created in His image and likeness is the possibility of relationship."¹⁵ Thus, it is made obvious that the relational element becomes the main purpose of the covenant between God and man.

⁹ Ibid, 26.

¹⁰ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 8.

¹¹ Ibid, 9.

¹² Ibid, 15.

¹³ John Walton, *Covenant: God's Purpose, God's Plan* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 15.

¹⁴ O. Palmer Robertson, 293-294.

¹⁵ Leandro Lima, *As Grandes Doutrinas Do Antigo Testamento*, vol 1 (São Paulo: Odisseu, 2011), 19.

Another viewpoint, proposed by John Walton, integrates all the strengths of other views. In his opinion the main focus of the covenant is not the relationship, though it is true that this element is there, but rather that God has a program of self-revelation in which the goal is for God to be in relationship with the people that He created. But in order to achieve this goal this self-revelatory plan has to be put in action, and it does so through a mechanism that drives this program being the covenant.¹⁶ In other words, the primary focus of the covenant is not the relationship itself, but making God known to the people with whom He wills a relationship. Even though the revelation of God culminates in God's plan of salvation, which provides the means by which relationship is achieved, the revelation of the one and true God is the particular objective of the covenant program.¹⁷

In conclusion, it seems that what these scholars are arguing is the priority of the covenant concept. Whichever it may be, it is quite clear that the relationship is, and was always intended to be, the important aspect of a biblical covenant. As God's Word frequently reveals, "I shall be your God and you shall be my people."

Consequently, the New Covenant promise made to Israel and Judah includes not only Jews but all God's elected people. God's covenant intention always encompassed the whole of humanity. The nation of Israel was supposed to be a model for the whole world. And the nation of Israel in the Old Testament functioned as a typological example of all God's elected people. And the church in Christ has become the New Israel which is composed of all God's elect.

The Covenant of Creation

Looking into the Covenant of Creation and the Abrahamic Covenant reveals that God included the whole world and not only the Jews from the beginning.

When God says to Noah in Genesis 6:18, "But I will establish my covenant with you..."¹⁸ this seems to suggest that there was no prior formal bond between God and man. Yet, an analysis of this text and its expansion in Genesis 9:1-17 proves the contrary.

In pointing to this covenant made between God and mankind, Dumbrell brings some important contributions to this subject. First, he demonstrates that the term "heqim b^erit" in Genesis 6:18 as well as in every other instance that it appears in the Old Testament, always refers to some pre-existing arrangement and its perpetuation rather than its institution.¹⁹ Second, the term "karat b^erit" (to cut a covenant) which is the standard terminology for covenant initiation between the two parties that are involved, is absent from

¹⁶ Walton, 24.

¹⁷ John Walton., 25

¹⁸ Dumbrell, 11.

¹⁹ Ibid., 25-26.

Genesis 1-11. It seems then, that by using the term “*heqim b^crit*” instead of “*karat b^crit*” when establishing His covenant with Noah, the text would be pointing to a continuation of a covenant previously made and imposed by God, presumably by the fact of Creation.²⁰ Third, a more detailed account of the covenant in 6:18 is given in chapter 9. According to Dumbrell, here God sets forth a new beginning and the similarities between Genesis 9:1,7 and Genesis 1:28 are obvious. Noah is commissioned to be fruitful, to multiply and to fill the earth and his status and role in the order of creation as the divine image is preserved. Also, the covenant now involves Noah’s seed which makes him a representative in 6:18. Hence, as a second Adam, Noah is armed with Adam’s mandate and is the clear representative of the whole human race just like Adam was in the beginning.²¹ Therefore, as a “new Adam” Noah continues the covenant made with Adam in creation.

Additionally, scholars also cite Hosea 6:7 and Jeremiah 33:20-25 as references to a covenant made at the time of Creation. Because Hosea said that Israel had transgressed the covenant like Adam and by the covenant made with the day and night in Jeremiah 33, it seems reasonable to infer that a covenant was made in Creation.²²

Thus, even though “covenant” only appears in Genesis 6:18, a covenant did take place long before the time of Noah: in Creation with Adam as the representative head of humanity. And after sin entered the world through Adam, the promise of a gracious redeemer (Genesis 3:15) would come from the seed of the woman to the whole human race. This seems to indicate that the promise is directed to all humanity and not only to one group of people. Robertson affirms, based on Romans 16:20, that the Apostle Paul alludes to the covenantal commitment of God to guarantee the triumph of the seed of the redeemed over Satan.²³

Therefore, by these evidences one could affirm that the plan of God from the beginning always encompassed the whole world with the refrain being, “I shall be your God and you shall be my people.” According to Robertson, this assertion is considered the heart of the covenant and the link that holds the unity of the covenant of God administered in several ways throughout the Old Testament.²⁴

The Abrahamic Covenant

As history unfolds so does the story of salvation. After dealing with the whole human race in the first eleven chapters of Genesis, God now decides

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

²¹ Dumbrell, 27.

²² Mauro F. Meister, “Uma Breve Introdução ao Estudo do Pacto [A Brief Introduction to the Study of Covenant]. *Fides Reformata*. Vol.III, (Jan-Jun 1998): 120-121.

²³ O. Palmer Robertson, 44.

²⁴ O. Palmer Robertson, 46.

to work His plan through one man and one family. In fact, Walton states that, after the continuous failure of humanity as a whole, the message of the book of Genesis is to offer these first eleven chapters as the explanation for why Yahweh has chosen to work through a particular people.²⁵ Expanding this idea, Stevenson affirms that Genesis 1-11 functions as a prologue for the rest of the Pentateuch, where, Abraham stands at the center and is the pivotal point as the father of the nation through whom all the world would be blessed.²⁶

When talking about God's promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, Horton has an interesting point concerning the covenant. He says, "The promissory oath (Abrahamic Covenant) underlies the whole subsequent development; it is the broad basis on which the two successive covenants rest. The Sinai Covenant is the one realized in the temporal typological kingdom; the Abrahamic is realized in the heavenly eschatological kingdom."²⁷ The first one includes God's promise to bless Abraham, give him a great name and a nation. The second covenant, which serves as the basis for the first, has the same promise made to Adam after the fall and deals with the promise of a messianic seed who will undo the damage he caused in alliance with the serpent.²⁸

Along this line Hoekema says this was the great purpose behind Genesis 12:3.²⁹ Quoting N.T Wright, Peter Gentry agrees and says that the line of disaster from Adam to Babel begins to be reversed when God calls Abraham and says, "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."³⁰ Gentry goes on to say that in the Hebrew culture "blessing" operates in the context of a covenant relationship with God. By blessing Abraham, giving him a great name and making him a father of a nation, God make Abraham the means to bless and save all nations. Therefore, there is a causal relationship between the first three Abrahamic personal blessings and the blessing of all families of the earth.³¹

Concurring with this idea, Dumbrell states that the blessing in Genesis 12:3 encompasses the whole of humanity. It is the whole world in its redeemed form that is in view here in this verse. As a carrier of blessing, the verse refers to Abraham's relationship to the world through whom the whole

²⁵ Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 84.

²⁶ John Stevenson, *A Survey of the Old Testament: The Bible Jesus Used* (Redeemer Publishing, 2009), 28.

²⁷ Michael Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 72.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 42.

²⁹ Anthony Hoekema, 199.

³⁰ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum. *God's Kingdom Through God's Covenant* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 94.

³¹ Gentry, 102-103.

world shall be blessed.³² This can already be noticed in the subsequent chapters when Abraham has an opportunity to function as an intercessor for Sodom and Lot.³³ And Abraham's descendants, Isaac and Jacob, bless Gerar and Haran. Therefore, Dumbrell says that blessing for the nations is effected by a relationship with Abraham's descendants as those who are blessed by God.

Thus, both the promise made to Adam and Eve and to Abraham point to a future blessing for the whole world. This is why, looking back at this passage, the Apostle Paul says, "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham saying: "In you all the nations will be blessed" (Galatians 3:8).

Explicitly, the substance of the Abrahamic Covenant is to annul the curse which was set forth in chapters 1-11 and the clear message of Genesis 12:3 is that, in order to be blessed, the nations are to be brought into direct contact with Israel as the Abrahamic people.³⁴ What will follow is the continuation of Israel as a nation and its role in Old Testament times as the offspring of Abraham.

Israel As a Model For the Whole World

When Israel as a people was formed at Mount Sinai, their consecration and preparation took place so that they could meet Yahweh and receive His Holy Law. In Exodus 19:4 God reminds them of the deliverance from Egypt and how He bore them on eagle's wings bringing them to Himself. Nevertheless, interesting to note are the words that God spoke in verse 5 and 6 saying that if they obeyed His voice they shall be His possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Right at the outset, even before this great encounter with Yahweh, it seems that the function that Israel as God's people would have to play is set before them. In fact, several scholars agree with this point. Gentry and Wellum state that Israel has inherited the Adamic role, meaning that they are about to become God's true humanity. According to these authors, verse 5 and 6 describe the divine purpose for the covenant established between God and Israel.³⁵

As Dumbrell puts it, "kingdom of priests" and "holy nation" are terms that should be taken together. The best way to understand is to adopt as a form of parallelism suggesting that what is being said by "kingdom of priests" is restated by "holy nation" from a slightly different point of view, but in each case all Israel is involved.³⁶

³² Dumbrell, 68-69.

³³ Ibid, 69.

³⁴ Dumbrell, 69, 70.

³⁵ Gentry, 134-135.

³⁶ Dumbrell, 88.

As a kingdom of priests, Israel will function to make the ways of God known to the nations and also to bring the nations into a right relationship to God. As a nation, Israel is to display to the rest of the world the kind of relationships that God intended originally for all of humanity. In fact, the plan of God is to bless Abraham's descendants, Israel, and through them bring blessing to all the nations. His plan is to restore His broken and ruined creation through Israel. Gentry concludes this thought saying that the Mosaic covenant is given at this time to administer the fulfillment of the divine promises to Abraham, and through Israel, to the entire world.³⁷

Still, a priest not only functions as intermediary to bring others into the presence of God, but also, in order to approach God, a priest needs to consecrate himself and be devoted to God. As a royal priesthood, Israel is to show what a right relationship with God is so that they might be a vehicle for bringing the nations to His divine presence and rule.³⁸ Thus, the call of Israel to be a kingdom of priests connects very well with the Abrahamic covenant and Psalm 67 pictures this clearly, "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make His face to shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations. Let the people praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!" The point of Israel invoking the blessing upon itself is so that salvation may come to the nations. This is the very goal of the Abrahamic Covenant.³⁹

Following the same pattern, Dumbrell agrees that Israel is to have a distinctive role as a societal model for the world. Its function points to the intent of the Abrahamic Covenant, Israel as the agent used by God to achieve the redemption of the whole world. By exercising this Abrahamic role, Israel shall fulfill the promise of Genesis 12:3.⁴⁰

But Dumbrell introduces an interesting point. Israel acts in a passive rather than missionary role. Because priesthood demands separation from the environment as well as purity within, Israel's role as a priestly royalty, a "holy nation," means it must maintain a certain distance and difference. It affects the world directly by being the vehicle through which the divine will is displayed. Finally, Dumbrell asserts that even though the notion of vs.6 is basically passive rather than missional, the ontological consequences for Israel cannot be left out of consideration.⁴¹

Another scholar, picking up on this same subject cites several texts to make this point. In Ezekiel 36:21-23 God says that Israel has profaned His name among the nations, but He will act for the sake of His name. Verse 23 says what God will do, "I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD," declares the Sovereign

³⁷ Gentry, 135, 136.

³⁸ Gentry, 146,147

³⁹ Ibid, 148.

⁴⁰ Dumbrell, 90.

⁴¹ Dumbrell, 90.

LORD. "When I show myself holy through you before their eyes." In this passage it becomes clear that God's holiness will be revealed and acknowledged by the nations through Israel. Then, God repeats the idea in 37:24-28 but in the context of the new covenant which will be made later. Here God says that His servant David will be king forever over Israel and they will follow His laws and decrees. He will make a covenant of peace with them and increase their numbers. Then He says, "My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God and they will be my people. Then the nations will know that I the LORD make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever." It is clear that in the context of the new covenant Israel will serve as a blessing by means of revelation to the nations.⁴²

At last, still in Ezekiel 39:21 God says, "I will display my glory among the nations, all the nations will see the punishment I inflict and the hand I lay upon them." Here, God punishes His people sending them to exile and this revelation serves as lesson to the nations.⁴³

Walton then proposes an interpretation of Genesis 12:3 taking all this information into consideration. He beautifully summarizes Israel's role:

I propose that the nature of the blessing on the nations is that, through Abraham's family, God revealed Himself. The law as given through them, the Scripture was written by them, and their history became the public record of God's attributes in action. Then to climax it all, His own Son came through them and provided salvation for the whole world. Israel was the chosen people of God, not in the sense that they always obeyed and believed; not in the sense that they were all automatically heirs to salvation; but in the sense that they were the instrument, and sometimes the medium, of his own self-revelation.⁴⁴

By way of conclusion, Horton makes a contribution to this matter stating that Israel was called to be a theocracy typological of the eschatological paradise of God. They were called to see themselves as the kingdom of God, a new garden of God's presence and a new creation in the sense of representing God – all of this typological of the true Israel, the faithful Adam.⁴⁵ As "kingdom of priests" and a "holy nation" Israel will model to the world what it means to have a relationship with God. They will mediate the blessings of God to the world and will be used to bring the rest of the world to know God.⁴⁶ In other words, Israel will be the channel of revelation of the truth and of the true God, the matrix from where the Messiah would come.⁴⁷

⁴² Walton, *Covenant: God's Purpose, God's Plan*, 58.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 60

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Horton, 90.

⁴⁶ Gentry, 150.

⁴⁷ Horton, 90.

Israel's Failure

Unfortunately, as the story develops, one can see that Israel was not able to keep the covenant vows. Early on, they broke the covenant by worshipping a golden calf. Later, in the times of the Judges and after the kingdom was divided, Israel gradually slipped away from a proper relationship with God. Their failure to keep the covenant was announced by the prophets as, frequently, Israel deviated from worshipping the one true God.

One could point out many aspects of Israel's failure: moral crisis, social injustice, idolatry, and corrupted leadership. Peter Gentry adds Israel's failure in its role as a king-priest.⁴⁸ The prophet Hosea says explicitly, "But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me" (Hosea 6:7). Lima captures the spirit behind the breaking of the covenant when he says, "God, through His covenant, offers Himself as a fountain of living waters, but the people preferred their own broken cisterns."⁴⁹ At this stage of affairs there was no turning back. With the northern kingdom of Israel already led into captivity and Judah ready to be subdued, there was no other hope for the nation but to make a new covenant.

Horton makes a point underscoring another error saying that, even though Israel always answered to Moses with the refrain, "All this we will do," they did not have the power to do it themselves. In fact, the problem was that the law did not have the power in itself to make the sinner accomplish what it demanded. The people of Israel thought that they could be justified by the law according to the terms of Sinai when, in fact, they were only condemned by it.⁵⁰ This is why at the plains of Moab, Moses told the people to circumcise the foreskins of their hearts. The problem is that they were not able to do this, although they promised to do so.⁵¹

However, it is interesting to note that long before Israel violated the terms of the covenant their ultimate hope was always anchored in the Abrahamic promise. Citing Deuteronomy 4:30, 31 Horton makes this clear, "When you are in distress and all the things have overtaken you, in the later time, then you will return to Yahweh your God and hearken to his voice, for Yahweh is your God who will not let you down or destroy you, and who will not forget the covenant with your fathers, that which He swore to them." It is God's immutable covenant that provides for a certain latitude or patience on God's part, although according to the terms of Sinai, Israel could have been judged finally much sooner. However, every event of divine restraint throughout Israel's history of rebellion is explained by Yahweh Himself in terms of the commitment to the Abrahamic covenant, not the Sinai Covenant.⁵²

⁴⁸ Gentry, 147.

⁴⁹ Leandro Lima, 97.

⁵⁰ Horton, 55.

⁵¹ Ibid, 70.

⁵² Horton, 70.

It is within this context of failure and judgment that the prophets bring the good news of a new covenant.

God's People in the New Covenant

The Bible is emphatic that Israel did not live up to its responsibilities and was punished with the curses of the covenant. After centuries of prophetic warnings and calls back to the covenant stipulations, the judgment of God's people was inevitable. With the northern kingdom of Israel gone for more than a century, the sons of Judah saw their beloved Jerusalem destroyed and its people enslaved. But even as God was bringing judgment upon His people, the prophet Jeremiah spoke of a time in which He would bless them: Jeremiah 31:31-34.

A brief historical context is needed to understand this promise. Although the term "new covenant" is only found in the Old Testament in Jeremiah 31:31, the concept of a new covenant cannot be restricted only to this prophecy. Robertson asserts that the new covenant concept is formed by a complex group of ideas found in the books of Ezekiel and Isaiah.⁵³ He adds saying that it is not possible to absolutely reconstruct the process by which this passage arrived in its present form, but it appears in a collection of declarations that has the common theme of promises of the Lord for the restoration of Israel. These verses are a part of a larger section known as the Book of Consolation which binds together chapters 30 and 31 not only by a common theme of the promise of Israel's future salvation but also by a common introductory phrase: "Behold, days are coming declares the LORD..."⁵⁴

In that historical context Ligon Duncan adds that, in the time of Jeremiah, many of the children of Israel and Judah were already in exile. But because God had promised Abraham and his descendants a land, those who believed the Word of God and in the promises of God started questioning what had happened to the land promises. Not only did the land promise apparently fail but also the promise of 2 Samuel 7 of a Davidic king always on the throne of Judah. In light of God's promises, how were God's people supposed to understand that they no longer were in the land and no longer had a king over them? According to Duncan, this became a theological question that Jeremiah and the latter prophets had to deal with and answer. The theological answer that was given to these questions was the new covenant.⁵⁵

An important issue that needs to be tackled in Jeremiah's promise is that it is said in verses 31 and 33 that God will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. As seen before, the dispensational

⁵³ Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 273.

⁵⁴ G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 971.

⁵⁵ J. Ligon Duncan III. The new covenant. Reformed Theological Seminary lectures. Accessed on March 20, 2019. <http://www.rts.edu>.

camp believes that though the church enjoys the benefits of the New Covenant due to the rejection of the Messiah by the Jewish people, this promise is yet to be fulfilled literally with ethnic Israel in the millennial kingdom. On the other hand, there are reasons to believe that what these verses are saying goes beyond ethnic Israel.

In light of everything that has been said up to this point, what will follow is an attempt to show that the term “Israel” has more than just one use in the Bible. This will be done in order to clarify the reasons why the new covenant promise applies not only to Israel but also to the Gentile people.

Robertson develops this aspect talking about corporativism versus individuality in the new covenant. He affirms that one cannot deny the aspect of individuality in the new covenant with a one-to-one relationship of the spirit being a key factor. However, Jeremiah does not set a personal-faith relationship in the new covenant in opposition to a corporate relationship. And he goes on to say that, not only with individuals, but because the whole pattern of God’s dealing with His people throughout redemptive history was through covenants, the new covenant shall be also made corporately with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, as it is written in Jeremiah 31:31.⁵⁶

Efforts have been made to resolve this tension by saying that the new covenant functions individually in the church age, but that it shall function corporately with respect to ethnic Israel in the age to come. Still, Robertson disagrees with this idea and suggests a way to resolve this tension by looking at another use of the term “Israel.” He says, “Old covenant Israel may be regarded as a typological representation of the elect people of God.”⁵⁷ Just as the serpent of brass typologically anticipated the new covenant Christ cursed on the cross and the old covenant tabernacle typologically anticipated the new covenant dwelling of God in the midst of his people, the old covenant nation of Israel typologically anticipated the new covenant reality of the chosen people of God assembled as a nation consecrated to God.⁵⁸

This is in agreement with the promise to Abraham in Genesis 17: 4, 5 when God says to him “For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.” In Romans 4:16-17 Paul interprets this Genesis passage stating that by faith Abraham is the father of both Jews and Gentiles who believe in Christ and who have become the unified people of God. In this sense, all who are elected in Christ and are participants in the new covenant represent the reality of the elected people of God typologically anticipated by old covenant Israel.

Christ, the Better Israel

Another aspect that points to the inclusion of others in the corporate people of God is that Christ is the true representative of Israel. Walton makes this case analyzing Galatians 3 and stating that Christ, as the representative of

⁵⁶ Robertson, 286,287.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 288.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 289.

corporate Israel, has replaced the nation in the revelatory program in the sense that He is the fulfillment of the promises and the channel of revelation. Then, he concludes his thought saying that those who are in Christ become part of Israel, the people of God.⁵⁹

David E. Holwerda develops this aspect using the gospel of Matthew to ground his idea. First, by linking Jesus to Abraham in Matthew's genealogy he declares that the promise of God to bless all the nations is accomplished through Jesus. By inaugurating the new covenant in Matthew 26:28, it becomes clear that Jesus is the true descendant of Abraham through whom the promises are being fulfilled.⁶⁰

Not only this, but in the genealogy there is also a clear link between Abraham, David and Jesus. The promise that David's throne would be established forever is evidenced through the inauguration of the kingdom of God by Christ. Thereby, the fulfillment of David's promise in Christ is the means through which the promise to Abraham is also fulfilled. Thus, the blessings promised to old covenant Israel finds its fulfillment only through Christ who is the incorporation of the true Israel and of its true king. In other words, He is the corporate Israel through whom all the families of the earth are blessed.⁶¹

Another important aspect of Christ as the better Israel has to do with the failures of Israel in the Old Testament. Horton points to Jesus as the true seed of Abraham and also the true Israel, the one who has fulfilled the terms of the covenant at Sinai in the place of those who have said, "We will do all these things" and yet have fallen short.⁶² He asserts that during his mission on earth, Jesus recapitulated the testing of Adam in the garden and the test of Israel in the desert in his own forty day probation in the desert. Thus, Jesus fulfilled both the Covenant of Creation and the Covenant of Sinai representatively, i.e., federally, being successful where Israel failed.⁶³ Then, Horton concludes by saying, "Jesus is the faithful Israelite who fulfilled the covenant of works so that [humanity] could, through his victory, inherit the promise according to the covenant of grace."⁶⁴ Therefore, Jesus, as the true Israel, does everything Israel was supposed to have done and is all that Israel was supposed to have been.⁶⁵

Summarizing this point, it was made clear that Jesus as the true descendant of Abraham, the king of Israel, the one who endured the same testing of Adam and Israel, is the true servant of God, the true and better Israel who accomplished successfully the calling that old covenant Israel had. Thus, as the ultimate representative of Israel, those who are in Christ are also made

⁵⁹ Walton, *Covenant: God's Purpose, God's Plan*, 125.

⁶⁰ David E. Holwerda, *Jesus & Israel: One Covenant or Two?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 31.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 32.

⁶² Horton, 68-69.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 94.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 105.

⁶⁵ Holwerda, 31.

part of Israel as a corporate entity and in Him, Jews and Gentiles become participants of the people of God. As such, Israel can never be defined as people of God apart from Christ.⁶⁶ Proving this point, the apostle Peter in his first letter employs the language once used for Israel in the Old Testament to the ones who are in Christ now. He says, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you might proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

The New Israel of God

Finally, Jeremiah 31:31 exemplifies that, in Christ, anyone, regardless of nationality, can be identified as God’s people. The Bible is full of examples when it comes to this matter starting with Abraham who was a Gentile. The Bible says in Joshua 24:2 that he was an idol worshiper who lived on the other side of the Euphrates River and, in spite of that, he was called by God and justified by faith.

