

WOMEN: KEEPERS OF THE HOME

by

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The question of the role of women in the Church has been widely discussed primarily from the perspective of the functions of Church offices and worship services. In its broadest sense the question of the Christian women's role in any occupation which involves her outside of the context of the home has not been widely discussed. This topic is considered primarily in the light of Paul's instruction to Titus.

The text of Titus 2 is examined with special emphasis on the word οἰκουπόús. A textual variant is considered and the arguments for the choice between the two words are compared with extra-biblical classical usages.

The passage is treated as implying that Paul intended to provide guidelines for the character development of women. This position is compared to the views of evangelical feminists, moderates and conservatives. Evangelical feminists' points of view are compared with the text and found lacking both in their basic presuppositions and then their system of hermeneutics. The moderate view is shown to be unsatisfactory in the degree to which it obscures a Christian woman's direct responsibilities to her home. The conservative view, while reaching similar conclusions about the role of women, is overly rigorous in its emphasis on the duties of the Christian woman.

The conclusion is drawn that Paul is proscribing a quality of character that was to be a permanent part of the education and deportment of Christian women and that this quality should cause women to desire to be directly involved in the home as their primary sphere of activity and labor.

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## INTRODUCTION

Most evangelicals would agree that Paul has established sexual equality in Christ by his statement "there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). But what is the relationship between this fundamental doctrine and the many other statements of Paul (and other New Testament writers) which it seems to contradict? How does the contemporary Christian apply these truths to the practical problems of church order and day-to-day living?

The answers to these questions go beyond the limited scope of this paper. However, these issues set the stage for a detailed investigation of one small part of the overall discussion. The question under consideration herein is, does the biblical ideal for Christian women limit their participation in work outside the context of the home? In answering this question, primary attention will be given to Paul's words to Titus concerning instructions to be given to young women.

Before dealing with this question, it should be noted that this is not the same as asking, "Is it wrong for women to work?" The responsibilities of caring for a home and a family can, and usually do, exceed the demands of most other occupations. No argument is made against the defense, "I was able to get more done at home when I was working than

I do now that I am home all the time." What is under consideration here is: "what does the Bible say and how should the Christian apply what is said?" Believers who are committed to obeying the Word of God should make this their standard, even if it does not conform to their expectations or the pressure of society.

In order to determine what God has directed, it will be necessary to ascertain what the text says. Because the key word being considered has undergone a variation in the transmission of the text, an analysis of the manuscript evidence will be required. This will be followed by a consideration of the context of the passage. Having come to a conclusion on the meaning of the word in its context, the exegesis continues with an evaluation of the impact which this directive would have had on the first century reader. Finally, a potential application to contemporary society will be offered.

## CHAPTER I

### CONFLICTING VIEWS ON THE WOMAN'S ROLE

#### The Feminist View

The rise of feminism in the secular world has been paralleled by an increased interest in, and unrest about, the role of women in the evangelical church. Most of the discussion on this topic centers on those activities which are involved with the public services of the church. Susan Foh describes the typical approach in this manner.

In its most practical form, the question of the women's role in the church implicates the role of the laity (can a layman exercise authority and teach in the church?), the format of worship (should only elders be allowed to speak?; should there be more congregational participation?), and the use of spiritual gifts (do prophecy and tongue-speaking still exist?).<sup>1</sup>

But the activities of the church services, as important as they are, are only a small part of the complete lives of Christian people. Scanzoni and Hardesty assert that "Except for Gal. 3:28, all of the references to women in the New Testament are contained in passages dealing with practical concerns about personal relationships or behavior in worship services."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Susan T. Foh, Women and the Word of God (Nutley: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, All We're Meant To Be, A Biblical Approach to Women's Liberation (Waco: Word Books, 1974), pp. 18-19.

They, along with Jewett, Mollenkott, and others, argue that the Bible teaches a fundamental equality of the sexes which must override any social conventions which have developed within cultures.

The following statements offer, in greatly simplified form, the line of reasoning with which most evangelical feminists would identify. Men and women were created equal, each sharing the image of God and dominion over the animals as described in Gen 1:26-28. In this state of paradise there was no differentiation between the sexes, only a harmonious coregency in Eden. The fall brought about a disruption of this orderliness, not because God had determined that this equality was not good, but because sinful people were incapable of maintaining it.

The social systems which developed after the fall, which have included slavery and the subordination of women to men, have been the result of man's sinful nature rather than of God's decree. (This requires a non-traditional interpretation of Genesis chapter three which is an important element in the evangelical feminist's line of reasoning.) But the original order was restored as a part of the soteriological activity of Jesus so that Paul could say, "there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). With total equality restored, all that remains is to sort out the details of how people should behave in order to get along.

The primary thrust of the feminist movement has been the matter of women's subordination. One of the important issues in the struggle is the availability of employment opportunities for women. For secular feminists the barriers against women have been removed from almost all occupations. Their struggle currently is over equality of compensation and opportunity for advancement. Evangelical feminists are striving for advancement of opportunity primarily in the realm of ecclesiastical polity. The barriers against women in this area have been more resistant to change.

#### The Conservative View

Many conservatives who do not support a feminist position do accept the advance of women in the working world. There are some, however, who question the appropriateness of Christian women in the workforce in any capacity. John MacArthur, Jr. has generated controversy by his position on working Christian women.

