

The Relationship between Apocalypticism and the Status of
Women in Early Christian Communities

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ABSTRACT

The Relationship between Apocalypticism and the Status of Women in Early Christian Communities

Angela Brkich-Sutherland

Feminist biblical scholarship has re-evaluated the status and influence that women held within early Christian communities. Recent studies of the participation of women in early Christianity have come to include texts that appear to provide women with roles of leadership and the opportunity to participate in activities that were previously restricted to men. An examination beyond the texts that reinforce traditional Greco-Roman roles permits an individual to examine the actual or incidental status, participation and influence of women within early Christian communities as opposed to their prescribed participation found in later, potentially misogynistic texts that uphold traditional Greco-Roman values (Kraemer 1992).

In a continuation of this methodology, this thesis will examine the nature of eschatology and its impact on early Christian communities. Through the examination of primary and secondary documents, the research in this study will reveal that women in different early Christian communities were not treated in the same manner. An examination of the Pauline and Pastoral epistles demonstrates that a change in eschatological beliefs played a changing role in the status accorded Christian women during the first century. This thesis demonstrates that women who lived in early Christian communities which held imminent eschatological expectations were granted greater participation within their communities than those women that lived in communities that established permanent long-term structures.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1- Apocalypticism in Early Pauline Christianity	7
Chapter 2- Women in the Greco-Roman World	26
Chapter 3- Women in Paul's Epistles	35
Chapter 4- Women in the Pastoral Epistles	60
Chapter 5- Women of Different Status	73
Chapter 6- Eschatology and the Status of Women	82
Conclusion	91
Bibliography	93

INTRODUCTION

With the emergence of feminist biblical scholarship, there has been a re-evaluation of the status and influence that women held within early Christian communities. Feminist scholars including Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Ross Shepard Kraemer, Margaret Y. MacDonald, Carolyn Osiek and Elizabeth A. Clark have widened their search to include texts that appear to provide women with roles of leadership and the opportunity to participate in activities that were previously restricted to men instead of focusing upon texts that support and reinforce traditional Greco-Roman gender roles. This process of interpreting texts assumes that a patriarchal society did not completely restrict female influence in social life (Schüssler Fiorenza 2002). Furthermore, this process permits an individual to examine the actual or incidental status, participation and influence of women within early Christian communities as opposed to their prescribed participation found in later, potentially misogynistic texts that uphold traditional Greco-Roman values (Kraemer 1992). An examination of the status that women held within specific early Christian communities permits scholars to obtain insight into a group's social, political, economic and theological beliefs. Furthermore, this study allows for scholars to explore the possibilities of how or why particular members of the community were valued. Specifically, this work will address the problem of how apocalypticism relates to the status of women in early Pauline communities.

Several early Christian texts, including the undisputed Pauline letters, suggest that early Christian converts believed that the end of the world was imminent. This stress on eschatology largely influenced the content of religious instruction and the manner in which communities were structured. For example, for many early Christians who

believed that the end times were looming, there was neither time nor the need to completely restructure traditional Greco-Roman social and political structures. However, because the end times were imminent, there was also no need to maintain traditional structures that limited individuals from achieving salvation. Primary evidence suggests that eschatological beliefs have had an impact on how femininity and women were perceived in early Christian groups as well as the roles and influences that were granted to women. This impact is particularly evident in the spread of prophetic authority among women in apocalyptic circles (e.g. 1 Cor. 11: 1-17; Wire 2003).

Although a few scholars have briefly examined the relationship between apocalyptic, end-time expectations and the role of women, few have focused specifically on assessing the actual correspondence between these two factors. This thesis will examine the role that eschatology played in the changing role of Christian women during the first century as witnessed in Pauline and post-Pauline writings, including the Pastoral epistles.