Not only Abraham was called, but one can also see people included in the genealogy of Jesus who were not direct descendants from Abraham. By registering that Tamar and Rahab were from Canaan and Ruth from Moab, Matthew shows that true descendants of Abraham are not preserved by their pure offspring. As a people of God, there was always the intention that Israel became a universal people not limited by racial purity.⁶⁷ In fact, quoting Matthew 3:9, Holwerda affirms that a genealogic claim was not sufficient to establish the identity of Israel. Even though the promises are made to Israel, Israel is not established simply by birth right.⁶⁸ In sum, it is God who elects and decides who belongs to Israel.

Another important aspect to notice is that, from the beginning, any Gentile could become a Jew by professing the God of Abraham and being circumcised. Robertson states that no racial barrier existed to keep Gentiles from becoming full participants in the covenant promises.⁶⁹ Quoting a Jewish commentator on the book of Genesis he makes his point, “Indeed, differences of race have never been an obstacle to joining Israel which did not know the concept of purity of blood... Circumcision turned a man of foreign origin into an Israelite.”⁷⁰

When looking at these different aspects one concludes that Israel was not only formed by people who were born within the land of Palestine. What becomes clear is that, as long as they served Yahweh and received the sign of the covenant, anyone could be entitled an Israelite.

⁶⁶ Holwerda, 34.

⁶⁷ Holwerda, 33.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 32.

⁶⁹ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Israel of God: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2000), 35.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

This exposes the greater significance that the term “Israel” gets in the New Testament. This shift is alluded to in the book of Matthew and clarified in the Pauline letters. One must understand though, that this is not to say that the meaning changed in New Testament times, but that it became clear once the mystery was revealed.

Connecting Isaiah 53:10-12 and Jeremiah 31:31-34 with Matthew 26:26-29, Peter Gentry proposes that the phrase “poured out for many” found both in Isaiah and Matthew connects the atoning sacrifice that Jesus is about to perform with the inauguration of the new covenant. In this celebration, Gentry points to the fact that Jesus does not view “house of Israel and the house of Judah” including indiscriminately all of Judaism in the first century, but rather as a covenant with those who are his followers and who believe in him.⁷¹

Still in Matthew, Holwerda sees this same point in chapter 13:11 when Jesus says to his disciples that the mysteries of the kingdom are made known only to those to whom God reveals himself. By this He means that faith is required in order to comprehend these mysteries and in doing so, all those who understand the words of Jesus and follow his teachings receive the privileged status of being part of Israel.⁷² The connection that Matthew makes is that no one can become part of God’s people apart from faith in Jesus.

This is why, knowing that the promises made in the Old Testament could not be received independently apart from faith and obedience, the Apostle Paul states in Romans 9:6, “For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel.” Following this reasoning, the Apostle Paul makes an interesting assertion. Citing N.T. Wright, Walton says that the clearest passage in the New Testament that proves this point is Galatians 3:7. By using Habakkuk 2:4, “The righteous shall live by his faith,” Paul redefines the covenant community saying that the recognition of being part of the community is not based on the Torah but the demarcating characteristic of faith. And he adds, “With the new covenant, the new elect body is identified as all who respond to the salvation offered through Christ.”⁷³

Furthermore, in verses 28 and 29 Paul confirms this same idea saying, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” Walton concludes that although the term “people of God” does not appear in Galatians 3, it imposes a soteric definition on Abraham’s seed.⁷⁴

Another passage that makes this concept clear is also found in Galatians. In chapter 6:15 Paul says that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything but what counts is the new creation. In other words, the people of God are not identified anymore by the old covenant

⁷¹ Gentry, 226.

⁷² Holwerda, 46-47.

⁷³ Walton, *Covenant: God’s Purpose, God’s Plan*, 123,124.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 124.

outward sign of circumcision, but rather, he says, “Jew is one who is inward, whose circumcision is of the heart, by the Spirit” (Romans 2:28, 29).

Robertson picks up at this point and says that the mark of identity of God’s people throughout the centuries avails nothing in the new covenant. What establishes a person as God’s is for him to experience the new creation.⁷⁵ It is precisely at this point that Paul introduces the phrase, “the Israel of God.” In verse 16 the Apostle writes, “And as for all who walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, even on the Israel of God.”

Explaining this passage, Robertson clarifies, “A canon or rule of conduct related to the identity of the people of God has been established.” The rule is simple, “No distinction may be made between Jew and Gentile in identifying God’s people.”⁷⁶ In order to get to this meaning, he analyzed the grammar of the verse, specifically the Greek word “*kai*” translated as “even.” In his opinion, the only explanation that satisfies the context as well as the grammar of the passage is to understand the word “*kai*” epexegetically, i.e., a word that explains a preceding word or sentence.⁷⁷

In this case, the conjunction “*kai*” is related to the previous sentence. “And as for all who walk according to this rule,” means all those who agree that there must not be any distinction between Jews and Gentiles when identifying the people of God. He then identifies this group to be the new creation of verse 15, namely the Israel of God.⁷⁸

In summary, Robertson concludes saying, “Paul declares that the new creation – the new community within humanity brought into existence by the cross of Christ in its uniting of Jews and Gentiles into one new people of God - is the community that may be designated as the Israel of God.” Combined into one body, this new creation, this new community, the Israel of God, represents all those who walk by the rule that prescribes that no distinction should be made between Jew and Gentile.⁷⁹

John Calvin also gives his opinion in his commentary of this passage, “In a word, he (Paul) now calls them the Israel of God whom he formerly named the children of Abraham by faith, and thus includes all believers, whether Gentiles or Jews, who were united in the same Church.”⁸⁰ And Robertson concludes:

The drama associated with this redefinition of the Israel of God now becomes even more apparent. Paul, the Hebrew of the Hebrews, the learned Jewish Pharisee, the one steeped in the traditions of

⁷⁵ Robertson, *The Israel of God*, 39.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 40.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 43.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*.

⁷⁹ Robertson, *The Israel of God*, 43.

⁸⁰ David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, eds, *Calvin’s New Testament commentary: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, trans. T.H.L. Parker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans publishing company, 1974), 118.

Judaism, transfers the customary Benediction of Israel to the universal church of Jesus Christ, the new Israel of God.⁸¹

Still, Peter Gentry asserts that the section between Ephesians 2:11 to 3:6 is perhaps the clearest passage that describes the parties entailed in the new covenant.⁸² The Apostle Paul in Ephesians 3:5, 6 makes it plain that the mystery that had been hidden for generations has now been revealed to the apostles and prophets. The mystery was that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body and partakers of the same promise in Jesus Christ. The Gentiles, who once were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and were strangers to the covenants, have been united to the believing Jews through Christ into one new humanity.⁸³ The church now has become the new Israel of God.

Still, it was not as if Israel did not have a clue. The truth that the nations would be included in Israel is taught in the Old Testament. It was made known through Moses and the prophets that the nations would benefit from Israel. The matter was scant in when, how and by what means the blessing of Abraham would come.⁸⁴ But in conclusion, in Jesus Christ a new humanity has been created which is now called the new Israel of God.

Conclusion

“I will make you a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6).

This Scripture by Isaiah illustrates with clarity the very objective of what is contained in the promise made to Abraham -- namely, the gospel of the salvation of God to the whole world. What was promised to Adam and Eve, confirmed with Noah, inaugurated with Abraham and forever established with David was fully consummated in Jesus Christ through the new covenant. As to reach this goal, the nation of Israel was to serve as an instrument and a channel of God’s revelation to all the nations, which happened in a very dim way.

The whole Bible story is held together by the many aspects of the covenant that God made with man. It is through this architectonic structure which provides the context within which one recognizes the unity of the Bible story that the entire plan of redemption unfolds.⁸⁵

“I shall be your God and you shall be my people” is echoed in the Bible since Adam first fell in sin. This principle as it was seen before, guides the purpose of the relationship established by God with man from the Garden of Eden to this day. In fact, it is very clear in the Bible that God’s plan always

⁸¹ Robertson, 45.

⁸² Gentry, 227.

⁸³ Gentry, 228.

⁸⁴ Calvin, 160.

⁸⁵ Horton, 12.

was to have a people with whom He could dwell. This can be seen in the Garden when Scriptures say that every day God walked with Adam; also God dwelt in the tabernacle and later in the temple; and then God, incarnate, dwelt among us in this world. Ultimately, the new heaven and the new earth will be the final place of dwelling between the people of God and God himself. This has been the whole purpose of God's plan since creation, and by this, His relational character is manifested.

What "Covenant Theology," has demonstrated is that through this one unified plan of salvation, there is only one God with one purpose for one people. This provides a better way of understanding the Bible rather than the dispensational view which sees two different people of God with two different programs to be fulfilled separately.

It must be made clear though, that this is not to say that the church has replaced Israel. Some may call this "Replacement Theology" when it is not. In Christ and the church many promises that referred to old covenant Israel have now been fulfilled. The church is composed of Jews and Gentiles who have been grafted and united into one people of God, to whom the promises were made and fulfilled through the new covenant in Christ in the New Testament.

A primary lesson here is God's sovereignty. By looking at the way history unfolded, it is clear that history and the destiny of nations is in the hands of an absolute sovereign Lord who created everything by His power, and the great purpose for which God worked all was accomplished in the incarnation of His son. The story of redemption was being completed by God's own design which had the covenants as its main structure. If it were not for God, the plan would have never made it to consummation. From beginning to end, it was God's initiative to reach out for Adam; it was God who called Abraham out of a pagan world and gave him purpose; it was God who preserved a remnant among His people Israel who had broken the covenant; it was God who made the promise to Adam, Abraham, Moses, David and the prophets, and He through whom the realization of Salvation came. Only a sovereign God is capable of working all for the good of those who are called according to His purpose.

Secondarily, one sees God's mercy and grace. By sheer mercy humanity did not cease to exist after Adam's sin. By God's pure grace He pursued Adam and Eve and revealed a promise of a redeemer. God continuously poured His mercy and grace upon His people. Through Israel the physical manifestation of grace was brought by divine initiative so that the new Israel of God could be totally formed. The covenant community that continues to exist today is composed of those who are made righteous by Jesus Christ, the true Israel, through whom the sovereign saving grace of God exists for a people of His own possession.

Believing and trusting in a God, who has traced a perfect plan through history, brings comfort when thinking about our own personal life history.

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The Gospel and Shinto Japanese Brazilian Descendants

Filomena Kato

Japan and Brazil are antipodes, both religiously and culturally speaking. Brazil's culture has presented an ethnic mix since its colonial phase — comprised mostly of Portuguese, Africans, indigenous people and later Europeans and Japanese. This cultural “melting pot” is also reflected in the country's religious aspect, although the country was established on Catholicism. Meanwhile, Japan's culture has been deeply rooted in its traditions dating back thousands of years. Its empire and government were founded on the ancient Shinto religion, a collection of pre-historic Japanese mythology and native beliefs.

While polytheistic Shinto and monotheistic Christianity may initially appear contradictory, they do share some parallel concepts. The initial aspects of the Shinto religion include prayer, respect, and love. While Christianity shares the importance of these concepts, being them as parallels is complex because these religions emanated from entirely different cultures. During initial attempts at evangelization, resistance arose with the introduction of a new religion and the consequent abandonment of what had been taught to a new life dedicated to Christ.

The research of Shinto and Christianity begins with the book *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions* by Winfried Corduan.¹ The author synthesizes Shinto's meaning and its history, practitioners, folk religion, life cycle, holidays and festivals and how Shinto relates to the Gospel. In Japan, Shinto means “the ways of the gods,” relating to the spirit world. The gods are known as “*Kami*” meaning “divine or sacred” in Japanese. Personal spirits dwell in natural phenomena like rocks, trees, and mountains. The book also notes that Shinto believers ascribe clemency of the weather to the gods' favor. Historically, Shinto beliefs merged with Buddhism from China which explains why Buddhist monks may perform funeral ceremonies while Shinto priests perform weddings. This information is essential because immigrants in Brazil practiced these consolidated rituals and ceremonies empirically, but now, academically. However, some laypersons would like to study Shinto further.

¹ Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*. (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 424

The Bible's Old Testament setting is similar to the cultural environment of Shinto in Japan. Both settings have a basis in family love. While finding similarities between these religions, religious holidays create a community among populations and nations. In these commemorations, they pray and thank God for their blessings. They share food, establish relationships, and help each other gain wisdom in life while pursuing peace. In Christianity, this peace was given by Jesus Christ, and He taught the most iconic prayer — "Our Father." In the Scriptures, there is a kingdom of heaven, and the king is Jesus Christ to whom believers submit their hearts and lives. His kingdom is merciful, and He has a plan for the whole earth and universe. In the Shinto tradition, however, the emperor of Japan was considered a god. He was deemed to be heavenly divine and ruler of the Earth. In both of these religions, Jesus Christ and Japan's emperor were represented as divine figures to unite people by faith.

Learning about other cultures can make people more understanding and tolerant when dealing with new perspectives. Current shifting globalization, transnational exchanges, and technologies have created a cultural bridge between the East and the West. Similarities build bridges, a start toward common ground in different cultures. In other cultures worldwide, faith in Jesus is growing in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. In these listed regions, non-Christian religions are considered part of a pagan society, and upon converting to Christianity, they end up syncretizing to their past religions for cultural and family-related motives. This bridge makes the interchange of knowledge easier for these cultures which would explain people from different parts of the world committing their lives to Christ, not only in church but also in introspective life. The story of many Japanese immigrants who immigrated to Brazil started more than 60 years ago. Many immigrants feel as though it is important to integrate with local culture and bond with the local community especially in religious terms. This paper has parts that intend to analyze the peculiarities encountered in both Christianity and Shinto to build a bridge between cultures for a better understanding of God's quest and the new integration with the Christian community. Understanding other beliefs enables evangelists to spread the gospel across cultural frontiers more efficiently and, more importantly, equips Christians to reason and respond to a variety of religions. The act of sharing within a community awakens others about the meaning of life itself.

Sometimes a model is necessary for those who want to evangelize to a different culture. To successfully explain the necessity of Shinto-Brazilian Japanese descendants hearing the Gospel and to believe in the true God to be saved, arguments will be presented in the following parts. First, the Shinto background is described including its mythology, history, rituals, objects of veneration, explanation of State Shinto and Imperial Edit, and how initial attempts to evangelize to different cultures. Second, Japanese emigrated to Brazil, beginning the exposure and integration of Christianity in Brazil. Next,

Biblical passages will be cited witnessing the eventual success of evangelization. Finally, this study is not the end because many descendants still practice Shinto reminiscently, but the message of Christianity has been spoken to them, as seeds to be harvested across future time.

Mythology in Shinto

Shinto mythology is first referenced in Nihongi, one of Japan's oldest written Chronicles explaining the world's origin.² Nihongi reveals that Japan, as an agricultural society, has a faith that is dependent on the blessings of the forces of nature, mainly weather. The written Chronicle explains that, *kami* (meaning divine spirits), who are Izanagi (man) and Izanami (woman) created the world, islands, human beings, plants, but the woman died in childbirth as a result of giving birth to her son; the kami of fire. Thereafter, she went to the Land of *Yomi*, the abode of death. Izanagi was devastated by her death and followed her to the underworld, but Izanami's body was already decaying. Izanagi saw his wife's body filled with maggots. This caused the end of the romantic relationship because Izanagi felt repelled by the site of his wife's body, and went back to the living world. The spirits of his dead wife cursed him and said that she would kill a thousand people a year, but Izanagi answered that he would give a thousand and five hundred lives each year. Mythologically, in this story, the cycle of life and death was created. The next highest of Shinto deities is Amaterasu, whose name means "She Who Shines in the Heavens"³ and is the sun goddess. Around 600 B.C the descendant of Amaterasu, Jimmu Tenno, took on human form and is the first human ruler on earth and people are subservient to a higher authority as the Emperor Yamato (4 AD). Thus Japan's emperor is considered a descendant of Amaterasu, the goddess of the sun. In contrast, Grudem explains the "Virgin Conception" surrounding Jesus' birth and gives reasons of His Humanity. He talks about Incarnation as transcendent, Holy above all, and how God became human. Also, Jesus is sinless. He is the substitute for humankind because the sacrifice has to be perfect, with incommensurable value. Last, the virgin conception is the Divine initiative because salvation is of the Lord, and many events are to save the human race.⁴

Shinto is the main religion for Japanese people that has had influence from foreign faiths as Buddhism, Confucianism, and Chinese culture and there

² Ibid., 426-427

³ Evans, Ann Llewellyn Evans. *Shinto Norito A Book of Prayers*. (Matsuri Foundation of Canada. Canada. 2001), 111

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1994), 529

is a comfortable coexistence among them. Verification of this amicable relationship can be found in the fact that most Japanese are married in a Shinto shrine but buried by a Buddhist priest. However, Shinto has developed its own precepts, and Shinto means *Kami Way*, used in the sense of the mystic directive of nature, soul, spirit or a path conducting to life beyond the grave. *Kami* is used popularly in the sense of deities, or gods. Besides religious faith, there are attitudes, ideas, and ways of acting that belong to Japanese culture.⁵

What is interesting about Shinto is that it has no founder or doctrine. There is no founder like Jesus Christ, Mohammed, or Gautama Buddha. In *The Essence of Shinto - Japan's Spiritual Heart*, Shinto is said to be a religion that has developed, has structure, and has encouraged the inhabitants of the Japanese Islands over the centuries.⁶ Shintoists believe that “teaching does not come from human beings.” It is a “religion that reveres great nature”⁷ because people are from an agricultural culture, and the earlier Shintoists had an awareness of the law of nature and the mysteries that surround water. Shintoists value nature (from forests and rivers to animals and plants), life, and the ancestors. They practice love and charity that result in spiritual growth and the development of a clean and pure character. The relationship between the practitioners is based on love, care, and a harmonious social life. Shinto has no doctrines; oral transmission of faith transfers from generation to generation. There is no sacred text as the Bible or Koran, nor subsequent systematic theologies applied to Shinto as a whole. According to Yamakage,⁸ in 712 A.D., the *Chronicles of Japan* has Shinto themes of historical facts, myths, and philosophy that are mixed with political subjects. There are ethics rules and instructions for members of the religious order and for lay people, but not commandments. Faith is internalized in individuals through ritual gestures. This is why rituals and festivals are important in Shinto. Participants in festivals feel transcendental involvement through their practices. This is the teaching of life that conveys profound and grateful thoughts and a feeling of respect and fear toward a *Kami*. The mental attitude of priests can touch people’s hearts and minds, without the use of logic or sophisticated language.

In the book *The Essence of Shinto - Japan's Spiritual Heart*, the author, Motohisa Yamakage, states that the foundation of moral judgment is symbolically observed in nature, represented in a straight tree and a curved tree. Then a tree is considered sacred, such as a cedar or a cypress. The tree

⁵ Sokyo Ono, *Shinto The Kami Way*. (North Clarendon, VT. Charles E. Tuttle Publishing Company, 1962), 2-19

⁶ Motohisa Yamakage, *The Essence of Shinto. Japan's Spiritual Heart*. (New York, NY, Kodansha USA Inc. 2012), 36- 58.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 29

⁸ *Ibid.*, 39

that has a straight form or line and its branches stretch to the sky is the characteristic of beauty that indicates maturity, clarity and integrity without blemish. Thus this straight tree is related to the stability between “mind, body and spirit.” An example of balance is represented in art of *ikebana*, the floral arrangement, that is practiced in Japan and is associated with meditation and aristocracy. The opposite of the straight tree is the curved tree, the *magatsubi*, which in turn is associated with a curved spirit, misfortune, bad form, including the mind and heart of a bad person, the actions of the devil or disasters.⁹

Motohisa Yamakage adds that a place where people welcome *Kami* is *yuniwa* (purified yard or court) to obtain the spirit of *Kami*. In the middle of the court there is a small evergreen with leaves, rocks, or animals, used for ritual purposes. The building is the shrine where the guardian spirits reside. The priests perform ceremonies in front of the sanctuary of the shrine. Worshipers intend to find spiritual guidance and inner transformation from “one level of reality to another, experiencing a true connection with *Kami*.”¹⁰ In the shrine, people feel symbolic representation of protection and divinity. The gateway of the shrine is *torii*, “which symbolically marks off the mundane world from the world of *Kami*, the secular from the spiritual.”¹¹ They do not seek a solid image of God in a human body; the divinity in human form is not necessary to identify God because the physical body and form are fleeting and temporary.

Shinto is a “path of peaceful coexistence.” A *Kami* possesses a diversification of spiritual powers and attributes, in three ways¹²: *amatsukami* (celestial *kami*); *kunitsukami* (worldly *kami*); *yaoyorozu no kami* (many other *kami*), but they “interact and overlap.” This seems polytheistic, but all *Kamis* are interconnected and have roots from a unique source. Shintoism is a simple belief that “anyone can accept and practice..., the attitudes associated with cleanliness and brightness (happiness) and righteousness and honesty, gaining spiritual awareness.”¹³

In mythology, the Imperial ancestor, *Ninigi-no-mikoto*, came from heaven and made commitment with *kami Okuni-nshi*. *Ninigi* promised reciprocity to build a “sacred palace, that is a shrine” - meaning a place of

⁹ Ibid., 45-46

¹⁰ Ibid., 47

¹¹ Sokyō Ono, *Shinto The Kami Way*. (North Clarendon, VT. Charles E. Tuttle Publishing Company, 1962), 28

¹² Motohisa Yamakage, *The Essence of Shinto. Japan's Spiritual Heart*. (New York, NY, Kodansha USA Inc. 2012), 56 - 57

¹³ Ibid., 58.

worship and where the deities dwell and serve the *kami* forever.¹⁴ A shrine has four main elements:¹⁵

1) *Torii* (“bird perch”) - which is a gate that symbolizes the boundaries of the everyday world and the godly world;

2) Roads that lead into a shrine, with statues of ferocious-looking dogs, foxes, and bulls as protectors/guardians in an entrance to repel malign spirits;

3) Water fountain, or “ablution pavilion” that represents purification, for visitors and believers to wash their hands to represent the purification and renewal of their body and soul;

4) Enclosure, an oratory, where prayers are offered and people worship.

The construction of the shrine is beautiful and ornate built to attract the gods to inhabit these dwellings. The visitors have a sense of a direct connection with the supernatural.

The Three Sacred Treasures of Japan are: a sacred Mirror (that represents the sun, knowledge, or wisdom), a sword (that represents courage and power) and a jewel (a pearl necklace that represents the benevolence).¹⁶ These objects were said to have been passed on by the *kami* Amaterasu to Japan’s Emperor, for him to care for. They constitute the Imperial Regalia “of the realm of tangible symbols of sovereignty.” The mirror is an abstract symbol of the sun, the source of life when Shintoists feel *Kami*’s presence. When looking at the “sacred” mirror, a person sees his or her image “as sacred” reflected in it.¹⁷ There is a parallel in the western world, when a person sees the mirror it reflects a person’s soul. Also, Bill Mounce explains that the secret of divine transformation lies in the Greek (verb) participle of κατοπτριζόμενοι. Its first literal meaning was “to look into a mirror.” Its meaning later evolved to “gaze upon” or “to contemplate.” In the Christian world, believers are all transformed into the image of Christ by contemplating the glory of the Lord. The result of gazing upon his glory is to be changed into the image of Christ.¹⁸

State Shinto (1868-1945) began in the period of Emperor Meiji and his Restoration¹⁹ to the ending of World War II. Japan’s empire used Shinto as a

¹⁴ Sokyo Ono, *Shinto The Kami Way*. (North Clarendon, VT. Charles E. Tuttle Publishing Company, 1962), 75

¹⁵ Ibid., 28- 35

¹⁶ Ibid., 13- 25.

¹⁷ Frank H. Hedges. *In Far Japan: Glimpses and Sketches* (New York, NY, Columbia University Press, 2005), 167.