So what's a wife and mother to do with her life? Pursue a career? I don't see that priority here. Clearly, according to Titus 2:3-5, a woman is to be a lover of her husband, a lover of her children, and one who does her assigned task at home.<sup>1</sup>

This view of Paul's teaching (which will be considered in more detail below) seems to place a legalistic limit on the opportunities available to Christian women. This is in sharp contrast to evangelical feminists who place no limits

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<sup>1</sup>John MacArthur, Jr., The Family (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), p. 33.

at all.

These extremes pose a serious problem for concerned Christians. The goal of this paper is to clarify the meaning of one of the passages which will contribute to the resolution of this problem.

## CHAPTER II

### THE DETERMINATION OF THE TEXT

#### The Background of the Text

Paul wrote a letter to Titus who was ministering to churches on the island of Crete. In this pastoral epistle Paul admonishes Titus to speak "the things which become sound doctrine" (2:1). He then gives instructions regarding the behavior of various groups of people. He concludes the discourse with the summary "these things speak and exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise you" (2:15). Paul clearly considered these subjects to be important.

The groups which Paul directly addresses are older men, older women, young men and bondslaves. He is writing about practical matters which could, if disregarded, bring the testimony of the church into disrepute. His advice to Titus was to speak to the older women as follows:

The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things, that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed (Titus 2:3-5).

At first glance it appears that this passage teaches that a woman's place is indeed in the home. The objective of this investigation is to see if in fact this first impression is accurate. "For too long, proof texts from the Bible have



been hurled at women to 'keep them in their place.'<sup>1</sup> In light of the vast numbers of women who have entered the work force, many of whom are members of evangelical churches, a more serious approach to the text is warranted.

### The Variation in the Text

The word which Paul used is either οἰκουροῦς or οἰκουργοῦς. Because the variation of the single letter changes the meaning of the word significantly, it is necessary to analyze the textual support for each reading. Both internal and external evidence will be considered.

### The Internal Evidence

In considering the internal evidence for the text, the methodology suggested by Greenlee will be followed. His four main principles are:

- (i) The shorter reading is often preferable.
- (ii) The harder reading is often preferable.
- (iii) The reading from which the other readings in a variant could most easily have developed is preferable.
- (iv) The reading which is characteristic of the author is generally preferable.<sup>2</sup>

There is no strong indication that the first principle is in operation in this case. It is possible that the word was shortened by a scribe who overlooked one letter, but there are no factors (such as haplography or homoioteleuton)

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<sup>1</sup>Scanzoni and Hardesty, All We're Meant To Be, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>J. Harold Greenlee, Introduction to New Testament Criticism (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), pp. 114-5.

which suggest that this is probable.

The second principle, that the harder reading is to be preferred, is considered by those who accept οἰκουροῦς to be a deciding factor in the evaluation of the internal evidence. Greenlee explains this principle as follows:

The reading which at first sight seems more difficult to explain in the context is likely to be the correct reading if further study shows that it makes sense. In other words, a scribe is more likely to change a word which gives difficulty into a word which seems easier to understand--changing either intentionally or unintentionally to a word which is similar in appearance, or unintentionally to a word which is related in meaning.<sup>1</sup>

Because the word οἰκουροῦς is almost unknown in classical literature many scholars believe that this word must be genuine. Metzger describes the process which caused the editorial committee of the United Bible Societies to omit listing this variant in their Greek New Testament.

A majority of the Committee preferred [οἰκουροῦς] because it was regarded more probable that an unusual word should have been altered by copyists to a well-known word, than vice versa.<sup>2</sup>

Not all scholars agree that this point is decisive. The problem is the obscurity of οἰκουροῦς and the overwhelming frequency of οἰκουρός. The only example of the former word which has survived is found in a writing of Soranus of Ephesus who was a medical writer of the second century A.D.

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<sup>1</sup>Greenlee, Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism, p. 115.

<sup>2</sup>Bruce M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 654.

Field points out that in that single context the more common word οἰκουπόους would have been equally suitable.<sup>1</sup> He goes on to defend οἰκουπόους by claiming that

The strongest argument for the old reading is, that it is improbable, not to say incredible, that in his exhaustive description of the female character, the Apostle should have omitted this particular feature . . . . There is scarcely a single passage of ancient writers, from Solomon downwards, in praise of a virtuous wife, in which this feature is not specially set forth.<sup>2</sup>

The application of this principle, that the harder reading is to be preferred, must be weighed with the other principles to help determine which variant is most probably the original reading.

Greenlee's third principle does not seem to apply in this case except in the sense that this principle overlaps with the previous idea of a harder reading being preferable.

The fourth principle for determining internal evidence indicates that the reading which is characteristic of the author is to be preferred. Greenlee indicates that this must be applied with caution because it is natural for an author to use some forms rarely. However, he states that "a form or longer phrase which is clearly out of harmony with an author's style is suspect if a variant is involved."<sup>3</sup>

Field's observation cited above indicates that he considers

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<sup>1</sup>Frederick Field, Notes on the Translation of the New Testament (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1899), p. 220.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 220-1.

<sup>3</sup>Greenlee, Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism, p. 115.

the use of a rare form in this context highly improbable. In order to demonstrate the background for this judgment, several extra-biblical texts may be cited. The passages shed some light on what Paul may have had in mind when he was selecting a word for this text.