In the first chapter, I examine the nature of eschatology and the impact that this end-time belief system had on early Christian communities (Schüssler Fiorenza 1983; Wiebe 1990; Aune 1972; Aune 1975; Chilton & Neusner 1999). This study will include an examination of the general social and political structures that are referred to within early Christian texts, as well as the status that is attributed to numerous individuals within and outside of the community. The analysis of Paul's apocalyptic expectations will include an examination of 1 Thessalonians 4-5 and 1 Corinthians 15. This section also briefly examines the Pastoral epistles to demonstrate that Christian communities adapted their end-time beliefs as time passed.

In order to properly evaluate the participation of Christian women within their religious communities, I will proceed in chapter 2 with an examination of early Christian women within the context of first century Greco-Roman society. The problems surrounding the methodology of using modern concepts to understand antiquity will also be assessed there. In particular, I explore the use of the term gender as a category and the need to use this term in a nuanced manner when examining women in antiquity. This section will examine the general status accorded to women in the Greco-Roman world and will make use of social and anthropological studies including the public / private divide and honour / shame dichotomies (MacDonald 1996; Massey 1988; Pomeroy; 1995; Winter 2003; Cohen 1996; Clark 1996).

In chapter 3, I examine the status, participation and influences that are attributed to women within specific early first century Christian communities. In particular, I use the comparative method to contrast the evidence found in 1 Corinthians, Galatians and Romans (high eschatological expectations) with that found in the later Pastoral Letters (low eschatological expectations).

In this section I will give particular attention to examining 1 Corinthians 11 where Paul instructs the community regarding women who prophesy with their heads unveiled and the passages that seem to involve ascetic women in 1 Corinthians 7. The acceptance or promotion of asceticism among women in 1 Corinthians 7 is significant when compared with the motherly and wife roles that are deemed appropriate for women in Greco-Roman society. While in the circumstance of 1 Corinthians 11, Paul rebukes women for their “male-like” activity of praying and prophesying uncovered, incidental evidence indicates that prophetic women gained authority within their Corinthian

community and were acting in the same capacity as men within communal gatherings. While these examples appear to contradict each other (at one point Paul appears to promote new roles for women and at another appears to restrict women to their traditional roles), they demonstrate that there is a distinction between the actual participation of women in the Corinthian community, on the one hand, and Paul's response to such activities, on the other. This analysis permits an examination of how individuals within the Corinthian community understood eschatology and the impact that this belief system played within social roles and activities. Other Pauline evidence that will be incorporated into the discussion of actual women here includes: 1) the references to Phoebe, Prisca, Mary and Junia in Romans 16; 2) the reference to Chloe in 1 Cor. 1: 11, the accompaniment of a believing wife in 1 Cor. 9: 5 and the issue of marriage, celibacy and virgins in 1 Cor. 7; 3) the statement that there is no longer male and female in Gal. 3: 28; and, 4) the references to Euodia and Syntyche in Phil. 4:2-3.

In chapter four, evidence such as that found in 1 Corinthians will be compared with textual instructions found in the deuterio-Pauline Pastoral epistles, including 1 Tim. 2:8-15 where the author instructs the community that women must be submissive, silent and will be saved through childbearing. Though this is a prescribed instruction, it is indicative of a change in the view of gender within early male church leadership. Other evidence in the Pastoral epistles that will be examined includes: 1) the status, requirements and participation of widows in 1 Tim. 5: 1- 16; 2) the "silly women" in 2 Tim. 3: 6; and, 3) the role of women within their communities as submissive and within the household in Tit. 2:3-5.

In chapter five, evidence found in both eschatological and non-eschatological early Christian texts will be compared in order to reveal how women were perceived and treated differently in Pauline and Pastoral communities. Finally, this section will include a study of the Acts of Paul and Thecla to demonstrate the tendency of communities with high eschatological expectations, regardless of time period, to grant women charismatic leadership roles (MacDonald 1983; When 2004). This section serves as a transition between the analysis of the primary evidence and the conclusion, which considers the impact of apocalyptic beliefs on perceptions of gender and the participation of women within early Christian communities.