¹⁸ William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek*. (Grande Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 3rd ed. 2009), 244

¹⁹ Helen Hardacre, *Shinto and The State 1868-1988* (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1989), 3

method of administration and used religion to its favor. The Imperial House persuaded Shinto practitioners through the assumption of the emperor's divinity, to control shrine finances, and priests. Also, the Emperor made the education sector the practice as a patriotic and moral tradition to be taught in schools. Public schools hired Shinto priests to teach and reverence the Emperor, as he was Amaterasu's descendant. Therefore, "religion, politics, and patriotism" are interwoven. The example is the Imperial Rescript on Education was promulgated in October 1890 (See Appendix 1). The rescript was a type of "sacred scripture" that was read in educational institutions with reverence to Emperor Meiji. As a result, schools displayed the emperor's picture. The government's motivation was to stop Western influences and bestow a foundation for public morality. It personified the rules of the Imperial House, "exhorting loyalty and filial piety and the Imperial Throne coeval with heaven and earth," which means the descendant of Amaterasu was Divine and sovereign.

As a result of losing in World War II, on January 1, 1946, Japan's Emperor Hirohito issued a declaration to his nation that he was not a living god, and that the concept of the Emperor's divinity was not true. The Japanese people had believed the Emperor was a living god, however this statement nullified the centuries-old assertion that the Japanese emperor's lineage was from the sun goddess Amaterasu.²⁰

Attempts of Evangelization in Japan

In Acts 17 Paul's contextualization was successful in converting the Greeks. But two main events showed that Japan was harder to evangelize. According to the website "Catholic Online," "The Japanese ... found the concept of hell as a place of eternal torment to be difficult to accept."²¹ To illustrate this case, there was a Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier who in 1549, went to Japan to evangelize. Local landlords (feudal officials devoted to protecting the emperor) forbade their subjects to convert to Christianity. If Christ were the only son of God, then people would no longer accept the emperor who claimed to be a descendant of God. This was subversive to authorities, Buddhists and Shinto priests, so believers went underground. The second event that proved that the Japanese were harder to convert than the Greek involved a Japanese Christian who was forced to retreat. In 1891,

²⁰ *Emperor, Imperial Rescript Denying His Divinity (Professing His Humanity)*. Accessed 03/09/2019,

<http://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/e/shiryo/03/056shoshi.html>

²¹ Catholic Online, Author and Publisher. Accessed 03/10/2019

https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=423

Uchimura was a teacher and a Christian who refused to bow to the new Imperial Rescript on Education (see Appendix 1) installed in his school. The “disloyalty incident” provoked attacks on and continuing harassment of Christians by promoters of the emperor system, saying that Christianity was incompatible with the duties of a Japanese subject towards the emperor.”²² Uchimura resigned from teaching and became a celebrated journalist and founder of the independent Japanese Christian movement.

In *Soldier of God: MacArthur's Attempt to Christianize Japan*, Ray A. Moore says General MacArthur tried to subdue indigenous religions during the American occupation of 1945-1952 and reintroduce Christianity to the Japanese.²³ At that period (1946), pastors were not prepared to reach the Japanese when MacArthur called missionaries to Japan. The objective was double: to substitute the moral lacuna in Japan by reimposing and reestablishing religion once the Emperor was no longer divine. General MacArthur also praised the change of the Emperor as a leader, altering the form of government from imperialism to democracy to the people of Japan.²⁴

Because pastors are not prepared to fill the vacuum of theologies of Shinto and Christianity, evangelizing the Japanese is quite arduous. Currently, Japanese Christians comprise only 1% of the population. This theological abyss should be ended according to Leonardo Luiz,²⁵ a Brazilian historian who says that an intimate relationship with the Creator and Redeemer as Christianity is a strange concept for general Asian people. They think goodness is inherent in human nature, in ancestral spirits, and the freedom of the spiritual.

In light of what is happening in Japan regarding missionaries, and because Brazilian-Japanese descendants have their origins in Archipelago of Japan, it is worth it to see how the Japanese people are dealing with evangelism. On the

²² *Fukei Jiken, A popular Dictionary of Shinto*. Accessed 03/10/2019.
http://shinto.enacademic.com/121/Fukei_jiken

²³ David Burleigh, *Review of Soldier of God: Mac Arthur's Attempt to Christianize Japan by Ray A. Moore*. (Merwin Asia, 2011) 166 pp. Accessed 03/30/2019. https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2012/04/01/books/book-reviews/japans-spiritual-recrudescence/#.XJ_LFS3Mxo4

²⁴ *Emperor, Imperial Rescript Denying His Divinity (Professing His Humanity)*. Accessed 03/09/2019.
<http://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/e/shiryō/03/056shoshi.html>

²⁵ Leonardo Henrique, Luiz, *Xintoísmo de Estado: entre o imperialismo e a imigração japonesa para o Brasil Aedos Journal*, Porto Alegre, v. 10, n. 22, p. 199-218, Ago. 2018. Accessed 03/09/2019.
<https://seer.ufrgs.br/aedos/article/download/80325/49786>

website logostokyo.com, Kiyō,²⁶ a missionary and native of Japan, narrated his struggles in converting. Nevertheless, he advised how to be cautious in evangelizing the Japanese people; and he did so in a threefold explanation and its subdivision: the polytheism belief, family relationship, and continuity of life and death.

First, Kiyō pointed out that the polytheistic belief of the Japanese who believed in *Yao yorozu no Kami*, (meaning eight million gods) is contrasted with the belief in the Bible of God's superiority to avoid the problem of syncretism. The word *Kami* can be translated as God. Thus, prior to witnessing Christ to the Japanese people, it is necessary to elucidate which God one is referring to, making clear that the Christian *Kami* is the Creator of the heaven and the earth. Furthermore, Kiyō compared God and others gods, showing His sovereignty as being the only living God. In Exodus, Kiyō didactically said, through Moses to pharaoh, God poured His judgments upon Egypt, which means God is superior above any Egyptian god. Four decades later, God instructed Joshua to demolish the statues of the Canaanite gods. Later God raised up David to fight against Goliath the Philistines. David challenged him saying, 1 Samuel 17:45 "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied."²⁷

The method of evangelism did not change from the Old Testament time to the book of Acts. Paul gave the sermon on Mars Hill, Acts 17:29-31 "Therefore, since we are God's offspring, ...God overlooks such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent," Paul is asking people for repentance. In Revelation 14:6-7, an angel proclaims the gospel "to those who live on earth to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people," announcing to "fear God and give glory to Him, because the hour of His judgment has come. Worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and springs of water." God presents His consistency from the Genesis to Revelation in His evangelization. God has always been saying to the people to turn back to God from idols.²⁸

Kiyō also pointed out the problem of syncretism when the Syrians, twice, (in 1 Kings 20:28 and 2 Kings 19:35) equated their pagan gods to the God of Israel. God replied to the king by saying, "Because the Arameans think the Lord is a god of hills and not a god of the valleys, I will deliver this vast army

²⁶ Kiyō. *Evangelism to Japanese People*. (Calvary Chapel Logos Tokyo. November 2012). Accessed on 03/07/2019. <https://www.logostokyo.com/english/evangelism-to-japanese-people/logostokyo.com>

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

into your hands, and you will know that am the Lord.” The second time was “The LORD killed 185 thousand Assyrian armies and later God had the sons of the Assyrian king murder their father when he worshipped the Assyrian god.”²⁹

The second issue is family relationship. Within Shinto, filial piety is very strong, the one interested in Christianity fears that he/she can suffer persecution or to be cast out from the family’s bosom. The moment of sharing their faith in Christ with parents, the new converters usually have conflicts and suffer attacks from their own families. Kiyo sympathized with new converts saying that their parents were not censuring their faith. The real parent’s struggle was regarding their children’s commitment to Jesus Christ. The parents felt that Christ broke the bond of the parent-child relationship. Accepting Christ means altering the families ties from carnality to spirit. The passage in Mark 3:33-35, represents the family in Christ, “Who is My mother, or My brothers?” he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” Kiyo heard a statement from an anxious new converter that if her mother and brother refuse Christ, she would rather abandon her faith to stay with her family members in hell because of her love to them. The ritual of water baptism took special meaning. This ritual means he or she will partake of the spiritual family of God being a great “step of faith.” The true test of faith to change their identity in Christ alone was to take baptism. The feeling to have ones “identity in Christ” with them is the chief element for Japanese or other Asian Christians.³⁰ On the other hand, parents sometimes alter their viewpoint because of what their children believe in. With this purpose in mind, they need to go to Church and observe a Christian service.³¹

The last point is the concern with the continuity of “life, death, and resurrection.” Japanese people find it hard to accept death. The ancient Japanese belief was that if somebody died, the spirit remained living with another person who stayed on earth. There were no differentiation between life on earth and afterlife; thus, the world of life and the world of death merge. A Shintoist explained a Buddhist funeral, that after death, a person becomes a *kami*. Hence, a funeral is a time of festivity, not sorrow, in which a *Kami* enjoys the festival with the living souls. Japanese followed the rituals of Buddhist funerals renouncing the “sense of mourning because it is one of desires of flesh” and to give an eternal goodbye to the deceased person at the funeral. In contrast, Japanese people solemnized Shinto ceremonies for the

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

dead in annual festivities celebrating fellowships with the dead spirits. Kiyo, in his continuing evangelism, explained to the Shintoist that all sinned, and after death, there is God's judgment. But Jesus came to the earth as a human being, and in his humanity, took the penalty of sin on the Cross. People who accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior will receive eternal life. Sadly, the Shintoist's response was that Kiyo was thinking too much about a somber issue, and Christians are too serious for not appreciating life. Shintoists seldom assumed the veracity of death.³²

Salvation by Grace

Japanese people struggle in understanding grace because they have difficulty in accepting death. In times of difficulty, or unfortunate situations, they usually try to do something good on the behalf of others. Japanese people think that salvation comes by works, not by faith alone. They do good works that seem right to others, not to God because they do not accept spiritual failure. To have a valuable life, Shinto makes possible good deeds. Titus 3:4-5 explains that God through his kindness, love and mercy saved humanity, not by good works of men; but the regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.³³ As illustrated in Mark 8:34-35, in order to obtain life, people have to die to themselves, "Then he called the crowd"... and said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it."

To encourage evangelism to the Japanese people, Kiyo enumerated practical advice; pray for the lost souls, preach the gospel as pure as possible, and remain meek. When missionaries learn the Japanese language and live amongst them, Japanese people will be receptive and attentive to the message. Finally, be aware that it was a long journey to occur a change in their lives. People needed to be patience to spread the word of God. Jesus preached on earth. He was God, but the Father sent him, and He became flesh on earth and dwelt among mankind. Jesus taught examples in parables and lived with his disciples.³⁴

Japanese Immigration to Brazil

Japanese immigration to Brazil officially began in 1908. Luiz³⁵ formulates that the migration motives were both internal and external:

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Leonardo Henrique, Luiz, *Xintoismo de Estado: entre o imperialismo e a imigração japonesa para o Brasil* [Shinto State: between imperialism and

economic redistribution in Japan and the economic opportunities in Brazil because of the abolitionist movement. The Japanese brought with them State Shinto in their minds and hearts. This religion influenced Japanese social organization. Immigrants replicated the Japanese school system in Brazil, and the origin of this behavior was due to the Imperial Rescript on Education (see Appendix 1). The rules of conduct were strict and standardized. It was equivalent to the “sacred doctrine” of education disclosed by the emperor, considered the core of ethical teaching. The goal of this education was “to encourage good moral standards, kindness, and respect for the younger generation.”

According to the dissertation by Brazilian-Japanese Jorge Hirakawa,³⁶ the end of the emperor’s deification did not necessarily mean that the Japanese immigrant descendants ceased to practice Shintoism. During Hirakawa’s research, the reasons for the conversion were examined, and the most cited were:

1. Parents wanted their children to progress in social status in Brazilian society, so they said they were Christian;
2. Brazilians sometimes offered themselves as godfathers to the descendants of Japanese; refusing this offer was impolite;
3. Belonging to a Christian community led to good opportunities and social reputation;
4. Children's peers constantly asked about religion;
5. An engaged couple wanted to hold a wedding ceremony in the Catholic/Christian Church because there were no Shinto priests at the time to perform the ceremony.

The Japanese descendants suffered the deepest difficulties of adaptation and insertion in Brazilian culture. One cannot deny that conversion or the adoption of Christianity would contribute positively to Japanese integration because having a different phenotype, language and religion severely hindered their acceptance.³⁷ The first immigrants brought the religious cult of their ancestors. As the continuity of the tradition, the firstborn male had an obligation to take care of the ancestors and was heir to all properties and goods

Japanese immigration to Brazil] *Aedos Journal*, Porto Alegre, v. 10, n. 22, p. 199-218, Ago. 2018. Accessed 03/09/2019.

<https://seer.ufrgs.br/aedos/article/download/80325/49786>

³⁶ Jorge Hirakawa, *Igreja Metodista Livre: Uma Igreja evangelica japonesa no processo de inserção no Brasil*. Master’s thesis, PUC University. 2007. Accessed 03/07/2019

<https://sapientia.pucsp.br/bitstream/handle/2034/1/Jorge%20I%20Hirakaha.pdf>

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³⁷ Ibid.

from their aging parents. However, after the ending of World War II, they were aware of the emperor's lack of divinity, so they had to seek God in other ways.

Genuine conversion for Japanese descendants in Brazil to Christianity has been slow. Post World War II grandparents and later Japanese descendants experienced a void in religious education. They were neither Shinto nor Christian, but they were eager to understand how to connect with God. This gap is exacerbated by the feeling of not being a "native" of Brazil, even though they were Brazilian Citizens for *Jus soli* law (Latin "right of the soil"). Many of the Japanese descendants were often referred by "Hey, you Japanese" instead of their names. So, to avoid racial discrimination, Japanese descendants were willing to be evangelized. Thus, the transition to Christianity from Shintoism became important. The concepts of cultural shame and honor, the importance of government in the community, and conversion of the whole family are topics that facilitate an exchange of religious ideas.

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus commanded His Apostles to go into all the world and make disciples, but messengers found different cultures. One aspect is the human identity of shame/honor-based cultures, argued by anthropologist Ruth Benedict in her pioneering study of Japanese culture, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. For people to feel comfortable in religious interaction, it is helpful to use a facilitator like an icebreaker and an opportunity to talk about "shame and honor." The heart of traditional ideas such as honor continues to influence Japanese descendants in family life. It is essential for Eastern people to maintain honor and avoid public humiliation, defeat, ridicule, loss of honor or status before peers/groups and authorities in a social network. Shame-based cultures "rely on external sanction for good behavior"³⁸ in a collective culture which supersedes individual needs in a public arena. "Shame stimulates fear of psychological or physical rejection, expulsion, loss of social position."³⁹ The person loses respect of society and shame means being less than valuable because the person acts against group values. Honor and shame are related to the group in a collective culture.

Several passages in the Old Testament start with a sad passage about shame and honor, such as 2 Samuel 11, with the character and attitude of Uriah. Understanding that Uriah belonged to an Eastern culture, of shame and honor, some idea can be drawn about it. Uriah's thought is a "collectivist consciousness," he did not think about himself, but he did think about his companions, his will was to honor his colleagues that were on a battlefield, with redemptive personality of moral duty. Soldiers, as in all war, were in distress. Furthermore, receiving a gift from David made Uriah more in debt

³⁸ Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, (Zondervan Grand Rapids Michigan. 2007), 79

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 79

with his powerful king. There is a spiritual side, an idea people may have neglected. Maybe Uriah has shown people that there is much more to life than just material affluence and egocentric pursuits. Uriah was pure in his duty, and it prevailed over his feelings.⁴⁰ When using a shame-based approach to share the gospel with eastern people, it is easier for them to make associations, understand, and believe in God's love. Christ's followers partake in God's righteousness and honor.⁴¹

Another icebreaker is to talk about cultures of Shinto, and in the Bible are Royal families. The royalty represents a family, a unity relationship that unites people in a society. But human kings are not eternal; they are transient. Also, corruption is seen in 1 Samuel 8, when Israel asks for a human King. 1 Sam 8:20, "we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles." Israelites forgot that God himself was their king, a faithful king (1Sam12:8-11) and the reason for their request for a king was sinful, they wanted what was happening around them, since other people had king. As it is observed, human kings tend to sin, to use men to their purposes, in a patriotic way or selfish interests. Jesus will never send men to war to pursue his interests.

To a Japanese descendant, a culture to congregate is essential to survival. People often long for a place and a sense of belonging within a community with its government. In Romans 13:1, "Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that God has established." It is not weird to say to descendants that the obedience of the Government is a kind of moral obligation. It is also seen in Paul's communities that material support is shared and how Jerusalem benefited from others. The people live in freedom, they can accomplish a full life in a community. Thus, a real community has these three traits: unity, righteousness, and equality.

In Shinto, nature such as a river, a tree, or a rock is the manifestation of *kami*. In ancient times, there was a cult of spirits, fertility deities, and ancestors. When Izanagi (the *kami*) was leaving the cave, fleeing from the spirit of his dead wife *Izanami*, he wanted to purify himself in the water of the ocean. While cleansing himself, the sun goddess Amaterasu appeared from his left eye; the moon god, Tsukiyomi, from his right eye; and god storm, Susa-

⁴⁰ Robert D. McFadden, *Hiro Onoda, Soldier Who Hid in Jungle for Decades, Dies at 91*, The New York Times. Jan. 17, 2014 accessed on 04.05.2019. <https://www.nytimes.com>

⁴¹ Timothy C. Tennent. *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*.(2007) P. 101

no-wo, from his nostrils.⁴² To share the gospel, one can mention Colossians 1:15, as it explains that Jesus is the likeness of the invisible God, the firstborn Son. He is superior to all creation, including the sun, moon, and stars. God created everything in the Heavens and on Earth, the seen and unseen, the tangible and intangible. Therefore, Shinto practitioners are worshipers of creation, but they should worship the creator, not His creations. Jesus exceeds cultural and racial barriers. Jesus teaches about the real water of life, and accepting Him is to enhance the spirituality of the community. Believing in Him is to satisfy the physical thirsty and also to have “rivers of living water” that emanate from inside a person to reveal this truth that they are no longer to ignore that Jesus is the real Lord and Savior of the Humanity.⁴³

The “animistic rituals of Shinto” pleased general people, as folk religion.⁴⁴ As Shrines are settled near water or trees for the purpose of the gathering people, there are figures of certain animals, such as fox that represent spirits. Also, walking toward the shrine, people purify themselves, in a fountain, washing hands, replicating and imitating Izanagi’s purification. Romans 1:22 says, “Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.” When one worships created things, this shows a limit in understanding of who God truly is, and divinity is associated with material things, rather than immaterial God. Romans 1:25-26 also states as a result of false worship, God gave people space to be foolish and confirm these material things as divine. Shinto practitioners need to understand that worshipping idols is not a privilege, but a form of punishment due to disobedience.

Ceremonies of funerals are performed by the Buddhists, who should answer the questions of death, and the cult of the ancestor is performed routinely at home. In Domestic Shinto, there is a miniature of the shrine - *butsudana* -, where there are tablets of the name of the family ancestors. There, they thank the spirits for good happenings. There is an idea that the dead are transformed into an ancestor and lives close to the family members. And the soul of the deceased returns to a previous state of the *kami* who in the beginning, consigned it a life. When a new baby of the family is born, it came from the *kami* of the dead. Ideas regarding the afterlife, there is the festival of the dead, (*Bon Odori*) in the middle of August, and this adapted in Brazil. It is a festival of lanterns, when people, at night, launch “floating paper lanterns”

⁴² Winfried, Corduan. *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press. (2012): 425.

⁴³ Humphrey Mwangi Waweru, *Jesus and Ordinary Women in the Gospel of John: An African Perspective*, Swedish Missiological Themes, 96,2 (2008) Accessed on April 11, 2019.

⁴⁴ Winfried, Corduan. *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press. (2012), 429

into streams of water with small lighted candles, meaning the provisions for the ancestor.⁴⁵ However, Jesus was raised from the dead to be a living God. He is seated on the right side of God. Hebrews 9:27 says that everyone dies once, and after this comes the judgment of God. And Jesus will return second time to save people who believed in him. So in reality, one cannot die, then come back, as Psalms 6:5 says, "In death, there is no remembrance of thee." The practice of honoring a dead person is forbidden in the Bible, as Jesus rose from the dead to give us victory. A dead person cannot grant wishes, protect or even come back to life. Only Jesus came back in that form for us to worship.

In different ways, humankind connects with the divine and exposes to oneself how the ideas of who God is. Shinto has strong polytheistic beliefs, the superior of creation. *Kami* is invisible god that is always with people but impossible to contact *kami* physically and with no material representation. *Kamis* are an invisible force that provide moral order and material order. Knowing if *kami* is divine or not divine is doubtful. There is no human form.⁴⁶ On the other hand, Judeo-Christian presents the belief in a single all-powerful deity illustrated in Deuteronomy 6: "Hear Oh Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is one" and in the New Testament Jesus is God. He is the One who is the Giver of life and simultaneously the Taker of life. Life is still a mystery, including the conception and childbirth. People glorify God, and the miracle is entirely in the realm of God.

God's supreme revelation, Jesus Christ, is his Son. In *How to Give away your Faith* - Paul Little⁴⁷ in chapter 5, *What is Our Message* claims that Christians as ambassadors do not know the content of the message such as who is Jesus, what he did, his work on the cross, what he commanded in Matthew 28:30. As Shinto does not have Scriptures, the Bible is an accurate historical document and asserts that Jesus is a living person, and believers have a personal relationship with Him. Thus the author presents a plan to announce the gospel.

Jesus is fully God His words in John 10:10-30 ("I and the Father are one"); He is the truth, Holy, (John 14:1-9 - Jesus the way of the Father) the Creator and Lord of the universe and He loves His creatures: human beings. Jesus is a full man and faced temptations as man in John 11:35 (Jesus wept).

⁴⁵ Ibid., 443-445

⁴⁶ Kiyo. *Evangelism to Japanese People*. (Calvary Chapel Logos Tokyo. November 2012). Accessed on 03/07/2019.
<https://www.logostokyo.com/english/evangelism-to-japanese-people/logostokyo.com>

⁴⁷ Paul E. Little, *How to Give Any Your Faith*, (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press 2008) 92-110.

Christ obeyed His Father in Heaven, he did not fall into temptation and is without sin. He was innocent but died to save others.⁴⁸

Although God cares about men, Jesus knows men are born sinners. In contrast, Shintoists believe there is no sin whereas Christians believe in sin. If a Christian were to explain to a Shintoist what is sin, they would have to already experienced jealousy, lies, immoral behavior to another person. Since there is no sin, and God is impersonal in Shinto, the sense that one is unrelated from God results in apathy, isolation, loneliness, moral fragility, deficiency of purpose. Followers of Jesus can feel the love of God.⁴⁹ Mark 7:20-23 points out what defiles a man is from inside a person, what is within, "... a person's heart, evil thoughts come, sexual immorality, theft, murder, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly."

All people after hearing theology should have a response for a change of mind to turn to a real God, as in John 1:12, to receive, to believe, and to become children of God. To start a relationship with a true God implies "commitment of intellect, emotions, and will."⁵⁰ A believer's commitment depends on Jesus Christ as Lord. Faith triggers the emotion of "godly sorrow" for sin. People thought that they could live independently of God. In order for one to act, one must first have the will to do so. Thereafter, ones will to grow close to God becomes an action, which results in Christ becoming the center of that believer's life.