The Greek historian Plutarch uses οἰκουρούς to describe the virtue of Gaia Caecilia. About her he says, "And both her sandals and her spindle were, in ancient days, dedicated there as tokens of her love of home and of her industry respectively."<sup>1</sup> The contrast between sandals and spindle, and οἰκουρός "love of home" and ἐνεργείας "industry," demonstrates the two sides of the quality being dealt with. For the ideal wife of ancient times, home was a place both to be and to work.

The Greek philosopher Plato writes of a dialogue which Socrates held with his followers on the topic of the abilities and training of the sexes. In building his case, Socrates refers to the training of watch-dogs; "Do we expect the females of watch-dogs to join in guarding what the males guard and to hunt with them and share all their pursuits or do we expect the females to stay indoors as being incapacitated by the bearing and the breeding of the whelps while the males toil and have all the care of the flock?"<sup>2</sup> Here the contrast between the females who "stay indoors" οἰκουρεῖν,

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<sup>1</sup>Plutarch, Moralia, 2.271e.

<sup>2</sup>Plato, Republic, 451d.

and the males who "toil" πολεῖν, indicates the traditional dichotomy between "women's work" and "men's work."

The Greek dramatists use the word under consideration in a number of ways. Euripides casts these lines for his character Hercules who mourns over his wife whom he has just unknowingly slain, "And thee, lost love, not in such wise I slew. As thou didst save, didst keep mine honour safe through all that weary warding of mine house!"<sup>1</sup> The use of δόμοις 'house' with οἰκουρίας indicates that the emphasis of the latter word is on the character of the action, rather than on its location. (The sympathetic μακράς διαντιλοῦς 'tediously exhausting' indicates that the task of keeping a household has not changed much in character.)

Field's conclusion seems to be based primarily upon the relative commonness of οἰκουρός and the almost complete obscurity of οἰκουργός. The internal evidence may not be considered decisive as to the original word used, but the similarity of context to secular sources which use a form of οἰκουρούς must not be ignored.

#### The External Evidence

Metzger summarizes the manuscript support for οἰκουρούς as "X<sup>C</sup> D<sup>C</sup> H L P most minuscules most Fathers, followed by the Textus Receptus" and for οἰκουργούς as "X\* A C D\* F G I 33 177 330 623 Clement of Rome al." He indicates

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<sup>1</sup>Euripides, The Madness of Hercules, 1373lsg.

that the United Bible Societies editorial committee "preferred the latter reading because of superior external support" in addition to the internal evidence.<sup>1</sup> This is strong evidence to those scholars who follow the views of Westcott and Hort.

Greenlee's approach to evaluating external evidence suggests that the "Alexandrian is generally the most reliable single text, although it sometimes contains a 'learned' correction."<sup>2</sup> In describing the various text-types, Greenlee admits that the "Alexandrian text is more likely to be wrong in the more 'sophisticated' variants--e.g., those involving technicalities of grammar or those in which a more literary form is substituted for a more colloquial form."<sup>3</sup>

Greenlee describes the Byzantine readings as follows:

It is generally agreed that some of the later uncial mss., most of the minuscules, and the later versions and Fathers represent a late text which is inferior to the other text-types. Of course, many Byzantine readings are supported by other evidence and are good readings. It is likewise possible that in some instances the true reading has been lost from the mss. of the other text-types and is preserved only in the Byzantine text. For this reason Byzantine readings must not automatically be rejected without examination. At the same time, the general impression which is given by readings which are characteristically Byzantine is that they are inferior and not likely to be original.<sup>4</sup>

This view, based on the work of Westcott and Hort, is widely

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<sup>1</sup> Metzger, Textual Commentary on the New Testament, p. 654.

<sup>2</sup> Greenlee, Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism, p. 115.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

accepted among scholars. On the basis of this view the manuscript support for the word οἰκουρῶς is stronger than for the alternative.

In contrast to the more common view is a renewed interest in the text families which underlie the Textus Receptus. Pickering offers a critical analysis of the Westcott-Hort theory and concludes that "it is evidently erroneous at every point."<sup>1</sup> He develops a systematic defense for the Byzantine text-type and the Textus Receptus. Hodges offers the following methodology for determining the text;

(1) Any reading overwhelmingly attested by the manuscript tradition is more likely to be original than its rival(s).

(2) Final decisions about readings ought to be made on the basis of a reconstruction of their history in the manuscript tradition.<sup>2</sup>

On the basis of their methodology Hodges and Farstad choose οἰκουρῶς. They list in their apparatus that N, A, C differ from what they consider to be the Majority Text.<sup>3</sup>

#### The Resolution of the Text

It is beyond the scope of this paper to decide the debate over which Greek text most accurately conforms to the original text. The principle of the harder reading and the

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<sup>1</sup>Wilbur N. Pickering, The Identity of the New Testament Text (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers, 1977), p. 91.

<sup>2</sup>Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, editors, The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers, 1982), pp. xi-xii.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 643.

Westcott-Hort theories are not lightly set aside, nor is the scholarship of the United Bible Societies' editorial committee questioned. However, the arguments of Fields, Hodges, Farstad and Pickering must be given due consideration. These arguments substantially balance the issues of external evidence. On the basis of the internal evidence, the remainder of this paper will follow the reasoning of Fields and deal with the subject in light of the hypothesis that οἶκονομός is the word which Paul chose.