Finally, I argue that women who lived in early Christian communities which held imminent eschatological expectations were granted greater participation within their communities than those women that lived in communities that established permanent long-term structures. While textual evidence suggests that women in the “later” first century communities, including those referred to in the Pastoral Letters, were granted a similar status to women in the general Greco-Roman world, women in some earlier Pauline communities had the opportunity to participate in ways that were previously limited to men. I suggest that there is a correspondence between apocalyptic ways of thinking and views of gender roles within certain early Christian groups. I argue that while women were not granted equality in early Pauline communities, the evidence suggests that they had greater access to participating in Christian communal gatherings because of eschatological expectations. With its expectation of an imminent end, the apocalyptic worldview was conducive to actual participation of women within leadership positions. Therefore, there was a significant difference between the belief in an imminent

end and the delay of the Lord's coming (*parousia*) in early Christian communities and their treatment of women (Aune 1975).

CHAPTER 1

Apocalypticism in Early Pauline Christianity

In order to achieve a thorough understanding of the status that was accorded to early Christian women within religious communities it is necessary to explore the worldviews of the period. By examining early Christians within their historical context, it becomes possible to appreciate the importance that they attributed to specific belief systems, philosophies, practices, individuals and circumstances. Furthermore, this methodology permits an individual to analyze as well as comprehend more thoroughly the activities of early Christians within their communities and the instructions of early Christian teachers. While there is no single worldview that is subscribed to in early Christian communities, primary evidence suggests that numerous first century groups maintained an apocalyptic worldview and expectation of an imminent end that was also characteristic of some other Jewish groups. By outlining and examining the impact that Jewish apocalypticism had upon the Christian worldview it becomes possible to appreciate behaviours and attitudes towards insiders and outsiders. It is therefore necessary to remember that early Christians were Jesus-followers or members of the Jesus movement, a sect within Judaism, rather than members of a distinct Christian religion. In particular, this chapter sets the stage for an examination of the impact that a belief in an imminent end had upon the status of women in early Christianity. This chapter will examine the nature of Jewish apocalypticism and the maintenance of this worldview by Christianity as seen in the Pauline epistles.

The term apocalypticism derives from the Greek word *apocalypsis* which means “revealing” or “unveiling” (Ehrman 2004: 244; Cohn 2001: 163). Apocalypticism was not a worldview that was unique to early Christianity. The belief in an end time was

actually a common belief system among some Jews during the second temple period. “Jews who subscribed to this worldview maintained that God had revealed to them the future, in which he would soon overthrow the forces of evil and establish his kingdom on earth” (Ehrman 2004: 244). Because the Christian apocalyptic worldview was adopted from Judaism, a brief examination of this Jewish worldview is beneficial for understanding its application and influence within early Christianity (Vielhauer & Strecker 1992: 543).

A common feature of Jewish apocalyptic writings “is that they purport to unveil to human beings secrets hitherto known only in heaven. Sometimes that secret knowledge is about the heavenly world, but chiefly it is about the destiny of this world” (Cohn 2001: 163). Though activities in the heavenly world and the earthly world are often perceived as interconnected, the historical experiences of the Jewish population explain why there is a focus on the earthly realm rather than the heavenly realm. The Jewish apocalyptic worldview originated from a long history of turbulence as well as political setbacks and is evident in numerous Jewish sources including the book of Daniel, books of Enoch, 1 Jubilees and the Dead Sea Scrolls (Ehrman 2004: 244-246). When interpreting Nebuchadnezzar’s troubling dream, for instance, Daniel makes the following statement: “and in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall this kingdom be left to another people. It shall crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever” (Daniel 2: 44).

The example of Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams indicates that among Jews there was a growing opposition against foreign rule which became widespread during the Hellenistic period (Cohn 2001: 166). This particular example also

suggests that the Jewish people, though subject to the rule of others, were looking forward to a period when all other kingdoms would be crushed. Cohn describes the use of apocalyptic material by the individuals of this period as though “the conquered nation turned to a distant past for strength to face a present and a future that they had no way of influencing” (Cohn 2001: 167). Therefore, the apocalyptic texts provided the Jewish population with support and encouragement during a period of oppression and persecution. Though the Jewish population had originally believed that their suffering was directly linked to their sins and disobedience of God, they came to realize that both sinners and righteous individuals were punished and suffered (Ehrman 2004: 244-245).