Afterlife and Jesus

The gospel transmits a message about death and resurrection. Shinto bury its dead in a grave, and after 49 days, return to make a ceremony in honor of the dead. At home, people take the tablet with the name of the dead to put on a domestic altar, then the person becomes a *kami*. But only the spirit remains among the living. The death of Jesus reconciled people to God. Jesus died so violently by human hands in front of many people. Jesus was crowned with glory and honor, the grace of God on behalf of all who die. Jesus' death allowed man to gain freedom from sin through his resurrection. Thus, mankind is able to receive an eternal inheritance from God. Jesus rising from death is a unique history, he resurrected not only spiritually, but his physical body was not in his tomb.⁵¹ His resurrection is the foundation of Christian faith; this is the materialization of his deity, he appeared in Galilee as he said before to his

⁴⁸ Ibid., 95

⁴⁹ Ibid, 96

⁵⁰ Ibid, 101

⁵¹ Ibid, 98

disciples. Human won the favor of God because Christ died and rose from the dead, John 20:19-24. God is the only true and living God.

The death of Jesus through crucifixion means that the forgiveness of sin was granted to those who do not deserve such sacrifice. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. The lamb without blemish and defect, Jesus, redeems mankind. Man's relationship with God was damaged by sin. The real story of his death is the hope that Jesus restored man's relationship which resulted in reconciliation with God.⁵² The cross represents those who are reconciled in the body of God, who made peace with God. Paul Little, in *Know Why You Believe* had contact with foreign friends who had questions if Jesus Christ is really the only way to God. Then the author presents the uniqueness of Christ in support of his argument in his incarnation - God comes to earth; his death on the cross was unjust; and his resurrection validates who he was and why he came.⁵³

It is necessary for a brief explanation to them about Christ to facilitate the Shintoists' understanding of the Christian doctrine of Salvation. One has to save oneself first. As Japanese has Buddhist influences, the immigrants used to pray: "*namumyohorengkyo*" ("May the Buddha save us!"). This was accompanied by the string of knots or beads to count how many times to say the same words. The article *Telling Beads: The Forms and Functions of the Buddhist Rosary in Japan* clarifies the meaning of the use of the rosary. Recite prayer with calm mind to end passion and suffering. There is a story of a believer whose son died, and he brought the body to Buddha at the sacred tree named Bodhi. If this tree is sacred, then make my son live again, and after seven days of prayer his son lived again. Chanting the rosary is used for devotional purposes which represents the grace of salvation that Amida (celestial god, meaning "Infinite Life"⁵⁴) gave freely to all.⁵⁵

For one side, Shinto practitioners have difficulties in understanding God, sin, and grace. On the other hand, Christians are too eager to be saved and live eternally with Christ. To clarify, the synopses of the Bible can be divided into Genesis and Revelation: God made Creation, with man and woman, then the

⁵² Ibid, 97

⁵³ Paul E. Little, *Know Why You Believe* (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2008) 183.

⁵⁴ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, Accessed on March 27, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Amitabha-Buddhism>

⁵⁵ George J. Tanabe Jr., *Telling Beads: The Forms and Functions of the Buddhist Rosary in Japan*, accessed on March 27, 2019. <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/monkeymind/2018/08/telling-beads-the-forms-and-functions-of-the-buddhist-rosary-in-japan.html>

Rebellion, the redemption, and Restoration to the entire world, with a new heaven, new earth.

Men are born with personal sin, and this sin is a transgression of God's Law, casting man's soul far from God. Jesus redeemed humans from the guilt of sin by taking away the sins of the world. The New International Version states that Jesus saved humans from the power of darkness ("For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" - Ephesians 6:12). For invisible spiritual world power, the devil and his ministers do not rest; their spirits are malicious and crafty. On the contrary, Ephesians 5:2 notes "... Christ loved us and gave himself up for us a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." God extinguishes His righteous anger toward sin via Christ; Romans 3:21-26 - human sin and God is right to anger human, that deserves punishment. Those sins cannot go unpunished, they are wrong, and it is necessary for justice. To first understand sin, one must understand that sin is against God, and to do anything that is against God is an offense to him, as he is a Holy God. Jesus' purpose here on earth was to divert God's wrath from man, upon himself. This had to be done, as the nature of God is holy, righteous, and perfect. God in his grace freely reconciled man to himself through the death of Jesus Christ.⁵⁶ Jesus Christ is Alpha and Omega; therefore, he has the plan of salvation, and the fulfillment of God's covenant promise to Abraham.⁵⁷

In Romans 4:13,16-18, 22, God promised Abraham and his descendants that they would inherit the world, but this was contingent on righteousness through faith, not because of the Law. Therefore, God credited this faith as righteousness. Jesus proclaimed this message, and fulfilled the will of God for the plan of salvation. For the aspect of salvation, Jesus redeemed people from an empty way of life. Undeniably, Jesus Christ was the only begotten Son of God as shown in John 3:16 where it says, God sent his only son to the earth and whoever believes what he says will not die, instead that person will have eternal life. In addition, people who rely on Christ alone for salvation are adopted into His family as sons and daughters; as in Ephesians 1:5, God predestined all for adopted to be granted sonship through Jesus Christ, in conformity with his will.

God in His grace and goodness did not separate Christians from Him. On the contrary, Christians are not free of eternal punishment, but as they belong

⁵⁶ Daniel Slavich, *Lecture, Systematic Theology SFBC*, Deerfield Beach, January 30, 2018.

⁵⁷ Kiyoo. *Evangelism to Japanese People*. (Calvary Chapel Logos Tokyo. November 2012). Accessed on 03/07/2019.

<https://www.logostokyo.com/english/evangelism-to-japanese-people/logostokyo.com>

to God's family, they have the right to inherit a place in heaven. Jesus knows that each component of the church comes from various places and each one has different gifts and contributes to the potential unity of the church. When facing adverse situations in life, the power of the cross is enough to allow people to do good. People constantly live in a spiritual struggle that should not be considered unimportant. Nevertheless, the realm of the Lord is "powerful to save and sanctify." To achieve this sanctification, one must submit to Christ; and in the end, the Spirit of God directs believers to Jesus.⁵⁸

Conclusion

The need to speak about the gospel among the descendants of Japanese in Brazil is evident in family gatherings. The Japanese brought Shinto to a distant land with no scriptures, no priest, only layman. Like all humankind, they had a need for God as all people around the world have fears and thoughts. Being an ancient religion, Shintoists had a glance of God in the magnificence of nature: rivers, forests, trees, etc. In Shinto, people are associated with all these elements. The first group of immigrants landed on farms. They remembered their former rituals and had a sense of wonder in how to connect to God. The immigrants would thank God for rain which was perceived as being from heaven while drought was perceived as an imprecation. It is a universal human urge to obtain a paradise on earth. Inside a strange country, the immigrants faced an opposing culture, but they knew how to survive within a community.

A community should help others in pain and give hope and comfort. Immigrants had to deal with the end of World War II and the disappointment of not returning to Japan. At that time, there was no immediate communication of the outcome of the end of the war. Before the war started there were worries about how to get food, but the community peacefully worked together to resolve problems; everyone was treated equally. Community was still important. Some members discussed what they were doing and shared their experiences to help others using their specialties. There is no money taking, but the desire is that everybody prospers physically and spiritually.

The descendants saw two types of people: those who helped and those who did not, from politicians to ordinary people. For example, in times of difficulty, many Japanese transferred the deeds of their properties to Brazilians who promised to return the property when the dark times ended. However, two types again, some returned, others did not. Some politicians were prejudiced against descendants of Japanese. However, there were other politicians who helped and passed a law that favored the descendants of Japanese to obtain

⁵⁸ Hunter, Bradford, *God's Work in Salvation Study Guide*. Accessed on March 27. <http://johnstevenson.net>

citizenship in Brazil. The status of citizenship created a feeling of belonging and made them stronger with a vision of a settled future in Brazil with family.

Family is an essential component that forges a person's life. The family origin informs about family background, ancestral struggles, especially achievements and a new generation's hope. At family meetings, for example, people come from distant places because they do not want to miss the opportunity to stay linked with their roots. A big family is organic, varying from the oldest person who could be 90 years old or older to the youngest infant. During these meetings members confide their difficulties with financial or medical issues or family concerns of any nature: a wife who fights against cancer; a boy who is being observed for autism, and other cares. This sharing brings comfort to the family, all seeking answers to the mysteries and a faith in God who heals. Filled with communal trust, they eagerly mark their calendars for the next year's meeting.

In the meeting, the descendants begin to present in writing five spiritual precepts. They desire to ask for spiritual help, to ask for spiritual protection, to ask for any happy outcome, words to ward off evil spirits and purify the soul. Shinto does not deny other religions. And the Scriptures have a variety of spiritual comfort the Holy Spirit brings.

Some Japanese descendants married Brazilian Catholics, and observe syncretism. It is common to have in ones house, a spouse who holds an altar as a vestigial of Shinto *butsudana* - an oratory made by black wood,- and the other spouse with another altar that holds a Catholic 'Our Lady.' Thus, a couple who does not want to lose the family bond brings the spouse to see the remnant of Shinto practiced among Brazilian-Japanese descendants. No one is the Shinto priest, but the person responsible for gathering the family records someone speaking in Japanese and plays a session of the cult of ancestors. The explanation of the *kami, torii, shrine*, is minimum. This reflects their state of disorientation with past rituals that they do not fully believe. Japanese speakers are few, but they are still interested in their heritage. Festinger, Riecken and Schachter proposed the expression "cognitive dissonance," which explains a "strong tendency to reinterpret [one's] previous belief or to invent new facts in order to diminish...dissonant elements."⁵⁹

As a result of mixed marriages, routine talk proposed casting out members who converted to Christianity, but the inverse has occurred in my own family of nearly 60 people. After greeting each other, some noticed that some members were missing. It was counted that two families refused to go to the meeting due to the pagan practices of Shinto. The reason others did not come was because they converted to Christianity. Those new converts are totally

⁵⁹ Rafael Shoji, *The Failed Prophecy of Shinto Nationalism and the Rise of Japanese Brazilian Catholicism*, (Japanese Journal of Religious Studies 35/1:13-38 2008 Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture), 23

against the meeting because other members are reduplicating rituals without a real salvation in Christ. They are not interested in pagan rituals because Christ calls for the renewing of their minds. Such renewal excludes the practice of Shinto rituals and syncretism. If members do not go to the gathering, they will lose the chance to explain their Christian faith. Some, however, as the family gathering happens once a year, it is an excellent opportunity to evangelize as Paul does in Acts 17, contextualizing the similarities between Shinto and Christianity such as prayer, food offering, gathering people, sharing fears, success, respect, and awe to God.

Corduan (2012) suggests that Christians should not oblige non-Christians to accept Christianity. He calls evangelization “a trap” when Christians attempt to outshine other religions in a foreign land. Do not be prejudiced by one’s native culture believing it superior to all others. God calls people to spread the gospel, and the hearer will decide with all heart, mind, and body whether or not to be a real Christian. Christians will tend to each other. In Acts 2:47, God adds to the number of believers, not the Church. Be free from parallel messages and focus on a genuine message of redemption. Make them understand that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the unique mode to be saved. These ideas reinforce that Japanese descendants needed “to know the authentic gospel: that Jesus Christ is the Savior and the Lord.”⁶⁰ Christ is a new family, a new identity.

⁶⁰ Winfried, Corduan. *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press. (2012): pp. 447 - 448

APPENDIX 1

Imperial Rescript on Education

“Our imperial ancestors have founded Our Empire on a basis broad and everlasting, and subjects ever united in loyalty and filial piety have from generation to generation illustrated the beauty thereof. This is the glory of the fundamental character of Our Empire and therein also lies the source of Our Education. Ye, Our subjects, be filial to your parents, affectionate to your brothers and sisters; as husbands and wives be harmonious, as friends true; bear yourselves in modesty and moderation; extend your benevolence to all; pursue learning and cultivate arts, and thereby develop intellectual faculties and perfect moral powers; furthermore, advance public good and promote common interests; always respect the Constitution [of the previous year, 1889] and observe laws; should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the state; and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of Our Imperial Throne coeval with heaven and earth. So shall be not only ye Our good and faithful subjects, but render illustrious the best traditions for forefathers. The Way here set forth is indeed the teaching bequeathed by Our Imperial Ancestors, to be observed alike by Their Descendants and the subjects, infallible for all ages and true in all places. It is Our wish to lay it to heart in all reverence, in common with you, Our subjects, that we may all attain to the same virtue.”⁶¹

⁶¹ Inoue, Kowashi, *Imperial Rescript on Education*, Accessed on 03/09/2019. http://shinto.enacademic.com/469/Kyoiku_chokugo Authored chiefly by October 1890.

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Evangelistic Contextualization in 1st Corinthians 9:19-23

Gustavo Cabral

Is the message of the gospel the same for everyone? Absolutely! Does it need to be preached to everyone in the same way? Absolutely not! The good news that Jesus came to earth, died on a cross, and resurrected on the third day to pay the debt of humanity's sin is universal. There is nothing that can be added or subtracted from it. However, how the story is told and how its concepts are explained might need to be adapted for each audience.

The events that provided the gift of salvation to all who believe in Jesus happened at a specific point in history and at a specific location. The issue is that every single human needs to hear about this: From those who lived at the time of Adam and Eve, the first ones to sin, to all those who will live on Earth until the eternal age begins. This span encompasses many unique levels of comprehension and thought processes who all need to understand one single message. How could that be done? God in His infinite wisdom decided to contextualize the delivery of the message of salvation to the need of each group of people throughout history and around the world.

The Bible is full of accounts of God contextualizing the message of the gospel. One example in the Old Testament was the institution of animal sacrifices, where God designed a redemption system that would point to the ultimate sacrifice of His son in a way that His people at that point in time would understand. In the New Testament, for example, each of the four Gospels had a different type of audience, and each author was inspired to carefully adapt the telling of the stories accordingly, by adding or omitting details as necessary. In the Gospels, there are accounts of Jesus choosing to reveal some mysteries of the Kingdom of God by speaking in parables to his audience so that they could better understand him. Also, Jesus coming to Earth himself is the best example of contextualization there ever was, when a deity took the form of His subjects out of love. God decided to live as a human so that He could best explain to humans how He expected them to live and how He could redeem them. He came to deliver the gospel in the flesh – how could it ever be more contextualized?

Contextualization, by definition, is to put things into context, to provide enough relatable information so that the receiver can understand the message. Paul, commonly known as the greatest missionary of all time, was a great example in the Bible of someone who used contextualization in his life and message to further the gospel. He saw it as an essential tool so that the good news of Jesus could be spread and widely accepted by the different audiences to whom he preached. Paul expressed this strategy in one of his letters to the church in Corinth, more specifically in I Corinthians 9:19-23. Here is how the New International Version translates it:

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

An analysis of these five verses will show he believed his Christ-given freedom allowed him to contextualize the gospel, respecting the diversity of the many groups with which he came in contact, as well as to consider the hearer of the message and his or her understanding of the world. This text shows further support to the idea that Paul strongly believed in contextualization when it overtly states his goal to save as many souls as he could. He did not concern himself with unessential matters, but rather was willing to do whatever it took to gain more people for the cause of the gospel. Most importantly, the ideas of Paul regarding contextualization are timeless and serve as guiding principles for the evangelistic work of the Church today. The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that Paul believed the preaching of the gospel should be fully and constantly contextualized, since he was free to do so and to reach as many people as possible, and that his example must be followed by the Church.

A brief exegetical look into I Corinthians 9:19-23 is necessary to best try to understand Paul's goals and intended meaning when writing these verses. They are part of his first letter to the church in Corinth, providing instructions on many different aspects of Christian life and church affairs. In chapter eight, for example, he introduces the topic of whether a Christian should eat food sacrificed and how to interact with people within the church who think differently. He then expands the subject in chapter nine into a discussion into the theme of freedom, then more specifically to his rights as an apostle, and how he had abdicated of those rights in the hope that the church reading this letter would do the same in their individual lives for the cause of the gospel.

Verses 19 to 23 in chapter nine come to provide an illustration from Paul's personal life of the sacrifice he had to make when preaching the gospel,¹ and how much Paul was concerned with "lifestyle contextualization"

¹ Dean Flemming, *Contextualization In The New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 195.

and wanted to highlight his modification of cultural and social practice.² These ideas are important because they will aid the understanding of the overall point he was trying to make: Everything he was saying was already happening in his life. Another important aspect as to how the passage relates to the surrounding context is that Paul believes this matter is not isolated from the rest of church life and the other issues in the letter, but rather part of his general persuasion to the church in Corinth.³ One of his goals for writing the epistle to that specific church was to promote unity within the church. These verses provide an important reminder that the whole church is united in fulfilling a bigger mission together and must overcome internal differences to get it done.

The way the passage is structured also contributes to convey Paul's overall message. He makes seven statements, all with a natural logical flow. The first and last two sentences are an *inclusio* that surrounds four specific and parallel examples. Also of note in these sentences, is the repetition of the verb "win" after the prepositions "to" or "so as to," sometimes translated as "in order that."⁴ Paul wants to be clear that every single one of these actions he is taking has a specific and single purpose: To win more people for the gospel.

Furthermore, the nuance in meaning of the word win in this passage is crucial. The first five sentences use the "missionary term 'gain, win'" but as Paul moves to verse twenty-two, he uses the synonym "save."⁵ P.T. O'Brien explains that the former has to do with "gaining someone completely, not just before they become Christians" but the verb to save "has a better understood meaning as to save from the coming wrath in the final day, not just to convert."⁶ This is important as it emphasizes how crucial Paul believed his mission to be. Suddenly, it becomes clear that it is not about increasing the number of his followers or simply aggregating more people to a church. The stakes are quite high and the "[failures] or [successes]" go beyond the measurement of an ability to persuade, but rather someone's eternal destiny.⁷

² Flemming, 198.

³ Stephen C. Barton, "'All things to All People': Paul and the Law in the Light of I Corinthians 9:19-23," in *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, ed. by James D.G. Dunn (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 273.

⁴ Morna D. Hooker, "A Partner in the Gospel: Paul's Understanding of His Ministry," in *Theology & Ethics In Paul and His Interpreters*, ed. by Eugene H. f, Jr. and Jerry L. Sumney (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 84.

⁵ P.T. O'Brien, *Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul: An Exegetical and Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Co., 1995), 94.

⁶ O'Brien, 95.

⁷ David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians: Life in Local Church*, *The Bible Speaks Today*, ed. John R. W. Stott (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 159.

Finally, Paul begins by saying in verse nineteen that even though he is free, he “made [him]self a slave to everyone” to “win as many as possible.” Why would a man who is free choose to become a slave? Why would he take a “lower station in society” and engage in “servile behavior” that no one would ever aspire to if not for a much higher purpose?⁸

His answer comes in the subsequent clauses where he explains his purpose for doing it and lists the name of the specific groups to which he enslaved himself: Jews, those under the law, those not the under the law, and the weak.⁹ It was all about contextualizing the gospel to win them. The first three examples are nothing more than a buildup to his “decisive” illustration of being a slave: Becoming “weak, to win the weak.”¹⁰ He did not have to do this, as he would not necessarily agree with them on matters, but he chose to make this ultimate concession to win more souls.

As it will be shown, he believed he was free to make such concession and that his mission was bigger than his sacrifice, so he wanted to let everyone who read it know of that, and structured his argument in a way that left nothing to question. Flemming agrees that these five verses are of “critical importance” to our understanding of Paul’s evangelistic contextualization.¹¹

Paul’s first argument for contextualizing the gospel was that every Christian was free to modify his or her own behavior to reach out to a certain group and win them for Christ. He expressed this idea by saying that he, a free man in Jesus Christ, was also free to become a “slave to everyone” as he said in verse nineteen, as well as to become “all things to all people” as he stated in verse twenty-two. When he uses the latter expression, scholars believe it is possible that he was doubling down on an accusation made by one of these groups of his being too malleable, but he makes it clear he was free under Christ to act that way to reach a more diverse group of people.¹²

He is not pretending to be someone else to pander to all these groups; he is just trying to build a bridge between himself and them. His point is that nothing could stop him from finding in all men “something with which he

⁸ Ben Witherington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 211.

⁹ Raymond F. Collins, *Sacra Pagina Series*, ed. by Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. *First Corinthians*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 353.

¹⁰ Richard B. Hays, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, *First Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 154.

¹¹ Flemming, 193.

¹² F.F. Bruce, “‘All Things to All Men:’ Diversity in Unity and Other Pauline Tensions,” in *Unity and Diversity In New Testament Theology*, ed. by Robert A. Guelich (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 92.

could sympathize,” and use that bond to win them for Christ.¹³ He just wanted to meet them where they were. His call was to preach to those who had no access to the gospel and in places where there were no churches either, so he used creative methods and approaches as platforms for teaching in order to access people “at their point of need and interest.”¹⁴ In Christ, he was free to not tie himself to stances that would alienate certain groups.

As Craig L. Blomberg expresses in the NIV Application Commentary, in whatever Paul did, his goal was to remove unnecessary obstacles between himself and those of the groups to whom he was preaching that would hinder anyone from coming to Jesus. This freedom from these “entanglements” allowed Paul to “give the best possible service to the widest range of people.”¹⁵ This is significant because it supports the idea that Paul did not want to slow down the spread of the gospel with unnecessary impediments from which he believed every Christian had been set free. He felt he could reach more people by exercising his freedom and not getting caught up in lesser matters.

He saw them as lesser matters because if the essence of the gospel was maintained, he was free to modify his behavior. If the heart of the message remained the same, its delivery could be adapted. Or if “the truth of the gospel [is] preserved,”¹⁶ as he put it, Paul did not have a problem adapting to anything else. He had to stay true to the message of the Cross and to how one could be saved, but not to the opinions of any group on unrelated matters. Some could say that his accommodations when preaching the gospel were limitless, and to a certain extent they were, except from one restraint, which he himself expressed in verse 22: To be under Christ’s law.¹⁷

So, there was indeed a clear limit. The adaptability to which he referred in his life and to which he was encouraging the church to follow suit had to do with being flexible in one’s manners, never in one’s morals.¹⁸ As author Ben Witherington III puts it, he would not become an “idolator to

¹³ Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the first epistle of St.*

Paul to the Corinthians (New York: C. Scribner’s, 1911) accessed February 28, 2019 (<https://archive.org/details/criticalexegetic33robeuoft>), 191.

¹⁴ Michael Pocock, Gailyn Van Rheen, and Douglas McConnell, *The Changing Face of World Missions: Engaging Contemporary Issues and Trends* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 231-232.

¹⁵ Craig L. Blomberg, *The NIV Application Commentary*, ed. by Terry Much, 1 Corinthians (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 183.

¹⁶ Galatians 2:5 NIV

¹⁷ Robertson and Plummer, 192.

¹⁸ Roy L. Laurin, *First Corinthians: Where Life Matures* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1987), 153.

idolators” or “an adulterer to adulterers.”¹⁹ Sin was not an option and any interpretation that comes close to such an insinuation becomes malicious. Paul was not “lawless” in the sense of “godless or wicked,” but actually the opposite of it; he is free from the law in the sense that he is not obligated to keep ritual requirements for example, but he is not lawless because he stands “under the law of Christ.”²⁰ That was the basis for his behavior and stance, which he consistently showed in his evangelistic endeavors.

It was never about abandoning his ways to prove a point, but to be flexible in order to “appease the neighbor’s conscience” in matters that were “without moral significance.”²¹ However, “in matters that he did not see as ethically or theologically essential or implied by the gospel, Paul believed in flexibility.”²² If his morals and conscience were not violated, why could he not make use of his freedom to connect with others and to win them for Christ?