### CHAPTER III

#### FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CONTEXT

##### The Influence of Secular Philosophy

How is the word οἰκουρούς related to its context in the epistle, and does this affect the topic under consideration? One interesting perspective is described by Leonard Swidler who categorizes this passage with some others in the following manner;

Both the Statements about women in Ephesians (Eph 5:21-33) and Colossians (Col 3:18-25), as well as those in Titus (Tit 2:3-9) and the first letter of Peter . . . have a basic similarity: they give expression to the household tables. This was a set of rules governing 'proper' duties of the various strata in a household. It was said to have originated with Zeno the founder of Stoicism at the end of the fourth century B.C. and had in the ensuing period become the common property of all the schools of Hellenistic ethics, including Hellenistic Judaism. The various 'strata' with superordinate and subordinate responsibilities vis-a-vis each other included husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves.<sup>1</sup>

Swidler's view must be considered in light of his critical hermeneutic (he considers these passages to have been written, not by Paul, but by some disciples in a much later period).<sup>2</sup> Even while rejecting this critical approach to the text, something can be gained from considering it.

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<sup>1</sup>Leonard Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Women (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979), p. 332.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

If the "household tables" or "domestic code" did represent an established literary form in the Hellenistic period, then it would have been perfectly natural for Paul to have adopted it to express the inspired truth which he was directed to convey. The exact course of the influence of this secular philosophical teaching on the writings of Paul (and Peter) is impossible to determine. There are several theories as to how the influence may have been direct (through the writings of Aristotle and Xenophon) or indirect (through Peripatetic discussions of domestic science).<sup>1</sup> This hypothesis sheds some light on the otherwise unusual combinations of sub-groups found in the various passages.

In each of these biblical "household tables" women are directed to be subject to their husbands and slaves to their masters. The similarity of the passages gives credence to the view that they shared some common literary type. How does this aid in the interpretation of the passage being considered?

#### The Influence of Contemporary Society

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<sup>1</sup>David L. Balch, Let Wives Be Submissive. The Domestic Code in I Peter, Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series, ed. James Crenshaw (N.p.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1981), p. 9. Balch goes to extreme lengths to trace the influence of secular philosophy and specifically the domestic code on the text of 1 Peter. His arguments touch on the similar influence these codes had on Paul's writings, including the passage under consideration in this paper. While his proof of such influence may not be accepted by conservatives who see such investigation as a threat to the doctrine of inerrancy, the breadth of his study deserves consideration.

There are at least two major problems to be dealt with in handling a "practical" passage such as this. First, the interpreter must seek to determine what message the author was trying to communicate to his original audience. Second, that message must be applied to the contemporary audience and communicated in a manner which will have an effect similar to that which it originally carried. At this point, what can be said about the message which Paul was communicating to Titus?

If the "domestic code" literary device is accepted as being used in Titus, an unusual feature stands out at once. In contrast with the other Pauline passages noted, the young women on the island of Crete were not directly addressed. Paul's message to Titus was to be delivered to the πρεσβύτεας "older men", πρεσβύτειδας "older women", νεωτέους "young men" and δούλους "slaves". The older women had as a part of their responsibility the education of the νέας "young women". In each of the other passages cited the wives are directly addressed as γυναῖκες "wives". Paul may have considered that this part of the young women's development was inappropriate for Titus to undertake. "To guide the younger women in the complex household duties of a wife and mother is, at least in part, beyond the ability of Titus and the pastors. A woman's insight, an older woman's experience, are priceless qualifications."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>H. Armin Moellering and Victor A. Bartling, Concordia Commentary (London: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), p. 198.

It is possible to see in the method of instruction that the content of the teaching was of a "practical" rather than a "theological" nature. The young women were to be taught by the older women who would draw upon their experience in the subjects to be covered. The range of topics was dictated by Paul, but the details would be left to the mature women to determine. Yet even though these could be considered practical lessons, the admonitions at the beginning and end of the passage make it clear that the effectiveness of the church's functioning was at stake. All of the topics come under the general heading of "things which become sound doctrine" (2:1) and "that the Word of God be not blasphemed" (2:7).

The significance of these motivations may not be simple to ascertain. According to Stagg,

The 'sound doctrine' with which Titus 2:1-10 is concerned has to do with life-style, not beliefs as such. This version of the Domestic Code calls for attitudes and conduct that are a credit to 'the word of God' (v. 5), such as will 'adorn the teaching of God our savior' (v. 10). There is concern for moral and ethical values, and there is throughout a strong emphasis upon the kind of deportment that will avoid discredit from without and win respect for the community and its message. This latter is applied especially to wives and slaves.<sup>1</sup>

This view does not lessen the importance of these teachings. Paul is giving recognition to the fact that it is not enough for a local assembly to hold to a sound doctrinal statement. There must at every point be application of those doctrines

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<sup>1</sup>Frank and Evelyn Stagg, Women in the World of Jesus (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978), p. 198.

in the lives of the members of the body in ways that will demonstrate to the watching world that Christianity had made a profound difference in their lives. The effects of the new life would be especially noticable in the most demanding interpersonal relationships and in the character traits which these relationships make obvious. That may be the reason that Paul utilized the "domestic code", to make certain that Christians, especially those whose liberty in Christ had come recently, would not be confused or misled by false teachings that their spiritual life freed them from temporal obligations.