Over time, some Jews came to accept that their suffering was the result of the interference of another evil supernatural power: God did not punish individuals who followed his laws. “According to this new way of thinking, God was still in control of this world in some ultimate sense, but for unknown and mysterious reasons he had temporarily relinquished his control to the forces of evil that opposed him” (Ehrman 2004: 246). In an attempt to make sense of the current suffering of their people, the Jews argued that God would soon “reassert himself, destroying the forces of evil and [establishing] his people as rulers over the earth” (Ehrman 2004: 246). Pseudonymous apocalyptic texts present their revelations as received from God and indicative of a determined future where “there will be a final judgment. There will be an afterlife when human beings, including the resurrected dead, will receive their just rewards and punishments” (Cohn 2001: 164-165).

Though there appears to be a common apocalyptic system, the ideas and concepts presented by specific Jewish apocalyptic texts are by no means uniform or standardized.

In particular, the variations in the expected type of saviour among the Jewish apocalyptic texts are notable. Some apocalyptic texts, which develop ideas expressed by prophets such as Isaiah, describe a type of national Davidic king while others depict a redeemer figure or judge (Vielhauer & Strecker 2003: 554). In Isaiah, the author depicts the righteous reign of the coming king: "For a child has been born for us, a son given to us...His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom" (Isaiah 9: 6-7). In this text, the author claims that an individual will restore peace, justice and righteousness. Traits of a anointed king can also be found in Daniel where the author describes the vision of seeing "one like a human being...To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him...his kingdom is one that shall never be destroyed" (Daniel 7: 13-14). An examination of the Book of Daniel is interesting because it is possible to see the variations of saviour expectations in one text. In Daniel 2:7 and 12:1-4, the author claims that it is God or angels who will bring judgment and salvation. "At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall rise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is written in the book" (Dan. 12: 1-2).

A brief mention of the Essenes, a Jewish community not mentioned in the New Testament but alive during the development of the Jesus movement, is informative not only because the scrolls for which they are well known display their eschatological expectations but because the community behind the documents believed in two end-time figures (Ehrman 2004: 237-240). "In *The Manual of Discipline* (1 QS 9:10-11), a prophet, a royal messiah, and a priestly messiah are mentioned alongside one another"

(Segal 1986: 51). While all of the leaders played significant roles within the new community of redeemed Israelites, the priestly messiah possessed a higher status because the Essenes were a priestly community (Segal 1986: 49-51).

Despite variations in depictions of an end-time figure sent by God, there are common features that can be found among these Jewish apocalyptic texts. According to Ehrman, the four major tenets of the Jewish worldview of apocalypticism are dualism, pessimism, vindication and imminence (2004: 226-248):

1) Dualism: There are two fundamental components to all reality. “The forces of good were headed by God himself, the forces of evil by his superhuman enemy” (Ehrman 2004: 246). The concept of dualism also extends to the belief in a doctrine of two ages where history is dichotomized. The present age is deemed as evil and the future period where God will reassert himself is good. Vielhauer and Strecker elaborate on this idea and describe “this Age [as] temporary and perishable, [and] the Age to come [as] imperishable and eternal” (2003: 549). Furthermore, there is no continuity between the ages: the new age is transcendent and results from the complete annihilation of the present age (Vielhauer & Strecker 2003: 550).

2) Pessimism: Though in the future God would again rule and those who sided with him would benefit, the present did not show any reward because the contemporary world was dominated by evil forces (Ehrman 2004: 246). The authors of apocalyptic material focus upon the devaluation of the present period, a criticism of current moral decay and the final catastrophe which annihilates the

current world order and provides hope for the future (Vielhauer & Strecker 2003: 550-551).

3) Vindication: God's intervention entailed a universal redemption where all people, living or dead, would be judged. Eternal reward would be given to those who had taken God's side and eternal punishment would be given to everyone else (Ehrman 2004: 248).