In his book *Pauline Theology & Mission Practice*, Dean S. Gilliland tries to explain Paul’s frame of thought when it came to missions by saying that he would underscore what was essential but communicate it in a way that was relevant to each situation. He alludes to the fact that Paul in Galatians 1:6-8 is clear as to how nothing could be modified in the gospel by anyone, but that Paul also conveyed these absolute truths in different ways depending on the context.²³ Gilliland tries to explain what Paul had in mind by using the expression “balance between essentials and relevance.”²⁴

David Prior explained the same concept by saying that Paul’s philosophy was to “discover methods which combined the greatest integrity with the greatest impact.”²⁵ This is key in trying to understand what Paul expected from Christians when preaching the gospel: Never change the message but do contextualize it! One is always free to adapt the delivery approach. Just be careful that the contextualization happens “at the level of form rather than content.”²⁶

Adapting was necessary because Paul knew that the gospel was not just for the Jews and needed to be effectively communicated to a broader and more diverse audience. If the church would get stuck in non-essential discussions and pander only to a specific group, its growth would be

¹⁹ Witherington, 213.

²⁰ O’Brien, 94.

²¹ Ibid, 153.

²² Ibid, 213.

²³ Dean S. Gilliland, *Pauline Theology & Mission Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 32.

²⁴ Ibid, 32.

²⁵ Prior, 159-160.

²⁶ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 321.

hampered. Paul validates his commitment to a more diverse church by being willing to identify with each of the “cultural commitments” he mentioned to win each one of them for Christ.²⁷

He mentions four groups with whom he could find things in common and use that to advance the gospel. At least with these groups, Paul had a head-start due to the influence of his background. He was a Jew first, calling himself a ‘Hebrew of Hebrews’ even though he was not born in Palestine, and his Jewishness frequently appeared in his letters when he called for maintaining purity and avoiding defilement.²⁸ However, he was also a Greek of sorts. In his formative years, Paul spent a lot of time immersed in Hellenistic centers of philosophy and learning, with Greek also being his probable mother tongue.²⁹ Finally, he was a Roman. His citizenship was inherited from his family and although it was the “least influential for his cultural identity,” it certainly gave him insight into a whole new culture in addition to opening many doors for him.³⁰

His hope was that each Christian reading his letter would look for people around them and try to build those same connections and spread the gospel through the doors available to them. Only through reaching people who were different could the gospel become universal and widely accepted, but each Christian needed to play his or her own part. So much so that Paul knew he could not reach all the groups in the world. He even self-imposed some limits to how much he could contextualize, so that it would be done in a legitimate way, thus strengthening his argument.

As author Kenneth E. Bailey states, “Significantly, Paul does *not* say that for the Greeks he becomes a Greek, nor that for the gentiles he becomes a gentile. That is impossible. He is a Jew. Identification has its limits.”³¹ This is a key aspect and limitation to contextualization, which increases Paul’s credibility in the matter. He was not claiming he could become just like anyone, for he was not Greek and neither a gentile. He was not forcing something that could not have been done. He stuck to what he could relate, or aspects that were not intrinsic to his being, such as relating to the Law. Through each Christian using contextualization as to what applied to him or her, though, he believed more people could be saved.

However, there are some divergent opinions as to whether I Corinthians 9:19-23 can be used to support such a Pauline stance on contextualization. Some scholars believe it is just a part of an argument

²⁷ Flemming, 126.

²⁸ Ibid, 123.

²⁹ Ibid, 123.

³⁰ Ibid, 123.

³¹ Kenneth E. Bailey, “The Structure of I Corinthians and Paul’s Theological Method with Special Reference to 4:17,” in *Novum Testamentum*, Vol. 25, Fasc. 2 (April 1983): 168, accessed February 28, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1560491>.

exclusively about freedom and cannot be overextended. Author Gunther Bornkamm, for example, believes “the apostle’s freedom and adaptability have nothing to do with a stoic-cosmopolitan attitude,” but Paul’s only concern was to make clear he believes the gospel empowers him the freedom to change his stance on issues.³² According to him, these verses have been “thoughtlessly misused in order to justify any form of assimilating the Christian proclamation and behavior to various ways of life.”³³ In summary, his argument is that Paul’s stance in I Corinthians 9:19-23 is not about an effective missionary strategy, but really to educate and drive home his point to his readers about the freedom of the gospel.

While the argument is certainly plausible, it is incomplete, as there is ample support to the fact that Paul does indeed mention the consideration of the hearers of the gospel. It is not only in a social or cultural sense, necessarily. However, it focuses on the diversity of people, regardless of how they are diverse, and how he wants to reach them but must adapt to their thinking to win them. He was indeed making a point about his freedom, but it didn’t stop there. What good would it be for him to be free if he couldn’t use this freedom to win “as many as possible?” Also, it is not that Paul would assimilate to “any form” as Bornkamm seems to suggest those who take a different interpretation than his would assume. As seen above, there were clear limits to Paul’s contextualization and he certainly understood and abided by them.

In his book *Contextualization In The New Testament*, Dean Flemming tends to agree with the fact that while Paul’s “all things” statement does relate primarily to his conduct, one could argue that his way of doing theology can also be applied to human needs and circumstances.³⁴ He also believes the passage opens the possibility of a “wider application” that does include flexibility in the way he delivers the gospel.³⁵ However one needs to bridge the gap with the receiver of the message, a Christian must do that for the sake of the gospel. Paul’s point, though, is that the preacher is free to find a common point with the hearer and take advantage of it, so that he or she is more effective in the delivery.

Paul was all about that effectiveness in winning more people for Jesus. Understanding that his time on Earth was limited, he wanted to do his best to win as many souls as possible. This is his overt objective, as he writes in verse 19 of I Corinthians 9. His ultimate goal was to win more people, and that is why contextualizing was so important to Paul, as this would aid him in

³² Günther Bornkamm, “The Missionary Stance of Paul in I Corinthians 9 and in Acts,” in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. by Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 196-197.

³³ *Ibid.*, 194.

³⁴ Flemming, 106.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 198.

that quest. His adapting his behavior, and never the message as it was discussed before, was what he saw as necessary to accomplish this goal.³⁶

This was not something he had suddenly thought of, this was his ministry life story. From the moment he was called and began to preach, he knew the message he had received was too great to be contained just to the Jews. Paul had been always willing to sacrifice himself by contextualizing his own conduct, because to him it was not just about the delivery of the message even, but it was about himself as the messenger as well.³⁷

For example, Paul in Acts 15 expresses his belief that circumcision was not necessary for salvation, and even gets involved in the related dispute that led to the council at Jerusalem. To him, when “properly understood,” circumcision as an “external mark” was irrelevant to having a relationship with God – it pertained only to one’s “cultural past and not to one’s standing vis-à-vis God.”³⁸ He could not have been any clearer about that. However, in the beginning of Acts 16, knowing that he would be facing an audience of mostly Jews in his trip, he encourages his protégé Timothy to be circumcised so that there would be no resistance of the gospel because of that issue.

Does it seem incoherent? Perhaps, but Paul was not worried about how he was seen. He was worried about saving souls. It was not about causing controversy, it was about being versatile. He would always follow the Spirit’s direction so that he wouldn’t be “locked” into any particular way of operating, but rather adapt to what was needed, like a “veritable spiritual chameleon,” as Prior aptly puts it.³⁹ He stood up for what was right, which was that salvation was not by works, but if a different non-compromising way of operating was required to gain the hearts and eventually the souls of the Jews, he was happy to comply.

Gilliland calls Paul’s actions in the context of Acts 15 “a radical move toward what, today, we would call contextualization” and goes it even further to say that it was the “most important event that opened the door to the Gentile world,” signaling to all peoples that salvation no longer was only for the Jews.⁴⁰ These actions and ideas might have seemed unpopular or even demeaning to people in his position and situation, but he saw them as necessary for his cause, hence his calling himself a slave, while being also free.⁴¹ Being unpopular or labeled as radical did not phase Paul, since his mission was more important to him.

³⁶ Hays, 153.

³⁷ Flemming, 196.

³⁸ Robin Scroggs, “Paul and the Eschatological Body,” in *Theology & Ethics In Paul and His Interpreters*, ed. by Eugene H. Lovering, Jr. and Jerry L. Sumney (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 22.

³⁹ Prior, 162.

⁴⁰ Gilliland, 32.

⁴¹ Hays, 155.

As he continued his missionary journey, later in chapter 17 of Acts, we see another one of his greatest examples of use of contextualization. While in Athens, after speaking in the synagogue and around the city, he is invited to lecture at the Areopagus to explain the “new teaching” he had been presenting to many in the city. He knew that moment was a unique shot, as many eyes and ears would be on him and his message could be of great impact. How could he best connect with them? He knew they longed for something new, but he had to start from somewhere that was familiar to them.

This was when in verse twenty-three he alludes to an altar raised to “an unknown god” by saying “For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: To an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.”⁴² From that point of connection with their reality, he builds a bridge to their knowing God and the message of the gospel. He contextualized by referring to the altar to the unknown God as a form of “introduction to the one true God”⁴³ he served and who called him to preach His Word. This is an example of a technique that missiologists would later call “redemptive analogies.”⁴⁴ Many people could have criticized him for alluding to a pagan object of worship, but that was just his starting point, something from where he could build his contextualization logic. He just wanted to connect with them to “win as many as possible.”

In this way, the words in I Corinthians 9:19-23 are not isolated, but rather a depiction and systematization of Paul’s life teachings. He had been building those bridges with different groups for a long time. As Prior describes it, “Every encounter, every personal habit, was now overtly under the control of Jesus Christ” and he practiced “evangelism with integrity, relationships with adaptability, and personal holiness with single-mindedness.”⁴⁵ Every aspect of his life was devoted to the preaching of the gospel by making connections with others, who many times were quite different from him. Even in chapter eight of I Corinthians, he had already given examples of his contextualization of the gospel for different audiences when discussing the matter of eating food previously sacrificed to idols.

So, when Paul said that he “became a Jew,” he meant that he was willing to take part in practices of the Jewish religion and make concessions on some debates so that he could use this as a starting point to win them. He knew that he no longer was under the “yoke of the Law” but he was willing to freely resume “some of his Jewishness” as a strategy for evangelism.⁴⁶ This must have been considerably hard for him, as he was so adamant about grace trumping the Law. However, it was better to be again under the Law that to

⁴² Acts 17:23, NIV.

⁴³ Pocock, Van Rheezen and McConnell, 231.

⁴⁴ Osborne, 321.

⁴⁵ Prior, 159.

⁴⁶ Witherington, 212.

“[start] off a relationship on the wrong foot” with someone and risk not winning him or her to Christ.⁴⁷ He was ready to promote a healthy dialogue between Judaism and Christianity, if the Jewish counterpart would be won for the gospel in the end.⁴⁸ It was never just talk, it was pragmatism at its best, but for a good cause, which happened to be the greatest cause of all.

This greatest cause deserved everything he had. His commitment to preaching the gospel had caused him to be severely punished, many times physically, but never would this affect his determination.⁴⁹ He even mentioned earlier in chapter nine of I Corinthians that he would “put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.”⁵⁰ To “win as many as possible,” he had to give all he had, or to preach the gospel “by all possible means,” as he would express in verse twenty-two. By all possible means also entailed that he would not let any petty obstacles of religiosity and legalism stop him from being used by God to save people.

When he contextualized the gospel and found himself in debates, it was never about winning the theological debate for him, but rather about minor “conciliations and accommodations” that would serve a higher purpose.⁵¹ Those debates were very small compared to what was at stake. In his mind, the stake of winning someone could also be seen in a broader sense as winning someone who was already a Christian to become more mature and realize that they too needed to reach out to people who were different to preach the gospel.⁵² Anything that was non-essential and divided the body of Christ should be left aside, so that the Church could fulfill its ultimate God-given mission.

Attempts at division in the early church would happen quite often, as not much doctrine had been established or at least systematized. So, in his quest to promote the gospel through contextualization, Paul had to also consider that the “by all possible means” attitude often was going to face some resistance. What he tried to do was to shift the focus of his audience from what was earthly to what was eternal. It was clear that the relationship of the Christian to the Law, for example, would cause disputes, but he wanted to form an “eschatological community” that could be polarized in some respects, but whose differences were transformed into something new, that would focus on the advancement of the gospel.⁵³

⁴⁷ Prior, 161.

⁴⁸ Andreas Lindemann, “Pauline Mission and Religion Pluralism,” in *Theology & Ethics In Paul and His Interpreters*, ed. by Eugene H. Lovering, Jr. and Jerry L. Sumney (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 285.

⁴⁹ Barton, 285.

⁵⁰ I Corinthians 9:12, NIV

⁵¹ Robertson and Plummer, 192.

⁵² Blomberg, 184.

⁵³ Barton, 283.

That is why any interpretation of these verses that implies Paul was not using them as an example to call people to the active preaching of the gospel cannot be considered valid. David Bosch expresses such view, for example, in his book *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. According to him, Paul's message was about the Church living a "missionary lifestyle" where outsiders would feel welcomed and consequently drawn to them, and not necessarily "to go out and preach."⁵⁴ It becomes clear in the text and in the context that Paul's actions and words do not seem to support such an interpretation. O'Brien agrees by saying that while being welcoming to outsiders has a "winsome effect," a detailed study of I Corinthians 8-10 shows that Paul expected the Corinthians to be committed to preaching the gospel "just as Paul was."⁵⁵

Dean Flemming also sees that Paul's "contextualizing principle" applied to his ministry toward believers as well, who needed to be strengthened in their faith and communities who need to be reconciled.⁵⁶ This is related to a discussion as to what interpretation should be assigned to the word "weak" in I Corinthians 9:22. Some see it as non-Christians, others as weak Christians who were too dependent on the Law, and some as people on the path to being saved. However, the point needs to be made that the distinction becomes irrelevant as Paul's ultimate goal is for them to be saved. It doesn't matter who they are or where they are, he will go meet them there, so that it could happen.

After they are saved, Paul still wants to meet them where they are to disciple them and help them in their process of sanctification, which cannot be excluded from the gospel. So even if it was working within the churches to advance the gospel, he would do whatever it took. He would be willing to identify himself even with those already in the Church.

His conviction that he needed to connect with all those groups on behalf of the gospel was so great that he wanted to make sure his audience knew that there was not any reward for himself for spreading the gospel by all possible means. In verse 23, he says the gospel is its own reward. He does all he does to share in the blessings of the gospel to be more exact. Some also interpret this part of the verse as if he meant that preaching it was its own reward⁵⁷ and that is why he would do it to the best of his ability. Regardless of which interpretation one chooses, this elevates the meaning of Paul's total surrender, because he expresses how he sees the cause as its own reward. When he is inviting others to follow suit, he is also inviting them to join in the reward he already knows he has.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 140.

⁵⁵ O'Brien, 105.

⁵⁶ Flemming, 197.

⁵⁷ Collins, 356.

⁵⁸ Hooker, 85-86.

A final noteworthy nuance of this last verse is that it can be translated as his being a partner with the gospel. Paul does not identify himself so that the gospel can move forward, as it is moving forward regardless.⁵⁹ Paul does “all this” or uses “all possible means” because God is already moving it forward. This is an important point as it shows that identification and contextualization are already taking place by the providence of God and Paul is just encouraging the Church to join in. The ultimate goal of saving souls is so good, so valid, and such a reward in itself, that doing everything he could for it was the obvious thing to do.

Paul and Contemporary Contextualization

Considering that Paul believed so much in this cause and that he wrote to the church in Corinth to convince them to follow his example in doing everything possible to advance the gospel, it follows that he believed the whole Church should take the principles he was teaching into account. His writing about making himself as a slave was not for any other reason other than to be “paradigmatic for the Corinthians,” calling them to do the same and also share in his “ambitions” to save more people.⁶⁰ The challenge for his readers and the Church of later days is to figure out how the “actual outworking” of his call to contextualize will come true in their settings, but each one in their own way should use their gifts and have the same passion as he does.⁶¹

As far as the outworking of Paul’s call, Flemming poses an interesting question that should guide the Church when applying his principles to modern days: “What implications does Paul’s approach to a specific issue in Corinth carry for a contemporary encounter between Christian faith and culture?”⁶² When it comes to the contextualization principles that he exemplified in I Corinthians 9:19-23, one could say they are indeed universal and still relevant to the Church in the twenty-first century. The first step it to recognize that it was not about that one specific issue, but rather about a universal matter: The gospel.

The task of preaching the gospel is still the greatest commission of the Church today, as it was in Paul’s time, so finding effective ways to do it need to be at the forefront of the Church’s practice. Paul’s example in using his versatility to “cross the culture-gap” between church life with all its “cozy meetings and holy talk” and the “pagan culture” of each community today should challenge every church member to do the same.⁶³ The focus needs to be outward rather than inward. Paul did not envision mission workers extracting

⁵⁹ Bailey, 168.

⁶⁰ O’Brien, 137.

⁶¹ Ibid, 137.

⁶² Flemming, 199.

⁶³ Prior, 162.

themselves from their communities and isolating themselves in religion, but rather he expected them to “remain in, though not of, the real world for the sake of witness.”⁶⁴

The Church has faced many witnessing challenges during the past decades in so-called post-Christian societies when it comes to connecting with culture, especially the culture of those who are younger. One of its biggest tasks is figuring out how to identify and incarnate into “contemporary paganism of all kinds.”⁶⁵ That is, how can it still be relevant so that it can form active communities within a larger community anywhere on Earth? Again, the answer could come from Paul.

Christianity in Paul’s time was “vibrant and alive” in part because churches, while connected in “faith and truth... under Christ’s lordship” to other churches, were also allowed and encouraged to find their own “expression of Christian life.”⁶⁶ The churches Paul planted were all a result of the same message he preached, but the fact that he wrote many different letters addressing different issues with them shows they had developed different styles. They all “adhered to basic Christian teaching...which did not change from place to place,” but were different when it came to their “emphasis, styles of communications, worship patterns, and ways in which ethical issues were faced” according to the community in which they were.⁶⁷

Take the styles of worship meetings, for instance. Paul had clear instructions for his churches, spread out in many of his letters. This created a certain “uniformity” among them and prevented each church from irresponsibly pursuing every whim they wished.⁶⁸ For example, in I Corinthians 4:16-17, Paul asks the Corinthians to “imitate” him and even sends Timothy to remind them of what Paul “[teaches] everywhere in every church.”⁶⁹ In I Corinthians 14, he sets a few guidelines, such as that everything must be done for the edification of the body and “in a fitting and orderly way.”⁷⁰ Aside from these “central considerations,” each church was free to worship in a way that best suited its environment so that more people could relate and be reached.⁷¹ Paul’s concern was that the churches would appropriate forms to best convey the message, while guaranteeing freedom.⁷² This is how the Church should always be: United in Christ, but diverse in its

⁶⁴ Pocock, Van Rheenen and McConnell, 232.

⁶⁵ Prior, 162.

⁶⁶ Gilliland, 209.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁶⁹ I Corinthians 4:17 NIV, cf. Gilliland, 233.

⁷⁰ I Corinthians 14:5,40 NIV, cf. Gilliland, 233.

⁷¹ Gilliland, 233.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 233.

practices according to the way each of their communities will respond to the gospel.

More than ever, churches are becoming more diverse and the preaching of the gospel needs to reflect that. Also, it is safe to say that at some point in his or her life every Christian will have an encounter with someone who comes from a different background, or at least has had a different life experience. That is when becoming “all things to all people” needs to come into practice. Paul and his readers operated out of a “complex intercultural mosaic” which has a lot in common with the “many faceted settings in which the gospel must be contextualized today.”⁷³ His message on adaptability to the Corinthians is as relevant as ever, just as his overall greater message of salvation.

Having established that Paul’s call for contextualization is still relevant, how can the Church put it all into practice? What is the philosophy behind contextualization and what would it look like when applied to day to day situations? In order to validate Paul’s arguments, it is important to delve, at least briefly, into the theory behind contextualization, as well as its practical applications. No study would be complete, though, without evaluating some criticism and perceived dangers of contextualizing so that a balance approach can be used as a guide.

When studying the theory of anything, it is best to first start by trying to define the term. “Christian Contextualization” is defined as the “process whereby Christian adapt the forms, context and praxis of the Christian faith so as to communicate it to the minds and hearts of people with other cultural backgrounds” with the goal of making it understandable.⁷⁴ By proxy, Evangelistic Contextualization can be defined as the process of adaptation so that the gospel can be understood by different backgrounds. In Pauline terms, it would be the “cultural attempt to be ‘all things to all people’ so as to ‘save some’” as Grant R. Osborne aptly put it.⁷⁵

These definitions capture an important concept that needs to be understood in this field, the “tension” that exists between the realities of the universal truths of the Bible and the diverse and ever-changing cultures in the world.⁷⁶ Osborne sees it as a tension between “form and content...the indispensable core of contextualization,” where the content is “unchanging” but the form is “ever changing.”⁷⁷ The challenge is to develop strategies so that these two realities can come together.

In his book *Constructing Local Theologies*, Robert J. Schreiter presents two significant approaches to Contextualization that missionaries have used to when trying to bring the realities of the gospel and of their target

⁷³ Flemming, 125.

⁷⁴ Pocock, Van Rheenen and McConnell, 323.

⁷⁵ Osborne, 320-321.

⁷⁶ Pocock, Van Rheenen and McConnell, 321.

⁷⁷ Osborne, 319.

audiences together. These two “models” help systematize two ways that can be used by the Church as a response to Paul’s call in I Corinthians 9:19-23. The models are: “The Kernel and Husk Model” and “The Flowering Model.”

The former sees two aspects of contextualization. The “kernel” is the “basic Christian revelation.”⁷⁸ The “husk” is the “previous cultural settings in which it has been incarnated.”⁷⁹ Accordingly, one cannot mix up what is essential to the gospel and what was exclusively directed to the context in which it was first preached. In analyzing this model, Max L. Stackhouse sees it as “[presuming] that Christianity has a clear and distinct essence that can be rather clearly discerned and differentiated from that which is ‘accidental’ to social, cultural, and historical conditions.”⁸⁰

The second model, “Flowering,” does not see such a distinction. Instead, it sees the gospel preacher as “planting the seed of faith and allowing it to interact with the native soil, leading to a new flowering of Christianity, faithful both to the local culture and to the apostolic faith.”⁸¹ There is more of a fusion between the essentials of the gospel and the local culture. While it will have the same essence, the Christian faith in different locations will be distinct, reflecting the environment in which it was planted. “New forms of faith will spring into being” as a result of the interaction with each soil, according to Stackhouse’s interpretation.⁸²

It’s important to note that both models fit into Paul’s arguments and call for contextualization. The first relates to Paul’s care to not modify the essence of the message, the kernel, while exercising his freedom in Christ to adapt the husk to each group with whom he interacted. Secondly, his ultimate adaptability expressed by the expression “all possible means” relates to the concept of letting the gospel flower in different ways in different contexts so that more people can be saved, which was his ultimate goal.

However, how can one be sure the different ways in which the gospel is contextualized still fall under Paul’s parameters so that the gospel is not modified like he mentioned in Galatians 1:6-9? Scholars have long debated how far contextualization can go before it becomes heretical. While there are many different aspects one must consider when contextualizing, the book *Changing Face of World Missions: Engaging Contemporary Issues and Trends*, by Michael Pocock, Gailyn Van Rheenen, and Douglas McConnell, brings a list of seven characteristics of “good contextualization” that can serve

⁷⁸ Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 7.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸⁰ Max L. Stackhouse, *Apologia: Contextualization, Globalization, and Mission in Theological Education* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 107.

⁸¹ Schreiter, 11.

⁸² Stackhouse, 107.

as a guide in evaluating contemporary attempts.⁸³ A brief summary each one follows.

First and foremost, “Good contextualization is grounded in Scripture,” where the Bible is the ultimate authority and “efforts are judged based on fidelity to [its] teachings.”⁸⁴ The culture can never supersede what the Bible says when it comes to the gospel. Again, according to Paul, the message cannot be modified in any way. Secondly, “Good contextualization is interdisciplinary in its approach to culture,” relying on contributions from history, theology, anthropology, sociology, communication, politics, etc., so that a comprehensive view of a local setting.⁸⁵ It can only be effective if a proper bridge is built between the preacher and the culture, and that bridge can only be properly built if there is ample knowledge of the target culture. Paul was someone who immersed himself in his target cultures, relying on whatever he could to “become all things to all people.”