However, Paul's teaching is not in defense of social norms as such. In speaking to slaves he does not defend slavery as an institution, but he does teach that certain qualities are demanded of the Christian slave because of his relationship to Christ. His arguments for the order within marriage do not depend upon social convention but upon the historical fact of the creation order. Paul's approach is not to get Christianity to fit in with society, but rather to make Christian living the standard for society to emulate.

#### The Influence of Christian Liberty

The passages which convey the "domestic code" have three primary relationships in view: husband/wife, parent/child and master/slave. The underlying purpose for the use of the code by Paul seems to be to guard against the abuse of the freedom which the new converts found in Christ. Because

women and slaves had been most exploited they would be especially motivated to take advantage of their newly gained liberty. Fearing that this would lead to anti-nomianism and anarchy, Paul needed to protect what had been won in his struggle with legalism.

Balch surveys the manner in which the code may have served the New Testament writers.

There have been three suggestions about the function of this ethic. Dibelius and Weidinger emphasized its paraenetic use, its use as a general ethical exhortation unrelated to any specific situation. Second, Schroeder and Crouch argued that the code was used to repress social unrest within the church among Christian slaves and wives, unrest stimulated by the baptismal formula in Gal 3:28 . . . Third, Schroeder, appealing to 1 Pet 3:1-7, 1 Tim 2:1-4, and Titus 2:5, suggested that this ethic was a part of the church's mission.<sup>1</sup>

The result is the apparent contradiction between the unrestricted freedom of "neither male nor female in Christ" and the seemingly crushing restriction of "obedient to their own husbands."

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<sup>1</sup>Balch, Let Wives Be Submissive, p. 10.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CONFLICT IN HERMENEUTICS

#### The Background of the Conflict

An understanding of the conflict between liberty and submission is essential to answering the question: How should the socio-historical context of this passage be applied to its interpretation? No one should deny that the Scriptures were written from within, and addressed to, a male-dominated, patriarchal, almost chauvanistic cultural setting. Virginia Mollenkott expresses her sensitivity to this potential for bias.

At this point we must begin to face a serious problem in our interpretation of the Bible. Although the Bible is a divine Book, it has come to us through human channels. And it seems apparent that some of the Apostle Paul's arguments reflect his personal struggles over female subordination and show vestiges both of Greek philosophy (particularly Stoicism) and of the rabbinical training he had received from his own socialization and especially from Rabbi Gamaliel.<sup>1</sup>

She goes on to point out how this influence may have functioned in the writings of Paul.

Vestiges of Paul's rabbinic conditioning are implied in I Corinthians 14:34, where women 'are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says,' a reference not to the Old Testament but to the social customs and rules of first-century Judaism. The Old Testament clearly assumed female submission but contained no law to command it, whereas rabbinic Judaism was full

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<sup>1</sup>Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, Women, Men and the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977), p. 95.

of traditional laws and customs which required the subservience of women.<sup>1</sup>

How should this cultural influence be reckoned in the interpretation of these passages? On this point each different viewpoint exposes its holder's system of hermeneutics and perspective on the doctrine of inspiration.

### The Direction of the Conflict

It is characteristic of evangelical feminists to maintain a liberal hermeneutical approach to Scripture. Paul Jewett expresses the thinking which is a prerequisite to this view.

While the theologians have never agreed on a precise theory of inspiration, before the era of critical, historical study of the biblical documents they tended, understandably, to ignore the human side of Scripture and to think of divine inspiration in a way that ruled out the possibility of any human limitation whatever in the Bible. The Bible, for all practical purposes, was so immediately dictated by the Holy Spirit that the human writers were more secretaries than authors. Historical and critical studies of the biblical documents have compelled the church to abandon this simplistic view of the divinity of Scripture and to take into account the complexity at the human level of the historical process by which the documents were produced.<sup>2</sup>

Scanzoni and Hardesty take the issue of hermeneutics one step further by applying guidelines for the interpretation of Scriptures relative to the status of women, which they claim,

Must not conflict with either the unequivocal, universal,

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<sup>1</sup> Mollenkott, Women, Men and the Bible, p. 96

<sup>2</sup> Paul K. Jewett, Man as Male and Female (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), p. 34



and identical sinfulness of both sexes, or the grace bestowed on both sexes through Jesus Christ . . . . We should reject any interpretation that does not apply just as well to women in a modern society; in totalitarian, welfare, and democratic states; inside and outside marriage; in the home and in the working world.<sup>1</sup>

This approach to the text reveals a powerful bias. It presupposes that the Scripture does not limit the opportunities for women to anything less than their contemporary view of women in an ideal society. It assumes in advance the answers to the questions which are herein being asked of the text.

### Examples of the Conflict

Clark categorizes these approaches to hermeneutics under four views. His 'cultural conflict' view

Holds that Christian teaching in the New Testament was under a strong Hellenistic influence. The process began with Jesus, who was heavily influenced by the Hellenistic Gentiles living in Palestine, at least in the area of men's and women's roles. As a result of this influence, Jesus moved toward an approach to men-women relationships which pointed to an elimination of different roles for men and women.<sup>2</sup>

He goes on to point out that Paul was influenced by these same cultural forces but that the influence did not completely overwhelm his own background. The result is the apparent contradictions in the New Testament teachings about women.