4) Imminence: God's reassertion and the destruction of evil forces were expected at any moment. Because it was believed that the end of the world was imminent, people were encouraged to repent, remain faithful and endure sufferings (Ehrman 2004: 248; Vielhauer & Strecker 2003: 552- 554).

The early followers of Jesus differed from other Jews on certain details of the apocalyptic worldview. The most significant of these differences was the identification of Jesus as the expected end-time saviour figure. However, it would be misleading to claim that, as a sibling of other Jewish groups, the Jesus movement did not adopt other aspects of the Jewish worldview. After all, it is important to remember that Jesus and the first followers of the Jesus movement were Jewish and continued to follow the Jewish law. "Christians, including Gentile converts, regarded themselves as Jews- and until well into the second century other Jews also regarded them as Jews, albeit Jews with strange beliefs about the prophet Jesus of Nazareth" (Cohn 2001: 194). Examples of the influence of Judaism upon the Jesus movement can be found throughout the Gospels and the Pauline letters. Though Paul feels that, in relation to the Gentiles, the law is a curse and that faith is required to achieve salvation because the righteous live by faith and "Christ redeemed [us] from the curse of the law", he presents his conception of groups of Jesus-

followers in terms of them being a completion of Judaism (Gal. 3:11-14). The Jewish law is not presented by Paul as opposing the promises that God made to his people. “Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. [...] But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian” (Gal. 3: 23-25).

The shared belief systems and worldviews are also evident when one examines the importance that both Jews and early followers of Jesus placed upon the expectation of an imminent end during the first century. “The thought-world and temper of Jewish Apocalyptic were shared, to a large extent, by the early Christian movement” (Vielhauer & Strecker 1992: 558). It is not surprising that Christianity shared apocalyptic worldviews with other forms of Judaism because it is a form of Judaism.

The earliest available primary sources depict Jesus as an apocalyptic teacher who prophesies the imminent end of the present world. Paul, for instance, sketches out the role of Jesus as follows: “Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15: 24-26). Again, it is important to remember that Jesus and Paul were Jews and, therefore, their actions and beliefs should be examined and interpreted within their Jewish context. As will be seen in this chapter, the major tenets of Jewish apocalypticism can be detected within Jesus’ instructions and early Christian eschatological expectations. While this paper focuses upon the Pauline epistles, texts authored by a self-proclaimed apostle who never physically met Jesus, a brief examination of the representation of Jesus’ apocalyptic teachings in the Gospels will

place early Christian communities within the general context of first century Christianity and will provide insight into the interpretation of Jewish apocalypticism by the early Christians.

Evidence found in early Christian sources such as Q, Mark, Matthew and Luke indicates that Jesus predicted that the current world would come to an end and a kingdom of God would appear on earth. Cohn describes the Jesus that is depicted in Q and Mark as “obsessed with the coming of the kingdom and the elimination of the forces that obstruct it” (2001: 194). From the beginning of Mark, the reader is aware that something is coming in the future. While baptizing Jews in the Jordan river, John the Baptist foretells Jesus’ role by stating that “the one who is more powerful than I is coming after me” (Mark 1: 1-8). This theme is also carried and intensified in the Gospel of Matthew where the author warns the Pharisees of the wrath to come: “every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matt. 3: 7-10). The notion of fire and destruction, probably taken from Q, is carried further: “his winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire” (Matt. 3: 11-12).

The notion of a dualism of ages and the belief that God would bring a better future for believers and the annihilation of evil forces is consistent with Jewish apocalypticism. The Gospel of Matthew itself links the Christian tradition of apocalypticism with that found in Isaiah. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near. This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, ‘The voice of one crying out in the wilderness’” (Matt. 3: 2-3). The gospels depict Jesus as instructing his followers that the Son of Man would soon appear from heaven in order to judge both the

living and the dead. The use of the title “Son of Man” is more common in the Gospel of Mark than any of the other Gospels. Examples of the author referring to Jesus as the Son of Man include Jesus’ instruction to the disciples “to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead” (Mark 9: 9-13). Another example can be found when Jesus foretells the coming of the Son of Man towards the end of the Gospel. “Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven” (Mark 13: 26-27). This example can also be found in Matthew 24: 29-31 and Luke 21: 25-28.