The third characteristic is that “Good contextualization is dynamic:” It must constantly keep up with the demands of new target audiences, the process is “never-ending.”⁸⁶ What works in one place or in one situation might not work tomorrow in that same place. What worked at the Areopagus for Paul might not have worked if he had come back a year later, for example. The delivery of the message must constantly adapt. The fourth aspect of good contextualization is that it “is concerned with the whole of the Christian faith,” not just theological “formulation or expression.”⁸⁷ It is not just about the theology of the gospel, for example, but how Christian faith happens after as well. Paul would not leave the churches he planted to wonder what to do next, but rather he would later follow up the preaching with doctrine that applied to many different areas.

Listed as the fifth characteristic is the fact that “Good contextualization is aware of the impact of human sinfulness in the process,” not overlooking people’s shortcomings or potential personal agendas.⁸⁸ The motives of the gospel preacher should always be kept in check. Contextualization must be driven by the Spirit, not human aspirations. This fits well with Paul’s next section of verses after he calls for contextualization, I Corinthians 9:24-27, where he talks about keeping himself disciplined so that he does not end up preaching to others and be “disqualified for the prize.”⁸⁹ The sixth one states that “Good contextualization is both propositional and existential,” not only limited to “timeless truths” but expanded to church life

⁸³ Pocock, Van Rheenen and McConnell, 323-325.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 324.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 324.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 324.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 324-325.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 325.

⁸⁹ I Corinthians 9:27 NIV.

and practice. Contextualization is about practicality and how the faith is lived on a day to day basis. It was not about discussing the matters of the Law for Paul, but rather how they would fit into the Corinthian context, for example.

Last but not least, “Good contextualization is a two-way process”, where the target audience also contributes to the process and not just the preacher, with each side learning from each other.⁹⁰ It is about listening, rather than pre-packaging a message according to the preacher’s perceptions of that culture. Paul knew about the Jews, the Greeks and many others, and would take their culture into consideration when preaching, listening to their longings and concerns, so that his message could be effective. While not exhaustive, these seven characteristics are a good start in making sure the contextualization work is effective, while still adhering to sound doctrine.

If these guidelines are not observed in some way, there is a risk of over-contextualizing. Critics of contextualization warn against the dangers that this practice can entail if done carelessly. First, there could be “Cultural Imperialism,” where the preacher of the gospel imposes their agendas, removing the process of decision-making from the local cultural leaders or local church leaders.⁹¹ As seen above, Paul had a unified teaching for all the churches when it came to the essence of the gospel, but allowed for autonomy in each church he planted. There is also the danger of “Contextual Realities [Overwhelming] Biblical Priorities,” where other needs of people are prioritized over the “deeper” spiritual need over a relationship with Jesus.⁹² This is common in areas stricken by poverty, where the preacher of the gospel could focus too much on humanitarian aid while sacrificing the preaching of the gospel. Again, a safe position is to follow Paul and keep in mind his ultimate goal, which was to save people in the spiritual sense of the word. A more “holistic approach”⁹³ can be used in these situations, but the priority must be the gospel.

Finally, the third and maybe worst potential danger of over-contextualization is syncretism.⁹⁴ In summary, this is when “the supracultural nature of biblical truth is replaced by the primacy of current cultural context.”⁹⁵ This phenomenon happens when the Bible is neglected or adapted to fit the culture, rather than remain as the ultimate authority. It can develop when the Christian community wants to make the message more “attractive, alluring, and appealing” to non-Christians and oversteps on some accommodations.⁹⁶ Osborne cites the fact of some Liberation Theologians redefining “sin” as social injustice and “salvation” as the liberation of the poor

⁹⁰ Pocock, Van Rheezen and McConnell, 325.

⁹¹ Ibid, 330.

⁹² Ibid, 330.

⁹³ Ibid, 330.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 331.

⁹⁵ Osborne, 319.

⁹⁶ Pocock, Van Rheezen and McConnell, 102.

as an example of an approach to contextualization that can violate truth.⁹⁷ The clearest and simplest rebuttal to syncretism is also to apply the words of Paul in Galatians 1:6-9, especially when he warns against any perversion of the gospel.

While these potential dangers of perversion exist, though, they should never prevent the Church from making attempts to reach more people by meeting them where they are. If sound doctrine is followed and again, the message is not compromised, contextualization can be achieved effectively. The New Testament shows examples of many churches who flourished by developing strategies to preach the gospel in their own unique settings while still being “uncompromising” against groups who promoted heresy, such as the many Gnostic movements in Colossae and Ephesus.⁹⁸

In summary, Paul’s call for contextualization is still relevant to contemporary society and can be safely answered if practiced with creativity and caution. Safely because if the true gospel is preached, it will always exclude any compromise with any form of idolatry.⁹⁹ Also, if Paul’s example is followed, there will be “responsible freedom” while flexibility is extended; and the cross of Christ will always be the “controlling pattern that guides Christian behavior.”¹⁰⁰ There is no better safeguard than these principles.

However, as Flemming puts it, the focus should not be about how far the Church can go in contextualizing, as it is inevitable, but rather, “how can [the Church] live out the Cross in life as the character of the Church and as a witness to the world?”¹⁰¹ The message Paul preached did have its own intrinsic meaning and value, but it would not have been as significant, impacting and world-changing if it had not been clearly understood by the audiences to whom he preached. The need for contextualization is unavoidable today as it was in his time, and while caution is needed, the baby cannot be thrown out with the bath water.

A Practical Application

The greatest challenge for the Church is to figure out ways in which to witness while practically applying sound contextualization. Christians need to find a point of connection with the person with whom they are sharing the gospel and adapt the delivery of the message in a way that will best reach the heart of the receiver. The greatest thing going for the Church is the genius of Christ’s message being “translatable into every single culture in the world.”¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Osborne, 319.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 321.

⁹⁹ Flemming, 199.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 200.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 200.

¹⁰² Pocock, Van Rhee and McConnell, 321.

And again, if the message remains the same, Paul reminds us we are free to change the delivery and not lose its universality.

Practically, though, how can the local church decide the boundaries between what is form and what is content, and how dynamic can this process be?¹⁰³ This is an important debate, but it must be tackled, as effective gospel preaching is as needed as ever. This is more than being just pragmatic, contextualization needs to be an integral part of being part of a missional Church.¹⁰⁴

Being that the preaching of the gospel is also an activity done through the local church in community, its contextualization needs to also be considered an ecclesial activity.¹⁰⁵ These verses in chapter nine of I Corinthians must serve as a mandate for the local church to adapt its methods of delivery of the gospel, while keeping the message the same. Each community deserves to be approached differently so that the effectiveness of the reach of the gospel can be increased. According to Prior, Paul was “tacitly acknowledging” that even the “most enlightened, far-reaching, imaginative” methods would not “save anyone” if they were also mass-produced.¹⁰⁶ “One size fits all” when it comes to the preaching of the gospel did not work in Paul’s time and would not work in the twenty-first century either.

For example, if the target audience of a church skews more towards a younger public, church as usual with a monotone hour-long sermon does not cut it anymore. Instead of criticizing the shorter attention span of the newer generation, why won’t the church accept it as a reality and incorporate relevant artistic expressions into the service program, where the same message can be conveyed? This is how the Church must contextualize to a post-modern society, by not only making the public understand the gospel narrative, but actually feel it, in the same way an artist provokes feelings through their audiences.¹⁰⁷

However, what is often observed is that many times churches pass judgments on different styles of music, criticizing society for adhering to that certain style. Instead, churches should be embracing all these styles of music, and using them to share the universal message of the gospel. This would be an example of becoming “all things to all people.” Instead, division is created, just like when local churches judge people by their style of clothing, as if they could determine what is socially acceptable or not. Why not recognize that people dress differently in their communities and recruit Christians who identify with that particular group and invest in ways to reach out to them?

¹⁰³ Osborne, 319.

¹⁰⁴ Flemming, 319.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 318.

¹⁰⁶ Prior, 159.

¹⁰⁷ Pocock, Van Rheezen and McConnell, 103-104.

So, each Christian, and consequently each church, needs to make it as easy as possible for someone in their community to understand the true message of the gospel. This is what Paul meant when he used the expression “by all possible means.” Churches need to pay less attention to tradition and petty divisive issues that are non-essential to the message of salvation and remove these obstacles from their audience so that they can “win as many as possible” and fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus to the fullest. Flemming summarizes this call Paul is issuing to the Church best when he says, “If we are to fulfill our calling as a missional church in the twenty-first century, we must reenact the task of singing the gospel in new key that we see modeled in the writings and stories of the New Testament.”¹⁰⁸

Therefore, based on his life as well as on I Corinthians 9:19-23, Paul indeed considered contextualization to be an essential tool in the preaching of the gospel, according to the freedom of every Christian to adapt his behavior and to effectively win more people for Christ. With expressions such as “I have made myself a slave to everyone” and “I have become all things to all people,” Paul shows that adaptability in the way the message of the gospel is delivered is not only permissible by the work of Christ on the Cross, but necessary to reach the hearts of diverse groups. The driving force in choosing the approach to preach the gospel to someone or to a group needs to be the circumstances and identity of the hearer of the message. Paul’s call is timeless and still relevant in the contemporary Church, as long as limits are observed, and wisdom applied to contextualization techniques. The message must remain unique and rigid, but the method of delivery can and should be varied and flexible.

This flexibility in Paul’s message was seen throughout his ministry and exemplifies his maxim “by all possible means” as more than words, but rather a lifestyle of commitment to make the gospel as easily accessible as possible. No sacrifice should be too small, especially when it comes to building bridges with the unreached. Only then, would he be able to “win as many as possible” as he did. This was his ultimate intent and mission, to give everyone to whom he ministered the best possible chance to join him in living in the rewards of the gospel. This should also be the ultimate intent and mission of the Church, and evangelistic contextualization must be incorporated into its tools to achieve this worthy goal of eternal consequences.

¹⁰⁸ Flemming, 321.

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An Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:11-15

Lee Ann Mancini

The evangelical church's perspective regarding women teaching and preaching scripture to men has varying viewpoints. A number of churches adhere to the idea that women may teach men as long as the pastor and/or elder authorizes the activity, whereas some do not allow women to teach men at all and others do allow women to teach men without reservation. Some claim that the issue at stake is whether women may have authority over men. They ascertain that since Adam was created before Eve, men hold an authoritative position over women. The word authority will be examined, as it is important to have an exegetical definition to understand the application of the word, which is in dispute. It seems that there are many opinions as to why women cannot teach men or preach to men. It should be understood that teaching and preaching go hand-in-hand, for a preacher teaches and a teacher preaches with perhaps only a slim degree of difference. Both, however, are held to a high standard in the eyes of God (James 3:1). The words teach and or preach will hold the same meaning for the purpose of this paper.

There are two main views regarding women teaching/preaching and they are the complementarian and egalitarian views. Both views will be analyzed as well as the issue regarding the equality of women and men ontologically and functionally. In addition, we will comprehend that many hold onto their presuppositions passed on by a generational understanding regarding the restrictions being placed on women in ministry.

Some evangelical churches embrace the simple and straightforward language of Paul restricting women to teach men and do not consider it a possibility that it was a directive based upon the culturally problematic situation in the first century church. They abide with the belief that women teaching men is prohibited, but other issues addressed in Paul's letter regarding attire, hair style, and elders each having one wife are dismissed as cultural and is not as universal directives. The dichotomy regards whether Paul was communicating a specific cultural exhortation or a universal mandate. Some evangelical churches assert that it is a command for all times because Adam was formed first in addition to the fact that Eve was the one deceived.

Other Evangelical churches believe that women can teach men but they cannot become elders or pastors, for elders and pastors institute authority that can only be held by men. Accordingly, some espouse this is due to the fact that Paul states an elder has to be the husband of one wife according to Titus 1:6, therefore, being an elder is a position retained by men. They also indicate that women cannot teach men because to teach men means to teach continuously, therefore occupying a position of leadership due to the continuous spiritual authority held over men by the continuous teaching.

The evangelical church needs to reevaluate its scriptural perspective regarding women teaching and preaching. A proper exposition of 1 Timothy 2:11-15, in view of the first century church customs, yields the correct understanding of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 as a cultural mandate. God does not place gender restrictions on teaching His Word. This is an important issue because women who are qualified to teach men are being treated unfairly by not being allowed to teach. Moreover, the church suffers due to the restriction placed upon the gospel going fourth, solely based upon gender. The church is to be the leading example of how people are to be treated with equality and with no restriction based upon gender regarding ministry duties. It must be noted that women are now receiving a higher education in seminaries and universities. We need to abandon the legalistic, cultural mandates of the first century. We can remedy this dilemma by educating women and men in the appropriate hermeneutic of biblical verses used to restrict roles within the church. Optimistically, as more pastors and elders are open to discussions, based upon proper hermeneutics, the evangelical church will comprehend that the anointing of the Holy Spirit is given for the body of Christ without restraints predicated by gender. Beyond a shadow of doubt, they should not limit what God has not limited.

Those evangelical churches that place restraints on women in ministry need to join in what many other denominations have found the freedom for God's people, anointed by the Holy Spirit, chosen to proclaim His word without gender preclusion. It is the evangelical's presupposition and reluctance to revisit scripture, with an open awareness of what God is doing for women for ministry, that has deprived women the full use of their God-given gift. A lexical study of the word *authority* will yield the correct understanding that it is a disproportionate, insolent, authority that Paul was addressing as a cultural problem in his day, consistent with and in addition to women and men being disruptive during church services.

A Survey of American Churches

There are various understandings regarding 1 Timothy 2:11-15 among evangelical congregations and their pastors. After sending out many inquiry letters to large congregational churches, I will share twelve replies.

Pastor Dan Hickling of Calvary Chapel Fort Lauderdale, a non-denominational evangelical church, stated that they interpret this verse in a very straightforward manner, "It basically states that a woman is not to teach or exercise authority over a man." In addition they claim, "Our view on 1 Timothy 2:12 is that a woman is not to occupy a position of leadership in the church that would require her to teach men on a continual basis or exercise continuous spiritual authority over men."

Pastor Robert Morris, senior pastor of Gateway Church, Southlake, Texas, a non-denominational evangelical church, stated that they, "believe women can serve in any area of ministry, except eldership, because an elder

has to be the husband of one wife according to scripture. We believe women can teach, preach, and share the Word.”

Pastor Drew Schmitz, pastor of Harvest Bible Chapel, Elgin, Illinois, a non-denominational Christian church, stated that 1 Timothy 2:12 is a command and, “God, through the apostle, Paul, restricts women from serving in roles of teaching and/or have spiritual authority over men. This precludes women from serving as pastors over men, which definitely includes preaching to, teaching, and having spiritual authority.” In addition he also stated, “This does not make women less important, by any means, but rather gives them a ministry focus more in agreement with God’s plan and His gifting of them.”

Beth Moore, well known author, speaker and founder of Living Proof Ministries, stated that,

“As you may know, the ministry to which God has called me is geared to women...Men continued to come and sit in the back. We never sought them but did not know how to deal with them. Would Christ have thrown them out? I just didn’t know. I handed the problem over to my pastor and under his authority; he said to allow anyone to come who chooses. I have wrestled with this and the Lord finally said to me, “I tell you what, Beth, you worry about what I tell you to say, and I’ll worry about who listens.” I have since then given up this class.”

Southeast Christian, a non-denominational church, sent a church position paper stating that, “The elders of Southeast Christian church have determined that the role of elder, preacher, and other roles that could be construed as holding spiritual authority over both men and women, should be filled by qualified spiritual men and are not open to women.” However, they hold on to the position that 1 Corinthians 11, regarding women prophesying with heads uncovered, is a cultural mandate and, “A good dictum to follow is, ‘a permanent principle if possible, a temporary cultural application if obvious.’” In addition they added, “Imagine the confusion that could arise if a husband is called by Scripture to be the spiritual leader in his home (Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18), but his wife is also his pastor. The lines of authority would be muddled, and disorder could result.”

Likewise, the McLean Bible Church, McLean, Virginia sent their “Policy on the Role of Women at McLean Bible Church” which pronounced that the roles of men and women are not culturally conditioned and that the roles go back to the “very creation of mankind before human culture even existed.” As Adam was created first, man is to have authority over woman, therefore they (women) cannot have authority over men. They also claim that their “line of demarcation between men and boys (for McLean Bible Church purposes) is considered below 6th grade.”

Care Pastor Jake Beaty, of New Spring Church, Anderson, South Carolina, holds the position that, “We do allow women on staff to lead

trainings when men are present,” and “We also have women that are Home Group leaders here, but the majority of them are teaching women’s home groups...[However,] all of our current discipleship classes are led by male pastors here on staff...The main point that Paul is trying to get across is that God has designed for the church to be led by godly, male elders.”

Other churches allow women to teach, preach, and hold any office of ministry, without restriction based upon gender. Assistant Pastor Wallace Henley from Second Baptist Church in Houston, Texas replied, “The biblical positions against women teaching men is contextual, and not to be applied in a universal sense.” They reference 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, “The women are to keep silent in churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church,” stating, “Our policy reflects the understanding that this does not apply to women teaching, but of the disorder and chaos that prevailed at Corinth.” In addition they state, “Paul is speaking against a practice of women dominating the teaching ministry of the church, which is consistent with his concerns about authority. The word for “authority” in the Greek text is not the normal *exousia*, which has a positive sense, but *authenteo*, which has the negative connotation of “domineering.” Therefore, they state they do not ordain women into an office in the church or support the idea of women being pastor of churches.

Resource Director Jack Hoey, from Seacoast Church, Columbia, South Carolina, a non-denominational church, replied that they believe 1 Timothy 2:12 is a “cultural mandate and not a general command for the church in all places and times.” And, they “hold to an Egalitarian view of church leadership,” which allows equality for men and women in all areas of ministry.

Joyce Meyer is a well-known author and speaker in the United States and abroad. She holds a doctorate from Life Christian University in Tampa, Florida, and many honoree degrees. Joyce Meyer Ministries is a non-denominational ministry and her reply stated, “We are not to take the Bible out of context (see 2 Peter 1:20-21),” therefore, “The word ‘law’ in this verse [1 Corinthians 14:34], ‘The women should keep quiet in the churches, for they are not authorized to speak, but should take a secondary and subordinate place, just as the Law also says,’ comes from the Greek word meaning ‘nomos.’ One of the meanings can be a ‘custom’ and if taken in context, the whole section is talking about order in services. Paul was not talking about preaching. He was talking about people creating an unnecessary distraction.”

Dr. Ken Jobst, Campus Pastor, St. Stephen Church, Louisville, Kentucky, a non-denominational church exclaimed, “If women are to be mute in the church, what do we do with Peter’s quote of Joel in Acts 2 that states your sons and daughters shall prophesy.” They believe the restrictions were due to many worshipping at the Temple of Diana (Artemis), a false female god. Therefore, the women were being disruptive during church service with

their questions and their false doctrines, due to their erroneous views of God based upon the Greek culture that worshipped many gods.

Pastor Tom Mullins, Christ Fellowship, Boynton Beach, Florida, a non-denominational Church, holds the position that there are no restrictions for women in ministry. He stated, "...this is vitally important - we need to keep steadily in mind that what determines or should determine the leadership structures in the church is not gender but rather gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit." In addition he explains, "One of the telltale signs of Paul's views on such matters can be seen in what he says about baptism – it is not a gender specific sign that we have for the new covenant unlike the one for the old covenant, and Paul adds that in Christ there is no 'male and female' just as there is no Jew or Gentile, slave or free...This should not be difficult to comprehend."

Lastly, the Assemblies of God USA, which is a Protestant organization and Pentecostal movement with churches in the United States and other countries, issued a statement written by Zenas J. Bicket, Ph.D., which expressed that women could serve as pastors and, "The Scriptures plainly teach that divinely called and qualified women may also serve the church in the ministry of the Word...and are identified by a divine anointing...We conclude that we cannot find convincing evidence that the ministry of women is restricted according to some sacred or immutable principle."

As noted above, there are varying views among the churches. Now we will address some views proposed by educational institutions and their professors.

Specific interviews with College Professors

There is also a difference of opinion regarding 1 Timothy 2:11-15 within various educational institutions and professors. I will share seven replies.

Craig S. Keener, Professor of New Testament at Eastern Seminary, embraces the Egalitarian view, "I insisted that whatever principles Paul applied to that situation were transcultural..." I will expound on his thoughts later in this paper.

Paul Copan, Professor of Philosophy at Palm Beach Atlantic University, author and speaker expounded, "The phrasing 'I do not permit' is rarely a universally binding prohibition." He believes that women are not restricted in ministry. It was a cultural mandate and one should perceive the unique situation in the parallels of 1 Timothy 2:8-15 and 1 Timothy 5:3-16, both indicating a cultural application. He expresses that the bible is a progressive revelation, which has a redemptive spirit that "moves the contemporary appropriation of the text beyond its original-application."

Professor Dr. Barbara Cavaness, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, simply states regarding the Samaritan woman, "she became the first

female evangelist” and “As we look on the fields ripe for harvest may we not be guilty of sending away any of the reapers God calls.”

Professor and Senior Advisor to the President Dr. Warren Gage, of Knox Theological Seminary stated that the faculty and board at Knox Theological Seminary decided to reverse their original position and they now allow women access to all programs based upon the understanding that they are not ordaining women but educating women. Dr. Gage believes that Paul seems to preclude ordination of women, however, he believes Luke and John teach full egalitarianism.

Regent University’s School of Divinity, where I received my BA in Religious Studies, issued a “Women in Ministry Statement” that asserts, “Women and men were created in the image of God, equal partners without competition or domination by one gender...[and Regent University] will honor our commitment to women’s full participation in ministry leadership and to promoting this vision in our classrooms, teaching, and scholarship.”

Trinity School of Divinity does not have an official women in ministry statement. I was directed to the TEDS catalogue, which clearly indicated that Trinity University does not restrict women in their endeavor to become prepared in all ministries. Evidence of this is the fact that some of the professors are women who teach men.¹

Lastly, Associate Professor of Christian Studies New Testament and Greek, Dr. Renate Hood, University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, Texas stated that this is an environment where there are many “closet Believers” that believe that women should have equality in all areas of ministry. She asks, “How must one interpret/understand 1 Timothy 2:12 as part of the epistle as a whole, embedded in the ancient Mediterranean culture?” Her understanding is, “Personally, I denounce all of the methods that read scripture out of context. It is not honoring the Word of God...Let’s get busy about sharing the gospel and stop oppressing women; Jesus certainly commissioned women to teach and preach.” I agree with Dr. Renate Hood, let’s get busy sharing the gospel without restrictions! God anoints men and women equally by His grace, equipping all He has anointed without confinement or constraint based upon gender. This can be understood in the fact that the most magnificent portraits in the Gospel of John is of Mary Magdalene being given the dignity of being made the antitype of all the high priests of Israel. Dr. Warren Gage gives great detail that who but God could imagine such redemption! He has given me permission to share his outstanding views. A woman—indeed a woman once oppressed and defiled by seven demons—is made to see what all the priests of the line of Aaron, the most holy of Israel, had longed to see, but were only allowed to see through shadows and types for so many centuries.

It was the special privilege of Israel’s high priest on the Day of Atonement to enter the most holy place of the tabernacle. One time each year,

¹ Trinity International University, TEDS12-13 Catalog.pdf accessed 11/14.

the holiest man in Israel was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies. This was the sacred place where the Ark of the Covenant was kept behind the veil. The Ark represented the throne of God. The Holy Ark itself was a golden box, two and a half cubits long—about the length of the trunk of a man. Seated over the ark were the figures of two golden cherub angels. They sat facing each other, one at the head and the other at the foot, upon the cover of the ark. The cherubim stretched out their wings toward each other over the ark, with their heads bowed as if in wonder at the cover of the ark—the place where God had promised to meet His people in grace (Exod 25:17–22). The ark represented the throne of God, who dwelt between the two cherubim angels (Psa 80:1). Upon the lid of the ark, which was called the mercy seat, the high priest sprinkled the blood of the atonement, covering the sins of the people.