A second view, according to Clark, is called

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<sup>1</sup> Scanzoni and Hardesty, All We're Meant To Be, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen B. Clark, Man and Woman In Christ (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1980), p. 237.

'cannonized rabbinism'.

According to this view, the teaching in the New Testament on the roles of men and women consists mainly of residue of rabbinic influence on the early Christians. The New Testament teaching is identical to rabbinic teaching and is grounded in the same approach to theology used by the rabbis.<sup>1</sup>

This view is similar to the position taken by Virginia Mollenkott cited above.

A third view is called the 'conformity to culture' view. "This view holds that the New Testament teaching on the roles of men and women was designed by Paul and other early Christians to help the early Christians blend more easily into the culture and customs around them, either for the purpose of avoiding conflict or for preaching the Gospel more effectively.<sup>2</sup> Scanzoni and Hardesty as well as Jewett would probably identify with this view.

Clark then presents a fourth view which he calls the 'distinctive approach'.

According to this position, the New Testament contains a distinctive approach to personal relationships and social structure, one that is neither reducible to Greek nor rabbinic influences, nor shaped by a principle of adaptation to societal practices. The teaching on the roles of men and women is part of that distinctive teaching. Moreover, in this view, both Jesus and Paul saw the Christian teaching on personal relationships as central to the purpose of Christianity. Hence this teaching is something that the early Christians would have experienced as being integral to their message to new Christians.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Clark, Man and Women In Christ, p. 237.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 238.

This view, that these teachings are integral to the message and purpose of Christianity, is the foundation upon which the conclusions of this study will be built. This pre-supposition flows from the conservative doctrine of inspiration, that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim 3:16). Observing the influence of the "domestic code" or any other literary device may be helpful in the understanding of the text, but it does not change the basic postulate that Scripture is the word of God, not of men. This perspective is in opposition to the views of feminists, even those who would claim to be within the realm of evangelicalism. As a result, this issue could become simply a power struggle between factions with incompatible systems of hermeneutics.

#### The Danger in the Conflict

However, interpretation does not take place in a vacuum, every expositor has a set of biases which influence, and may even override, his or her rules of exegesis. In examining the motives behind the evangelical feminists' methodology, Litfin sees a basic vice:

This humanistic rebellion against the authority of God is the culture medium from which radical feminism springs, and in which it thrives. Radical feminists do not want anyone to instruct them on who or what they ought to be. They want to define their existence for themselves. It is not even that they believe this is the pathway to happiness, for it is not finally happiness they desire. It is freedom that they crave, and they are determined to pay whatever the price to obtain it.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A. Duane Litfin, "Evangelical Feminism: Why Traditionalists Reject It," Bibliotheca Sacra 136 (July-September 1979):268.

Scanzoni and Hardesty demonstrate their basic motivation when they claim that

Women's status in a given society greatly depends upon her power and position within the economic-opportunity structure of that society . . . . In societies where economic opportunities for women are greater, women hold a higher position.<sup>1</sup>

By measuring woman's status in economic terms they reveal their bias toward the materialism of contemporary western culture. This bias undoubtedly colors their efforts to determine accurately what Paul was attempting to communicate to his first century readers and what is applicable to Christians today.

#### The Result of the Conflict

How is this discussion of feminism related to the question of employment and Titus 2? To the contemporary feminist, the battleground is broadly defined. Having abandoned (or at least modified) the traditional conservative view of inspiration, the feminist interpreter is not constrained by the text in seeking the meaning and application of the concepts dealt with therein. Most older commentaries which discuss the Titus passage do not see the potential controversy over the application of οἰκονομοῦς because until recently the role of women has been so clearly defined by society in accord with the traditional interpretation of this (and similar) passages. This question has been dealt with seriously only

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<sup>1</sup>Scanzoni and Hardesty, All We're Meant To Be, p. 38.

since the evangelical feminist movement raised the issue. At that point the issue of employment became tied to the issue of subordination. Women had had to stay at home and keep house because it was inappropriate for them, as the "weaker sex", to move into positions of responsibility in the workforce. For this reason, subordination vs. liberation became the field of battle, with unlimited economic opportunity the prize.

At the same time, the feminist movement in the secular world was moving ahead at full speed. Evangelical church leaders and members alike were finding their values questioned, and often changed, without any serious vocal resistance or investigation into the potential conflict with the Word of God.

## CHAPTER V

### THE INTERPRETATION OF THE TEXT

#### The Grammar of the Context

The older women of the church were to be charged with the task of teaching the young women. The word teach  $\sigma\omega\phi\rho\omicron\nu\acute{\iota}\xi\omega\sigma\iota\nu$  is a compound word that carries the idea of "bring someone to his senses" or simply "encourage, advise, urge."<sup>1</sup> The earliest opportunity for this might involve the training of daughters by their mothers at home. This precise word does not appear elsewhere in the New Testament. The word implies informal teaching and training, personal involvement rather than lectures. The implication is that the older women should associate with the younger women for the purpose of helping them in the development of these qualities.

The list which Titus was to convey to the women consisted of eight items. The first seven are single words, each an accusative plural adjective. The eighth is a phrase introduced by an accusative plural participle. The English translation obscures the mood of some of the words in its attempt to transmit the sense

The words translated "to love their husbands"  $\phi\iota\lambda\acute{\alpha}\nu\delta\rho\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  and "to love their children"  $\phi\iota\lambda\omicron\tau\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ , do not

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<sup>1</sup>BAGD, p. 802.

have the same force as the common translations. More accurate translations would be the awkward "husband-lovers" and "child-lovers."<sup>1</sup> Kent declares "the list of virtues describes a young wife whose traits would make her ideal in any age."<sup>2</sup>

Paul's emphasis on the development of these traits in the newly married is indicated by his choice of the word νέας "young women", instead of γυναῖκες "women, wives". The mature women were to help younger women develop character by modeling these qualities before them. By exercising and emulating these qualities, the young women would develop characters which would allow them to become saints whose lives would not bring reproach upon the Word of God.

How does this view of the list of qualities in Titus compare with another of Paul's writings on this subject? The boldest statement concerning the role of women to be found in the New Testament is Paul's instruction to Timothy concerning the care of widows. In 1 Timothy 5:14 he writes, "I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully." This passage focuses on behaviors, not qualities. The three directives λαμβεῖν "to marry", τεκνολογεῖν "to bear children", and οἰκοδεσποτεῖν "to manage

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<sup>1</sup>Homer A. Kent, The Pastoral Epistles, Studies in I and II Timothy and Titus (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), p. 229.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

the house" are infinitives in contrast to the adjectives used in the Titus list. In this passage Paul is proscribing what the women should do, not traits which they should try to develop.

### The Meaning of the Text

The question with which this paper began is: does the biblical idea for Christian women limit their participation in work outside the context of the home? The answer to this question (when limited to Titus 2) turns on the sense in which Paul's word is understood.

### A Feminist Interpretation

The feminist view avoids the question of interpretation by deciding, on the basis of faulty hermeneutics, that this passage had a limited application which was bound to the cultural setting in which it was given. Scanzoni and Hardesty express this view in this manner:

Passages like Titus 2:4-5 and 1 Timothy 5:14 must be read in context. Women in the situations described, lacking in educational opportunities and often emerging from paganism, needed to be taught what it meant to be Christian wives and mothers. They were told to center their interests in building Christian homes so that criticism by enemies of the faith could be avoided . . . . However, to interpret these verses to mean that God's will for all women in all times requires confinement to the home is a mistake with unfortunate consequences.<sup>1</sup>

The problem with this evaluation of the applicability of this teaching for contemporary society is that it makes

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<sup>1</sup>Scanzoni and Hardesty, All We're Meant To Be, p. 110.



both of the mistakes that have been suggested before. By seeing legalistic restrictions in these words they are comfortable in relegating them to a less enlightened period of God's program. Because Scanzoni and Hardesty do not depend upon a conservative view of inspiration they are able to determine for themselves that this passage does not deserve permanent application.

Patricia Ward and Martha Stout suggest a different perspective on the reason why there is still resistance to Christian women going to work.

In our age, the economic issues are quite different. The traditional household tasks (baking, spinning, weaving) have been taken over by industry, and labor-saving devices have reduced most household work to a minimum. In our society, the "problem" of working women has been, for the most part, a problem of the middle class. We accept the fact that poor wives and mothers must work. We allow unmarried women to work. But we have trouble dealing with the middle or upper-class mother who works outside the home when her children are young or the married woman who works when she does not have to. Some Christians, brought up with a hierarchical view of the family and church, also tend to be uneasy about the ascendancy of women to management or leadership positions, even in a secular work environment.<sup>1</sup>

The idea that technology has made it possible for women to be relieved from the drudgery of housework and therefore there is no compelling reason for them to stay at home again misses the point that the Christian wife has a God-given responsibility to the home. Both of these views are related to the choice of οἰκουργούς as the proper text.

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<sup>1</sup>Patricia A. Ward and Martha G. Stout, Christian Women at Work (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), pp. 51-52.

Because behavior is made the focus of the argument, the passage is treated as being variable, subject to changes in society and technology.

#### A Conservative Interpretation

MacArthur presents a strong defense for his view that women should not be employed outside of the home.

Approximately one out of every three mothers with a child under three holds a full-time job. And many who don't work are engulfed in TV or running around town. Who's raising the children and taking care of the home? In many cases, no one! I am convinced that the answer to this problem is found in women's response to the phrase "workers at home" in Titus 2:5. What does it mean? Very simple, the word oikourgous comes from oikos ("home") and ergon ("work"), thus "worker at home." I think the emphasis is really that wives ought to work when at home and they ought to work at home.<sup>1</sup>

Because he accepts the variant οἰκουργούς, MacArthur builds to the conclusion that it is not proper for the Christian woman to work outside of the home.

#### A Moderate Interpretation

Foh takes a stand somewhere between the feminists and the conservative MacArthur.

Titus 2:4-5 lists some requirements for wives. Among them is οἰκουργούς or literally home-workers. By some this word is taken to be confirmation that the woman's work should be confined to the home. It is sometimes translated "domestic," a word that conjures up a woman whose delight is baking homemade bread, sewing all her family's clothes and making her pots and pans shine and whose dress is incomplete without an apron. Because of these connotations, "domestic" is a misleading translation. The verb form of οἰκουργούς is translated by

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<sup>1</sup>John MacArthur, Jr., The Family (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), p. 33.