When the evangelist John depicts the morning of the resurrection, he describes Mary Magdalene weeping before the tomb of Jesus. Peter and John have come to the tomb already, and having seen that it is empty, they have returned home. But Mary’s love will not let Jesus go. So she stays behind, weeping because they have taken away her Lord. As she weeps, she stoops to look into the tomb, to the last place where her precious Jesus had rested in death. Mary sees the grave clothes of Jesus laying there before her, about the length of a man, all sprinkled in blood. Suddenly she sees “two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the foot, where the body of Jesus had been laid” (John 20:12). The angels ask her, “Woman, why are you weeping? You are seeking Jesus. He is not here. He is risen!” And stretching out their hands over the grave clothes, they say in wonderment, “Behold where He lay!” (cf. Matt 28:6).

Imagine the scene of this living Holy of Holies! The grave where Jesus had lain has become the Ark of the Covenant. Here is the heavenly mercy seat, with the angels at the head and the foot. The grave clothes of Jesus, sprinkled with blood, are the place of propitiation. In other words, Jesus has made the grave, which is the place of the corruption of uncleanness, of sin and death, into the throne of His glory, having triumphed over sin and the grave. Mary alone is chosen to behold the reality of what Aaron and the high priests of Israel were only permitted to see through shadow and type. Mary peers into the True Holy of Holies. She stands before the throne of God, her vision veiled only by the mist of her tears.

In this simple picture of Mary looking into the tomb, the evangelist John compares her privileges to those of the high priest of Israel, who alone was permitted access to the Ark of the Covenant, to the place where God had promised to meet man. Mary beholds with unveiled eyes the splendor of God’s redemption, for she has been chosen to represent the universality of the priesthood of all believers.²

² Warren Gage, *The Romance of Redemption*, (Ft. Lauderdale, FL: Saint Andrews House, LLC, 2016), 138-140.

A Treatment of First Timothy 2:11-15 and 2:8-11

1 Timothy 2:11-15 states,

“A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.”

The controversy surrounding this verse is multilayered and there are many exegetical questions that need to be answered such as “What is the correct application regarding the word *authority*,” and does it regard women as having authority over men or are women equal ontologically and functionally, so that the authority this verse is describing is an abuse of authority? Is this verse a cultural mandate or a universal command for all times? Since the woman was created after man, does that mean that she is inferior or subordinate to man? Lastly, what does a woman giving birth have to do with any of this? We will address these questions, however, not necessarily in the order in which they were enumerated here.

William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker posit, “Let not a bird try to dwell under water. Let not a fish try to live on land. Let not a woman yearn to exercise authority over a man by lecturing him in public worship... She must not assume the role of a master.”³ Because of this, women are to be silent and submissive to the master. As I understand it, there is only one master, who is God, not man! Apparently, Hendriksen and Kistemaker do not think it is important to address the culture in which these verses were given. This is a myopic view of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 offered to prove their view that it was a universal command and not a cultural ordinance.

It is important that we fully embrace and comprehend the cultural times of the first century church regarding the predicament and obstacles Paul was facing which gave rise to his admonishments and particular restrictions. Our first indication of a problem in the worship service is understood in Paul’s previous statement in 1 Timothy 2:8-11,

“Therefore, I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing. I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.”

³ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary, Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1984), 109.

On the surface, one can deduce that there was a problem in the worship service as Paul directs the men to lift their hands without being disruptive and argumentative. Apparently, men who were in disagreement, perhaps letting their anger percolate, led to outbursts during the church service. Dr. Linda Belleville, Professor at Bethel College, issues another reason for the heated arguments as she exclaims,

“The women at Ephesus (perhaps encouraged by false teachers) were trying to gain an advantage over the men in the congregation by teaching in a dictatorial fashion. The men in response became angry and disputed what the women were doing... It also fits the grammatical flow of verses 11-12: “Let a woman learn in a quite and submissive fashion. I do not, however, permit her to teach with the intent to dominate a man. She must be gentle in her demeanor.”⁴

Many theologians emphasize that one of the issues was the false teaching Paul is warning against that is causing a disruption in the church service. Dr. Philip B. Payne, past professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, espouses that, “First Timothy 1:3-11 identifies five aspects of the false teaching: myths and endless genealogies, controversies, causing people to leave the faith, meaningless talk, and inappropriate application of the law” and “Paul’s goal is to guide Timothy in ways to help him stop the false teaching. The false teaching is of such central concern to Paul that nearly every verse in this letter relates to it...”⁵ In addition, apparently the women were dressing immodestly and were an indecent distraction. Addressing this issue, Dr. Craig S. Keener, Professor of New Testament at Eastern Seminary, states, “In that society, these women’s adorned hair would distract men from the worship of God, perhaps in the way that bathing suits would distract many of us in church today.”⁶ One can only imagine what an enormous, scandalizing, distraction it would be if women wore bathing suits to church services. Paul’s message indicates that he was giving Timothy advice on how to deal with heretical teachings in the Ephesus church that were erroneous in theological content, alongside the fact that the congregation was improper in attire and conduct.

Paul states the women are not to teach or assume authority over a man and must be quiet in church service. However, he declares he is the one issuing this guideline, using *verbiage* to indicate Paul’s will as opposed to the

⁴ Linda Belleville, *Women in Ministry: An Egalitarian Perspective in Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry, and James R. Beck, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 89.

⁵ Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 296.

⁶ Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 46.

will of God, as Dr. Copen previously expressed. The women were speaking during the church service, speaking false teaching, asking questions and exercising excessive authority, causing disruptions and confusion. As a result, Paul issued an exhortation for them to remain silent. Addressing the deception of women, the late Dr. Stanley Grenz, Professor at Carey/Regent College states, “The Ephesian church was wracked by the influence of false teachers who espoused a proto-Gnostic form of Jewish Christianity. They probably proclaimed a dualism that led to either libertine or ascetic approaches to physical existence (1 Tim 4:1-8). These teachers propagated myths and genealogies (1Tim 6:3-5), as well as godless chatter (6:20-21).”⁷ It is important to recognize that this environment had “the largest temple in Asia Minor, which was dedicated to Artemis, the goddess of fertility...[and therefore it] endangered the purity of the church,”⁸ With this understanding, one can fully comprehend that the church at Ephesus was comprised of people who were being taught erroneous religious doctrine. Moreover, they claimed “...the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship” (Act 19:27), indicating the religious atmosphere, which led Paul to issue the directives as false doctrine was penetrating the church.

The last part of 1 Timothy 2:15 states that women will be saved though childbearing if they stay faithful in holiness and love. On the surface, it seems to say that the women who will be saved are those who give birth. Dr. Gilbert Bilezikian, Professor of Biblical Studies emeritus at Wheaton College, interprets the verse as follows:

“The second part of the verse moves from consideration of Eve’s destiny to a practical application for the Ephesian women. The singular ‘woman [she] will be saved’ becomes the abruptly plural ‘if they continue.’ A rehabilitation similar to Eve’s is also possible for the Ephesian women, provided they are properly disciplined by learning in quietness and submission – so they grow in faith, love, sanctification, and good judgment.”⁹

Rebecca Groothuis, co-general editor of *Discovering Biblical Equality, Good News For Women*, and lecturer at Denver and Fuller seminaries, perceives another meaning as,

“Another possibility is that verse 15 refers to the bearing of the Christ child. Although transgression entered the world through Eve’s disobedience, salvation has come through the obedience of

⁷ Stanley Grenz, *Women in the Church*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1995), 126.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 126.

⁹ Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 140.

Mary in giving birth to the savior... Perhaps Paul is offsetting the dire effects of Eve's disobedience by noting the redemptive effects of Mary's obedience, which save womanhood from the taint of the first woman's sin."¹⁰

In my research, most seem to believe the last part of the verse regards the salvation brought forth via the birth of Jesus Christ, who was born of a woman. As I have just touched upon 1 Timothy 2:11-15, we will continue to discuss this verse in the other sections to come. At this point, we will examine Galatians 3:28.

The verse states that, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Even though this verse does not seem to restrict women, some indicate that this verse cannot be used to promote gender equality in ministry, for it only references equality in salvation in Christ Jesus. Added to this theory, some state that the mentioning of the man being created before woman establishes a hierarchy of men above women. Dr. Grenz affirms that some theologians assert, "Whereas the others [Jew/Greek, Slave/Free] are human differentiations introduced after the Fall, 'male and female' belongs to the created order. Consequently their unity in Christ does not obliterate the functional distinctions which God himself placed in creation." This theory indicates that some believe women are inferior to men ontologically and functionally based upon of the order of creation. However, this verse is mostly understood to mean that the salvation brought forth by the risen Christ has set everyone free from the condemnation of sin as long as one has faith in Jesus Christ, and this freedom in Christ is also freedom from the legalist burden of man-made law. Dr. Payne adds that, "Paul's concluding argument against treating Gentiles as second-class citizens is Gal. 3:28-29...[moreover] the Abrahamic blessings cannot be fulfilled either in the church or to all nations if the blessings are restricted to individual salvation."¹¹ In effect, he is stating that this verse does not only regard individual salvation, but also "Paul's principle of freedom in Christ specifically rejects the bondage of circumcision and the ritual requirements of the law. This frees Gentiles and women to full standing and participation in the life of the church."¹² Therefore, Gal. 3:28 is a verse that gives freedom and equality in ministry to all people. In so much, "The verse carries a ring of universal application for all our relationships, not just an assurance that anyone can come to Christ. 'Neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female' – these are basic relationship principles to which faithful followers of Christ must give highest priority. The God of the Bible 'does not show favoritism' (Romans 2:11)."¹³

¹⁰ Rebecca Groothuis, *Good News for Women*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 226.

¹¹ Payne, pg. 98

¹² *Ibid.*, pg. 99

¹³ *The Role of Women in Ministry As Described in Holy Scripture*, Adopted by the General Presbytery in session August 9-11, 2010).

This freedom is also expressed in Gal. 5:1, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” Also, “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” This freedom allows those in Christ to serve each other in love, allowing the gifts of the Holy Spirit to benefit the body in Christ without gender restriction: “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (1 Cor. 3:17).

First Corinthians 14:34-35

This verse exhorts that “women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.” Again, we have Paul stating that women are to be quiet during church service and are to inquire about questions from their husbands at home, adding that it is “disgraceful” for a woman to be verbal in the church setting. This is an additional verse used by those who wish to promote the literal understanding of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 regarding requiring women to be quiet, submissive, and assume no authority over men, and maintaining that women may not teach or preach to men, nor hold a position of elder or pastor. In keeping with this Dr. Craig Keener expounds, “It appears that even a woman’s leaning over to whisper a question to her husband is considered out of order...It could also imply that Paul wants wives to learn only from their husbands at home...”¹⁴ A better understating, in my opinion, is held by Aida Spencer, Assistant Professor of New Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. She expresses that, when referring to “the ‘silence’ in 1 Corinthians 14:34, they did not mean that women could not participate in leadership at worship...The women were not silent, they apparently were monopolizing the entire service! As Paul asks, ‘has the word of God reached only you’ (14:36)?”¹⁵ In Paul’s sarcasm, we can comprehend his frustration regarding the situation as the women were exhibiting knowledge as if they were the only ones with knowledge.

The Complementarian View

The complementarian view was essentially birthed out of the traditionalist view, which held that women must submit to the decisions of the church, elders and pastors. Furthermore, “by the end of the 1980’s the idea of ‘biblical manhood and womanhood’ expressed in terms of gender

http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position_Papers/pp_downloads/PP_The_Role_of_Women_in_Ministry.pdf accessed 11/13.

¹⁴ Keener, *Paul Women and Wives*, pgs. 71-73.

¹⁵ Aida Spencer, *Beyond the Curse*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 104.

‘complementarity’ became the language of preference for a number of proponents of male leadership,” and female submission to male leadership is inherent because of the gender distinction.¹⁶

The complementarian view espouses that women may teach and or preach to men as long as there are men in a leadership position who have authorized the women in the activity. Also, men and women are created equal ontologically and were created to complement each other functionally. The major verses used by complementarians to promote their theories are: 1 Tim. 2:9-15, 1 Cor. 14:34. They ascertain that the foundational principles for understanding gender specific ministry roles are found in Genesis 1 and 2, where God created male and female with the female being created out of the male. Although they were created ontologically equal, because they were created in the image of God, some complementarians believe since Adam was given the authority to name the animals and since he named Eve, accordingly he was given authority over her. Consequently, they posit that the restrictions placed in Timothy and Corinthians are founded in the principles set forth in creation.¹⁷

Dr. Steven Roy, Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, espouses the egalitarian view that all are created equal and there is equality in ministry. He offers insight to the complementarian view as he teaches that this is also based upon the hierarchy of the Trinity,

“This pattern of ontological equality instituted in creation and re-instated after redemption is patterned after the Trinity. There is a hierarchy between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit although they are one. There is an economy of the Trinity. Ontologically equality and functional hierarchy.”¹⁸

Dr. Wayne Grudem, Professor of Bible and Theology at Phoenix Seminary, adheres to the position of complementarianism and announces,

“My own position is complementarian, and I have written extensively on that position elsewhere. In a brief summary, my conviction would be that none of the passages emphasized by egalitarians are really addressed to the question of whether women can have governing or teaching authority over the whole church: It is true that women can prophesy in the New Testament churches (Acts 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:5), but the gift of prophecy is always distinguished from teaching, and elders are

¹⁶ Ronald Pierce & Rebecca Groothuis, *Discovering Biblical Equality*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 16.

¹⁷ Susan Foh, *A Male Leadership View: The Head of the Woman is the Man*, in *Women in Ministry*, (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1989), 72-73.

¹⁸ Steven Roy, Class lecture, ST5103, *Theology III: Holy Spirit, Church, and Last Things*, July 2013.

not required to have the gift of prophecy but to be “apt teachers” (see 1 Tim. 3:2)...and private teaching like that of Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:26) are certainly appropriate for women today, but these activities differ significantly from the authority over the whole church that is prohibited to a woman in 1 Timothy 2:11-15).”¹⁹

Other noted prominent advocates for the complementarian view are, John Piper, Gerald Bray, John MacArthur, C.S. Lewis, Jack Cottrell, and Bruce Ware.²⁰

Dr. Gerald Bray, Professor at Knox Theological Seminary, states, “...the Bible, which maintains a distinction between the roles given to men and women in the life of the church that effectively excludes women from the eldership, through not from the diaconate [office of deacon]...the Scriptures are perfectly clear and straightforward on this matter. Paul did not mince his words when he wrote to Timothy.”²¹

Neither did the evangelical leaders who authored the Danvers Statement on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, published by The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, in Wheaton, IL. The statement maintains the complementarian perspective and promulgates that God restricts women from serving in church leadership roles: “Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart (Gen 2:18, 21-24; 1 Cor.11:7-9; 1 Tim 2:12-14).”²² Regarding the Danvers Statement, Dr. Grudem states, “...of many who do not agree with all of our convictions, nevertheless, moved by the preceding observations and by the hope that the noble Biblical vision of sexual complementarity may yet win the mind and heart of Christ’s church...” However, it seems Dr. Grudem’s wish is not being fulfilled as the Egalitarian view is becoming more prominent as the knowledge and wisdom of total equality in ministry, based upon the gifts of the Holy Spirit, is superior to a cultural, man-made exhortation directed to the first century church.

Egalitarian view

Contrary to the Complementarian view is the Egalitarian view, which states there is equality in ministry for men and women without gender prohibitions. Men and women are interchangeable when it comes to functional roles in ministry leadership and equality, as understood in Gal. 3:28. The term egalitarian has been used to promote gender biblical equality. This perspective

¹⁹ Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 207.

²⁰ *Complementarianism*, <http://www.theopedia.com/Complementarianism> accessed 11/14. <http://cbmw.org/council-members-2/> accessed 11/14.

²¹ Gerald Bray, *God is Love*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 707.

²² The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, *The Danvers Statement Core Beliefs*, <http://cbmw.org/core-beliefs/> accessed 11/14.

posits that women are allowed to teach men, in addition to holding positions as elder or pastor. Egalitarians assert that Christ overcame any hierarchy that the complementarians espouse, and based upon Gal. 3:28, by the grace of God, all are equal without any constraints, in salvation and in ministry.

In agreement is The Christians for Biblical Equality group, which put forth a statement, called, “Men, Women and Biblical Equality” that indicates, “the Bible teaches that at Pentecost the Holy Spirit came on men and women alike. Without distinction, the Holy Spirit indwells women and men, and sovereignly distributes gifts without preference as to gender (Acts 2:1-21; 1 Cor. 12:7, 11, 14:31).”²³ At the same time, they exclaim that biblical leadership is for service and not empowerment over others. In addition to this Dr. Keener posits, “The ‘all’ of 2:1 must include the Twelve (1:13, 26; cf. 21:14), the women, and Jesus’s brothers (1:14), and presumably some others as well...we would also have to suppose more than twelve disciples together in 2:1 who will be filled with the Sprit at 2:4; more than twelve languages are spoken (2:5-11).”²⁴ Some prominent egalitarians are Gilbert Bilezikian, Stanley Gundry, F.F. Bruce, Gordon Fee, Stanley Grenz, Philip Payne, and William Webb.²⁵

Dr. Payne illuminates that, “God uses women to communicate several key portions of inspired Scripture...The equality of the sexes is evident in Jesus’ vocabulary. He calls a crippled woman a ‘daughter of Abraham’ (Luke 13:16), a linguistic usage seventy years prior to the first recorded rabbinic equivalent (Str-B 2:200).”²⁶ Additionally, Dr. Grenz enumerates that:

“Egalitarians seek to replace the hierarchical ordering of male over female with a focus on reciprocal relations and mutuality in relationships. In contrast to the claim set forth by complementarians that God created the second gender specifically to complement the first, egalitarians argue that God intends that men and women mutually support each other in all dimensions of life, including within the church and the church’s ministry.”²⁷

Moreover, Dr. Craig Keener points out,

“There is in the entirety of the New Testament no evidence for the subordination of women that is practiced in many of our churches today, and certainly not sufficient evidence for men to rule out the validity of women’s call to minister the word of God...If we judge

²³ CBE International, *Statement on Men, Women, and Biblical Equality*, <http://www.cbeinternational.org/?q=content/men-women-and-biblical-equality> accessed 11/14.

²⁴ Craig S. Keener, *ACTS an Exegetical Commentary, Introduction and 1:1-2:47*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 795.

²⁵ Ibid. <http://www.cbeinternational.org/?q=content/endorsers> accessed 11/14.

²⁶ Payne, pgs. 56-57.

²⁷ Grenz, pg. 18.

other people's calls on the basis of a narrow and ill-considered interpretation of several texts, ignoring the clear examples of other texts, we may succeed only in silencing some of God's servants needed for our generation. And if we do that, we invite God to pass judgment on our own call as interpreters of God's word."²⁸

Added to this, Paul did not teach the complementarian view but exhibited his desire for the church to be more in line with the view posited by the egalitarian view: "We further discovered that Paul jealously protected this egalitarian principle against the encroachments of Judaizing legalists who were trying to impose synagogal practices on the church."²⁹

In my research, I believe that the Egalitarian viewpoint is biblically correct. In the next section I will define the correct use of the word authority as applied to the church service in the first century in which Paul was addressing a culture mandate regarding restrictions during church service; He was not placing any limitations in ministry based upon gender. The Bible must be understood in light of the character of God who has bestowed His gifts via His Holy Spirit upon men and women equally and mankind should not place any obstacle upon the proclamation of the Gospel going forth, given by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Application of the word: ἀθεντεῖν - authenteo

The Greek word ἀθεντεῖν, can be translated to mean "usurp authority over."³⁰ Most theologians agree it means to hold authority; in contention is the difference how the authority is yielded and how it is understood as either authority in succession or used in a domineering way. Some state the word ἀθεντεῖν means that women cannot hold any authority over men, and teaching men scripture is a form of authority. Dr. Payne consigns a comprehensive understanding of this word in his book, *Man and Woman, One in Christ*. He maintains that Paul indicates the priority of Adam to mean that a woman should respect man and not *assume* authority nor *dominate* over him, for in Genesis both are created equal in the image of God. In addition, when one dominates their will over and against another that is the opposite of having a quite and gentle spirit which the Lord requests His believers to exhibit (1 Peter 3:4).³¹ Dr. Payne states,

"The 'for' clause in 1 Tim 2:13 indirectly supports the 'dominate' interpretation since dominating teaching is the opposite of the respect a woman owes to man as prior in creation

²⁸ Keener, pg. 18.

²⁹ Bilezikian, pg. 133.

³⁰ Strong, J. (2001). *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software. #831.

³¹ Payne, pgs. 379 – 382.

and the one from who she was formed. The translation ‘to dominate’ also contrasts well with Paul’s final word in verse 15, his insistence that women exercise ‘self-control’...there is sufficient lexical and contextual evidence to give serious consideration to translating ἀθηντεῖν in 1 Tim 2:12, ‘to dominate.’³²

Some claim that since man was created first it is an indication of the superiority of man. If this is the correct, would not animals be more important than humans for they were created before man? Furthermore, were women created less than man in the image of God? At variance with this, Paul stresses interdependency of the man and woman for woman came from man, and man is born of woman. Paul was not stressing subordination.³³ At this point, I must interject that “Not all flesh is alike; but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish” (1 Cor. 15:39), indicating a reverse order of creation and debunking an authoritative order based upon creation.

Regarding the exhortation that women are to be silent, Dr. Keener remarks, “Whatever else Paul may mean...he cannot mean complete silence, because earlier in the same letter he allowed women to pray and prophesy (1 Corinthians 11:5). The problem seems not to be teaching, but rather that women are learning – too loudly.”³⁴

Teaching is always done with a goal to educate or to influence another and in a culture that is male-dominated; a woman teaching a man could have been construed as a woman having superiority over a man. We must choose the meaning of the word *authority* that makes sense of the entire passage and is the best fit in context. Dr. Kroeger states,

“It is possible that the mandate in 1 Tim 2:12 forbids the usurpation of power by women, especially as in the New Testament period... unquestionably ‘to dominate’ is a valid meaning of *authentein* and one which may or may not be appropriate in 1 Tim 2:12...the command would then stand in direct variance to other Pauline material...[regarding] widows who are to be enrolled as members of the clergy, and Titus 2:3 requires female leaders to be ‘worthy of the priesthood.’”³⁵

It seems to be a contradiction that women are not allowed to have authority by teaching men, as we understand that women were prophetesses and deacons, teaching and preaching the will of God. However, the problem is not women teaching men or holding leadership positions, but the problem is

³² Ibid., 383 - 384.

³³ Paul Copen’s response to inquiry mailed to him in May, 2012.

³⁴ Ibid., Copan Response, pg. 7.

³⁵ Kroeger, pg. 91.

women holding power *over* men that creates an abusive superiority of women, therefore, could be seen as women dominating men. This is a logical, contextual fit of what Paul was stating in 1 Timothy, which was for the congregation to worship in an atmosphere free of confusion and verbal argumentation, immodesty in attire, void of false doctrine, without questions being asked that disrupted church service and worship.

The word, “therefore” or “then” used in 1 Timothy 2:1, indicates that Paul’s directives or exhortations were based upon the preceding chapter which indicated the serious problems with false teachers and disruptive activity during church services.