Arndt and Gingrich as "to fulfill one's household duties." The Christian wife should fulfill her household duties; she should not avoid working at home. This understanding of the word is helpful in that it does not limit the woman to working only at home. The virtuous wife of Proverbs 31 illustrates the meaning of "home-worker." Her activities include travel, commerce, agriculture and charity, but she does not neglect her household. She sees that the needs of her husband and children are met. A test for whether or not a wife and mother should take a job is whether it helps or hinders the family.<sup>1</sup>

The problem here is that, while defending the legitimacy of Paul's instructions about the unique role of the Christian woman, Foh agrees with MacArthur in viewing this term as representing an action to be performed. By focusing on the verbal root instead of the adjectival form assumed in this paper, she has missed the emphasis on the quality of character which is in the text. Instead, the textual variant considered here emphasizes the labor aspect, whereas the variant accepted in this paper plays down the idea of "housework" as the subject of this passage.

These three views, though very different, share a common element. The underlying thought beneath each is that Paul intended to define the role of the Christian woman as restricted to the realm of the home.

#### A Moderate-Conservative Interpretation

An alternative approach to the text is based upon the acceptance of οἰκουρούς as the word which Paul used. As has been demonstrated above, this word has valid support from

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<sup>1</sup>Foh, Woman and the Word of God, p. 192.

both internal and external evidence. The effect of this choice is to shift the emphasis in the passage away from the concept of household duties and toward the pattern of character traits. This view is more consistent with the pattern of contemporary secular writings on the identical subject.

In addition, this view more effectively harmonizes the key word with its immediate context. All of the qualities in the Titus text can only be evaluated in subjective terms. The eight positive character qualities are not deeds but patterns. One of the qualities ἀγαθός "good" demonstrates this concept well. There is no way to teach "goodness" apart from the doing of good deeds. It is possible to say with some objectivity that a given act is good or not good, but it is difficult to say that a person is good or not good except in light of a consistent pattern of behavior. Yet, the goal of teaching goodness must go beyond the outward show of acceptable behavior. The objective is to produce an inward commitment to goodness which will constantly and creatively find ways of expressing itself.

In the same manner the quality under consideration is also subjectively evaluated. Instead of seeing the woman as responsible for working in the home, this view follows the classical Greek ideal of the woman as the one who "guards, keeps, watches over" the household. This view fits well with 1 Timothy 5:14 where the women are to οἰκοδεσποτεῖν "rule" the house. This "rule" requires direct involvement

in the oversight of the functioning of the household, but does not require that the women personally perform every domestic duty.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE APPLICATION OF THE TEXT

#### The Interpretations Compared

How does the moderate-conservative view assumed in this paper compare with the other views under consideration? The feminist's view rejected the applicability of this passage to contemporary society on the basis of the hermeneutical principle which does not allow the restriction of the freedom of equality which they see in Gal 3:28. The moderate-conservative view does not conflict with this equality because it proscribes characteristics rather than limiting behavior.

The moderate-conservative interpretation is more limiting than the moderate interpretation of Foh because it does encourage that young women be taught to prefer the home as opposed to other employment.

MacArthur's conservative view is most similar even though it was developed from a different basis.

What about older women whose children are grown? The answer is in Titus 2:3-5. When they were young women they were to be loving their husbands and children, keeping their homes, and so on. Now that they're older they should invest themselves in a spiritual ministry of teaching the younger women. I'm not saying that a woman can't work at that point, but I don't see a provision for that in Scripture. She may exercise that option if she chooses, but I do know that Scripture says the mature women are responsible to teach the younger women the things they've learned. The next generation isn't going to have any

women to do that if younger women aren't staying at home and learning from those who are older. There will be no legacy to pass on.<sup>1</sup>

These views share the same concern that the role of the Christian woman be centered in her household.

#### The Moderate-Conservative Interpretation Applied

The context of this passage demonstrates that a complete life cycle is in view. As MacArthur has noted above, there should not be any discontinuity in the cycle of each generation learning from the previous generation and teaching the next. The leadership of the pastor should provide the framework in which mature women teach young women those qualities which, if exercised properly, will "adorn the doctrine of God" and, if neglected, will bring reproach to His Word. Like goodness and chastity, being a proper guardian of a home is a subjective ideal. It can not be objectively measured, but it does set a standard by which choices may be judged.

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<sup>1</sup>MacArthur, The Family, p. 35.

## CHAPTER VII

### SUMMARY

The question with which this paper is concerned is: does the biblical ideal for Christian women limit their participation in work outside the context of the home? In attempting to answer this question, attention has been focused on Paul's admonition to Titus.

It has been determined that the text supports the reading *οικουρούς* and that this word is commonly used in secular Greek literature of the same period. This word describes a quality which was considered especially appropriate to women. This quality was displayed in the care that a faithful woman showed in taking care of her home and family.

Several views of how this quality is understood and applied today have been considered. The view presented in this paper has been compared to these other views and the contrast which results from the different textual reading has been demonstrated.

It is the conclusion of this paper that the answer to the question asked above is that the biblical ideal for Christian women does limit their participation in work outside the context of the home. This limitation functions indirectly in the process of mature women teaching young women to develop a godly desire to guard and keep their homes.



Because this goal can never be perfectly realized it encourages young women to avoid employment in order that they may concentrate on the responsibilities of their homes.

The same passage teaches that mature women have a corresponding responsibility to be involved with the younger wives. This responsibility should not be legislated but rather it should be taught as a part of the whole counsel of God.

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