Gordon Fee remarks, “It is hard to deny that this text prohibits women teaching men in the Ephesian church; but it is the unique text in the New Testament, and as we have seen its reason for being is not to correct the rest of the New Testament, but to correct a very ad hoc problem in Ephesus.”³⁶ Moreover, Dr. Keener states,

“Here Paul also forbade women to “teach” something he apparently allowed elsewhere (Romans 16; Philippians 4:2,3). Thus he presumably addressed the specific situation in this community...It is probably no coincidence that the one passage in the Bible prohibiting women teaching Scripture appears in the one set of letters where we explicitly know that false teachers were targeting and working through women.”³⁷

In my opinion, with common sense and proper exegesis of the word authority, one can understand that Paul was issuing a cultural exhortation for women not to exhibit excessive authority as if they were the only ones with knowledge as indicated in 1 Cor. 14:36. To think otherwise would be contradictory to what Paul teaches in other chapters regarding women teaching, preaching and prophesying.

Why would Paul want to prohibit women from speaking in church services, but at the same time claim that they may prophesy? Why were women told to have hair coverings? Is Paul stating cultural mandates in 1 Timothy 2 or must a deacon being a married male having one wife be understood as a universal command for all times? It seems simple enough to understand the reason for these requests as Paul states, “Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household which is the church of the living God...”(1 Tim 3:14-15). Paul says they *ought* to conduct themselves, meaning they should conduct themselves in a certain way as a necessity needed to rectify the current situation, which was confusion and disorder during the church service. The word ought means: it is necessary,

³⁶ Gordon Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1991), 63-64.

³⁷ Craig Keener, *Was Paul For or Against Women in Ministry?* *Enrichment Journal*, (Spring 2001): 82. http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200102/082_paul.cfm Accessed 11/14.

there is need of, it behooves, is right and proper, a necessity due to the nature of the case.³⁸ The ESV, NET, NIV, NASB95, NRSV, NKJV, all use the word “ought,” indicating as Paul stated, this is the way they ought to conduct themselves during the worship time. It was not a timeless doctrinal mandate being placed upon the church perpetually. It was an exhortation from Paul to Timothy, due to the fact they were living in a civilization that was heavily influenced by Greek gods and goddesses, which ushered in false doctrine, along with improper conduct and immodest apparel exhibited by the congregation. At the same time, there was a lack of educational opportunities for women in ministry, men were held in higher regard than women, and women were treated as property, “In first-century Hellenism, women were generally treated as their husband’s property...[and] many of the pagan roles for women, however were repugnant to Christian morality...because they did not treat women as full persons.”³⁹ This inequality is seen in John 8, regarding the woman caught in the act of adultery, for they delivered the woman to be stoned, but not the man. This was the cultural atmosphere in the first century, which caused Paul to issue an exhortation based upon a dysfunction and incompetent church service that was deficient in promoting and teaching the Word and will of God, due to disruptions, and heresy.

As formerly expressed, in the first century church women were less educated than men, and among the Jews and God-fearers, which was most of the Corinthian congregation (Acts 18:4-5), men had opportunities to be trained. It was the Jewish boys, not Jewish girls, who were taught to recite the Torah at an early age. It was also culturally shameful for a married woman to speak to a young man.⁴⁰ Additionally, “Because women’s public speech was sometimes shameful in Corinth, one cannot simply assume that Paul’s claim that it is ‘shameful’ for a woman to speak in the assembly (1 Cor.14:35) is meant to be transcultural, any more than his earlier injunction to cover their heads (related to shame in 1 Cor.11:5-6). Or his later one to greet with a holy kiss.”⁴¹ Accordingly in Paul’s day, a woman teaching in church was understood as a moral problem and it could have kept others from coming to Christ. Notwithstanding, “by earnestly trying to make the same application (the silence of woman) rather than follow the same principle (avoiding shame and dishonor to the husband), we can actually commit the very error Paul sought to avoid - that is, offending people’s moral sensibilities and hindering them from accepting the gospel.”⁴²

Dr. William Webb, professor of New Testament at Heritage Seminary, adheres to the theory that the Bible needs to be read with an

³⁸ Strong, J. (2001). *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

³⁹ Payne, pgs. 33-34.

⁴⁰ Craig Keener, in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, General Editors, Pierce & Groothus, pg. 169.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 167.

⁴² Walter Liefeld, *A Plural Ministry View: Your Sons and Your Daughters Shall Prophesy*, in *Women in Ministry*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1989), 143.

redemptive frame of mind, “The term ‘redemptive-movement hermeneutic’ captures the most crucial component of the application process as it relates to cultural analysis, namely, the need to engage the redemptive spirit of the text in a way that moves the contemporary appropriation of the text beyond its original-application framing.”⁴³ With caution, Dr. Webb states that one must be aware of when and where the words of scripture were spoken, as they were given to specific communities. It is a tragic misreading and application of the text if one isolates the text instead of letting the Holy Spirit lead one to have a complete comprehension of meaning and application, “As Christians we should be very careful not to become gridlocked with the isolated words of the text so that we miss reapplying the redemptive spirit that produced the text in the first place.”⁴⁴ God’s Word is a Word that redeems His people from the yoke of the law, setting the captives free through His Holy Spirit.

Both Complementarians and Egalitarians claim their views are supported biblically. I have always sought interpretation with prayer and guidance by the Holy Spirit, in consideration of the character of God. I agree with the statement made by Dr. Steve Brown, Professor of Practical Theology Emeritus, Reformed Theological Seminary, “There are things in the Bible that are meant to be ‘cultural’ and not to be applied universally...Theological and biblical liberals just throw out what they don’t like and say it’s not relevant. Those of us who are orthodox and are serious about the Bible can’t do that...So one asks in this passage, [1 Timothy 2:11-15], is it ever violated anywhere else in Scripture?”⁴⁵ The answer is no, for there is no where else in scripture where Paul tells women they cannot teach and men are to remain silent apart from 1 Timothy 2:11-12, and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. In contrast Colossians 3:16 states, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord (Eph. 5:19).” The other restrictions were not based upon gender such as, “But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God” (1 Cor.14:28). The reason these exhortations were issued by Paul was to accomplish the goal he announced in the previous verses in 1 Cor. 33 and 34 regarding disruptive elements during church service, “For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints” and “Let all things be done decently and in order.” It must also be noted that Paul was not addressing all women in general for not all women had husbands, as indicated by his exhortation that they ask their husbands questions at home (1 Cor. 7). Paul was clearly addressing an obstacle to having a peaceful, orderly service, and not an ordinance for women to be totally silent due to an inferior position to men. For, when Paul was on his way to Jerusalem he stopped at Caesarea where the four, unmarried, daughters of Philip were prophesying (Acts 21:9) and he did

⁴³ Dr. William Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 30.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 33 - 50.

⁴⁵ Steve Brown, Response letter, acquired May 2012.

not admonish them. We are wise to recall that prophecy brings “strengthening, encouragement, and comfort,” which Paul needed (1(Cor.14:3). Another time, Paul calls Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea and asks that she be received in a way worthy of the saints and to give her help (Rom 16:1-2). In the next verse, Romans 16:4, Paul, who was taught by Priscilla and Aquila, names Priscilla first, stating that all the churches are to be grateful for what they had done. Moreover, Paul cites Andronicus and Junias as being among the apostles who were in Christ before he was (Rom 16:7) and Dr. Payne claims that when Paul states they were outstanding among the apostles this implies that they “were revered missionaries recognized in the churches as having authority as ministers of the gospel.”⁴⁶ Women were an extremely important asset in all areas of ministry as indicated by Paul in his words and actions.

In the most convincing place, we need to look to the precedent set by God and Jesus regarding the roles of women in ministry. In the Old Testament, God chose Miriam, Moses’ sister who was the first prophetess mentioned in the Bible (Exodus 15:20). Likewise, Deborah (Judges 4:4) was chosen to be a prophetess, judge, counselor and warrior who led the people of Israel to safety. Another was Hilkiah who was sent to Hilkiah the prophetess (2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chronicles 34:22) when the King wanted to inquire what was written in the Book of the Law; he sought a true spokesperson for the Lord. Further, Isaiah’s wife was also called a prophetess (Isaiah 8:3), and must have had a ministry. God clearly chose women in the Old Testament to minister His will to men, when He could have simply chosen men. Consistent with this, God gave acknowledgement in the Bible to Ruth, Esther, and Tamar in securing the lineage of the Messiah and preserving the Israelites. God proclaims the birth of His Son Jesus as He was taken into the temple and God chose Anna to announced the birth of the savior of the world (Luke 2:21-38).

In the New Testament, Jesus exhibited no division based upon gender in ministry. Jesus imparted wisdom and understanding to all people and the essential messages of all times were given to women as they and all people were told to preach the Good News with no division (1 Cor. 1:10). The woman at the well was the first to hear from Christ that He was the Messiah, as described in John 4, and many of the town believed her testimony. To further the point, Mary Magdalene was the first to see the risen Lord and proclaim the Good News to the disciples, who likewise proclaimed the same Good News that the Lord defeated death (Mark 16:1-12, John 20: 16-17). Jesus said she shall be remembered “wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world” for what she has done (Mark 14: 9, Luke 7:36-50).

It must be understood that Jesus announced that He came to serve and that a servant is not greater than the master, for all are equal servants to each other and to God. With that being said, I would ask the Southeast Christian Church, which expressed the confusion of a wife being a pastor, to imagine the

⁴⁶ Payne, pg. 66.

blessings a husband would receive from a wife who is anointed by the Holy Spirit to be the pastor of his church, for, she would lovingly serve her husband and not place herself before him.

The Holy Spirit was given to all people so that the proclamation of salvation may be heard. Jesus did not place any restriction in ministry based upon gender! Surely, He would have expressed this restriction if needed in view of the importance of the gospel being disseminated. On the contrary, in the great commission (Matt 28), the will of God is for His message to go to all the nations, and He commands this without a gender-based prohibition.

All people were created ontologically and functionally equal as described in Gal. 3:28, "For you are all one in Christ Jesus." Not only are we one in Christ for salvation, but also in all the things Christ died for, such as setting the captives free from the yoke of the law and manmade rules that would hinder the proclamation of the gospel. It is apparent that this verse unites the division that the law established during that time, Jew/Gentile, slave/free, men/women and now there is no more division, which was defeated by Christ through grace. In concurrence with this, there is only one headship of the church and that is Christ (Eph. 1:22-23, 4:15-16, 5:23; Co. 1:18, 2:19), who is the Lord of all and came to serve in love. Therefore, men and women are to be in a relationship of mutual submission serving each other and others. If Christ came to serve and Christ reigns in us we, too, should seek to be effective servants, for there are many lost souls, and the harvest is great and in need of all the harvesters, without restriction. Christ died to set all of us free to proclaim the message that all are free and all are saved in Christ Jesus. Christ sent His Holy Spirit at Pentecost, starting the life of the universal church, giving the Spirit to all believers without differentiation of ministry based upon gender (Acts 2:16-18). Most importantly, no one has the right to exclude someone else from doing ministry. "On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable" (1 Cor.12: 20-22). No restrictions here!

Additionally, one must understand that God chose a helper for man and the word helper did not connote a form of complementarity hierarchy, for a helper was one who would rescue others in various situations and the word denotes not subordination but competency and strength (Ex: 18:4, Deut. 33:26, 29). God choosing Deborah to save Israel is a perfect example of this. According to Gen. 1:27, the woman was rescuing the man from being alone.⁴⁷

Those who continue to hold onto the view that 1 Timothy 2:11-15 restricts women, but yet do not hold onto the restrictions placed upon men by 1 Timothy 3:4-5, 12, are picking and choosing the verses they want to support their idea instead of adhering to the whole gospel message, which establishes what is theologically, hermeneutically, and exegetically the will of God. One cultural mandate given in the first century to address a specific dilemma does

⁴⁷ Gilbert Bilezikian, *A Challenge for Proponents of Female Subordination to Prove Their Case from the Bible, God's Word to Women*, <http://godswordtowomen.org/bilezikian.htm>, accessed 11/14.

not override the universal commands of equality announced and exhibited by God in His word and through His Son.

One must also perceive the failure of the excuse that since there were no women among the twelve disciples, therefore, indicating women cannot teach men, would have to insist that since it was only Jewish men chosen to be apostles, only Jewish men can teach. Likewise, I posit that the reason there were a lack of female theologians in the early church was due to the fact that women were not afforded an opportunity to be educated biblically. Wonderfully, that is no longer an issue in today's environment and in the next section we will address the shift in culture regarding women's theological education, and what can be done to rectify the continuance of restrictions allocated by gender.

A Call for Education

If the pastor of the church believes that 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is not a cultural mandate, but a universal command for all time, it may be hard to convince his congregation otherwise. However, we can start by first educating women on the correct exposition of 1 Timothy 2- 11-15 in small group gatherings such as home groups and church groups. We could ask that both views be addressed as to give the women a full understanding for effective apologetics. By doing so, hopefully they will understand that it was a cultural mandate. We need to teach that God is neither man nor woman but is spirit and all were created in His image having the right to learn, teach and preach without hindrance based upon gender. God wishes for all to have the knowledge of Him and His will (2 Tim. 2-4). 2 Timothy 3:14-17 without restrictions announces, that all scripture is from God, for teaching and equipping one for good work, for we are to "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the world of truth" (2 Tim 2:15). In Romans 12:2, we are told to test and discern the word of God, and to put away the hypocrisy (1 Peter 2:1), understanding that there is only one God and one mediator, Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:1-15). Interestingly, God's word said that many believed, including many Greek women (Acts 17:11-12), pointing out no restriction based upon gender to learn, nor should there be constraints placed upon teaching what is learned. On another note, we could inquire as to what are we to do with married couples that seek godly guidance. Shall a woman, because of her husband, only be allowed to have a male therapist conducting their joint therapy because he is educating them in the ways of the Lord? What about women who have continuously educated their sons biblically, are they no longer allowed continuing once their sons turns 18? Surely, Timothy's mother and grandmother did not stop teaching him once he became a man, for he learned from them the ways of the Lord (2 Timothy 1:5). In addition, what are we to do with people who are born hermaphrodites or who have had a sex change but are believers? These questions could ignite the inquisitive fire

within, allowing one to seek earnestly answers that will set one free from man-made constraints.

To corroborate, we can proclaim what some of the well-known evangelicals such as Billy Graham proclaim, as he is highly respected in the church and is a world-renowned Christian evangelist and ordained Southern Baptist minister. He states,

“The devaluation of women in so many ways throughout history is a result of sin in the world. Wherever the Gospel has gone the status of women has been elevated. Through Christ, women have experienced the opportunity to live creative, productive, and satisfying lives. This transformation has led to far-reaching contributions by women in areas such as social and political reform, medicine, literature, the arts and sciences, and Christian service and missions.”⁴⁸

We can present statics from the Barna Group, a leading research and resource company whose focus is on faith and culture. In their survey taken September 2009, they divulge that 78% of women disagree that the Bible prohibits women from leadership in the church, women in the pulpit are in general highly educated compared to the men and 77% (2009) of women pastors hold a seminary degree compared to 63% of men who claim the same.⁴⁹ Additionally, looking backward in time we know that 6 of the 12 elders at the mission of the Azusa Street were women.⁵⁰ We can posit that women were a part of the American history that promoted Christianity. More importantly, God is giving unmerited gifts of grace for the common good to serve the needs of the body of Christ, not setting constraints on the female gender.

In addition, we could reach out to women who are not in the church, but have suffered at the hands of male domination, and teach them the value of equality in Christ and the freedom Christ brings before they join the church, preparing them for a mindset of equality in all things through Christ. Perhaps we could put together a lesson plan and offer it to teachers in the classrooms, and do a unique Youtube video to reach the younger generation of women. Lastly but not exhaustively, just as the bracelets “What would Jesus Do” were made popular, we could fashion a bracelet to say “Equality for Women in Ministry.” Women today need to be aware that just because their pastors or elders indoctrinate a view that restricts women in ministry, God did not. For

⁴⁸ Billy Graham, Looking for Answers, *Is it true that women are not valued very highly in the Bible?* <http://www.billygraham.org/articlepage.asp?articleid=2038> accessed 11/14.

⁴⁹ The Barna Group, *Are Women Happy at Church?* <https://www.barna.org/culture-articles/579-christian-women-today-part-1-of-4-what-women-think-of-faith-leadership-and-their-role-in-the-church> accessed 10/14.

⁵⁰ George .O. Wood, Th.P., *Exploring Why We Think The Way We Do About Women in Ministry*, *Enrichment Journal*, http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200102/008_exploring.cfm accessed 10/14.

we are all the body of Christ and all parts are equally important without restriction!

In order to educate churches in the proper exegesis of 1 Timothy 2:11-15, we need to first meet with the pastor of the church. The discussion should not admonish his viewpoint as error, but perhaps ask him to allow the congregation to have a better understanding of all viewpoints in order to have a complete apologetic of the issues involved. Also, we could educate others as to how the church had once fallen into confusion allowing “works” as a way of salvation, which was promoted before the reformation came and corrected the error. Furthermore, as the early church took a few years to sort out the Gentile inclusion issue, it may take a few more years to work out women’s exclusion in ministry, but we must start now. I would ask the pastor if it would be possible to address the elders on the new findings of statistics and how other churches are being blessed by their understanding of 1 Timothy 2:11-15. I would suggest that he listen to his heart, for many do not feel 100% at peace placing ministry restrictions upon any one based upon gender, and perhaps his heart is knocking upon his intellect asking him to review this verse again. Just because it has always been done that way does not mean it should continue, for complementarianism came out of traditionalism. It is a wise man that corrects his understanding based upon proper exegesis, and does not hold onto doctrine for historical sake or prideful self-preservation by being unwilling to revise what had always been taught. A pastor is to continue to learn the things of God letting the Holy Spirit speak to him without him holding onto presuppositions. I would also ask the pastor to be guided by his heart allowing for a new view to be comprehended, and I would express to him what Dr. Wood, General superintendent for the General Council of the Assemblies of God stated, “For years Peter had the clear, straight-line teaching of Jesus on the subject of Kosher and non-Kosher foods; but it took Peter’s experience of the vision to actualize the teaching as applied to his own life. Without the experience at Simon the tanner’s, Peter would have probably lived the rest of his life and never eaten any non-Kosher item, even though the Lord had expressly given permission to do so.”⁵¹ I would espouse that hopefully the pastor would not fear change for there are many wonderful churches and educational institutions that allow women to teach men. I would suggest that he speak with other pastors and or elders who have changed their viewpoint and no longer allow any ministry restrictions established by gender discrimination. I would also quote, “One positive act, however so small, if multiplied many times over, carries with it tremendous restorative potential...One must listen for the redemptive spirit of the text within the author’s empowering act of framing its words, not from the deaf ears of those who simply fulfill its words out of respect for custom or out of pressure to conform.”⁵²

⁵¹ Ibid. George Wood.

⁵² Webb, pg. 42.

It is time to defend equality for women in ministry and Germaine Griffin Copeland, founder of Word Ministries, author and inspirational speaker demands,

“This is a call to women of God to arise clothed in the armor of God (Ephesians 6). You are women of valor with great inner strength and well able to influence communities and nations for righteousness and justice...There is revival coming to the church, preceding the great end-time harvest, and it is imperative that we walk in obedience to our God...As you read the Word of God, ask the Holy Spirit to come alongside your spirit and expose the religion, man-made doctrines and traditions that have hindered you from rising up as the woman of God...Let your desire to be to please the Father, and take your place as a valuable, vital part of the Body of Christ.”⁵³

Dr. Stephen G. Fortosis & Nancy K. McCall, Biola University, interviewed four unnamed women in evangelical Christian leadership and stated, “...in relation to limitations and discrimination, the general consensus of these women was an acknowledgment of the reality of hindrances but also a conviction that these factors do not pose an insurmountable barrier to a leadership ministry.”⁵⁴ Nothing is insurmountable when the Spirit of God leads you in truth and conviction. For God wishes all to come to the knowledge of Christ, and He will never limit the ability to go forth in spreading His gospel that sets His creation free. Lastly, Dr. Phillip Payne states,

“This exegesis argues that 1 Tim 2:12 does not support a universal prohibition of women teaching or having authority over men. Nothing in this passage states that women are inherently unsuited to teach or exercise authority over men in spiritual or any other matters. Nor does Paul universalize this particular prohibition for all churches and all times. This passage, therefore, does not conflict with the scriptural record of women in Paul’s circle of ministry who, like Phoebe, Pricilla, Junia, Eudoia, and Syntyche, held leadership positions in the church. Solid exegesis does not warrant using 1 Tim 2-8-15 as a blanket prohibition against women teaching in the church or holding position of authority over men.”⁵⁵

⁵³ Germaine Griffin Copeland, *A Message to Women of God*, God’s Word to Women, http://godstowomen.org/woman_God_Copeland.htm accessed 11/14.

⁵⁴ Stephen G. Fortosis & Nancy K. McCall, *Feminine Perspectives in Ministry: Interviews with Selected Women in Evangelical Christian Leadership*, Biola University Christian Educational Journal, <http://journals.biola.edu/cej/volumes/xii/issues/3/articles/104> accessed 11/14.

⁵⁵ Payne, pg. 444.

We should not restrict what God has not restricted, by placing barriers that withhold women from any ministry, when Christ taught and exhibited otherwise. It may be a tedious and exhaustive endeavor to overcome, but the truth of God needs to prevail; anything less is false doctrine. Let us not continue to be infants feeding on milk, but be mature Christians feeding on the solid food of understanding fully comprehending the word of God. God built the foundation of the Church with the blood of His Son and by His grace we are saved - saved to do His will. Let us remove the obstacles that restrict, and allow the clear wide-angle view that allows one to see the full picture of God's word and not just the myopic view of one verse that inhibits the full majestic scenery of equality for all of God's people. I urge you to ask yourself, does it seem like God's character to place restriction on His message going forth to all the corners of the world, to all the nations, based simply upon gender? As today there are some women who are highly educated in the Word and ways of the Lord, anointed by the Holy Spirit and are more qualified than some men, surely God would not restrict them. Lastly, if I were a man and I had the choice to learn the word of God from either a woman who had vast knowledge given by the Holy Spirit, or a man who had minimal knowledge given by the Holy Spirit, I would chose the woman. We should not place upon God's people, who are created equally in His image, any limitations that God has not placed. Hopefully, the church will come into the light of the 21st century and see that God has allowed women equal rights in all areas of life especially the ability to promote the gospel that brings eternal life. Stop the discrimination that hinders the message of salvation going forth by and for all people. The Holy Spirit came at Pentecost giving gifts so that sons and daughters may proclaim the will of God and the message of salvation. How dare we place any restriction upon this eternal, life-saving message! It is paramount that 1 Timothy 2:11-15 be understood as a cultural mandate for the first century church and not a universal command. If not, should we also hold onto James' statement that we are to abstain from things polluted by idols...from things strangled, and from blood for all times" (Acts 15:20)?

I ask this, "Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" (Acts 15: 10). Transforming a cultural manmade exhortation into a God given universal command is a yoke being placed upon the people of God. Who are we to burden or restrain the most important message of all times - are we the modern-day Pharisees?

The evangelical church needs to reevaluate its scriptural perspectives regarding woman teaching men and women holding ministry positions. The evangelical church needs to be united in the body of Christ, for united we stand and divided we fail in fulfilling the universal mandate to go forth and spread the Good News that Christ defeated death and has set the captives free!

Even after substantial research and debate among brilliant theologians, there is one Bible verse that, perhaps, indicates women can teach in all sectors of ministry with maybe the exception of head pastor. The Apostle

Paul states in 1 Corinthians 14:37, “If any man thinks himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.” Paul is claiming that all he has written is, in fact, a commandment from the Lord. This question among scholars remains: Is 1 Timothy 2:11-15 a commandment or a contextual mandate, specific to a time and place and circumstance?

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