According to Vielhauer and Strecker, it is the references to the “Kingdom of God” and the “Son of Man” that provide the strongest link with the apocalypse (1992: 569). The notions of future judgment, hope, redemption and vindication found in early Christian texts have parallels with Jewish apocalyptic tenets that have been examined within this paper. There is currently debate surrounding the term “Son of Man” and its relationship to Jewish texts and apocalypticism. While the exact relationship between the term used by Jesus, Jesus’ followers and the references within Jewish scriptures is uncertain, it is undeniable that the use of the term did not begin within early Christianity. Thus far, this chapter has demonstrated that the expectation of an end-time prophet or saviour figure was popular both before and during the period of Jesus’ life (Vielhauer & Strecker 1992: 569-570).

Charles illustrates that there is a significant difference in the manner in which first century Jews and Christians foresaw the future kingdom. While the members of some Christian groups came to expect a kingdom of heaven, the Jews expected a community

where divine will was “realized on earth” (1963: 370). However, this argument is debatable considering the primary evidence that suggests that some Christians believed in a realized eschatology where the kingdom had already been established on earth (Aune 1972). In 1 Cor. 2: 18-19, Paul reminds his audience that they have not yet reached salvation and not to place too much importance on human leaders: “Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God”.

Though the early Christian concept of a “Kingdom of God” that is realized through the future coming of Jesus may have been modified from Jewish traditions, the two-age doctrine and the imminent expectation are generally consistent with Jewish worldviews (Vielhauer & Strecker 1992: 570; Cohn 2001: 195). Like the Jewish belief system, those who supported God, repented and endured would participate in the future kingdom of God. The individuals who had come to accept Jesus’ teachings and had reformed their lifestyles would be saved while those who did not would be destroyed (Ehrman 2004: 250-273). “Being a member of Israel will not be enough to escape the coming judgment. People need to heed Jesus’ words, return to God, and follow his commandments before it’s too late” (Ehrman 2004: 251). Therefore, people were encouraged to prepare for the break in history by the divine force: those who prepared could be saved (Cohn 2001: 197).

Other early Christian documents, including the Pauline epistles, indicate that early Christian leaders and the Gentile Christian communities they instructed maintained these apocalyptic worldviews and prepared themselves for the return of Jesus (the Parousia). Primary evidence suggests that both Jewish and Gentile Christians adopted or maintained

Jewish beliefs and adapted them within their worldviews. This is not to say that all Christian communities or leaders adopted Jewish apocalypticism in the same manner.

There is scholarly debate surrounding Paul's application of apocalypticism within his instruction. Though the debate centers around the issues of realized eschatology vs. future expectations of an imminent end, there is little doubt that Paul was indebted to the concept of apocalypticism (Meeks 1983: 171-172). Despite the fact that Paul's instructions on the second coming of the messiah had an impact on early Christianity, later communities did not maintain Paul's worldview of an imminent end. As will be seen later in this paper, evidence found in later first century documents such as the Pastoral epistles suggest that the expectation of an imminent end dissipated and Christians began to prepare for a future that did not include the coming of the Kingdom within their lifetime. The comparison of end time beliefs within the Pauline and Pastoral documents is vital for the examination of the status of women within early communities. Though the issues of the Parousia and the status of women may appear disconnected, this paper will demonstrate that a worldview or expectation can impact or change a major component of a belief system.

The Pauline epistles do not focus upon the life, activities and teachings of Jesus and as a direct result lack elements of his eschatological teachings found in the Gospels. However, the Pauline epistles do not disappoint if one is looking for the maintenance of eschatological expectations and the belief in the imminent return of a saviour figure. The letters indicate that Paul and the Gentile communities that he instructed came to accept the Jewish tradition of an imminent end where they would be saved from oppression and evil. The importance that is placed upon apocalypticism throughout the Pauline epistles

suggests that this belief system would have impacted the manner in which early Christians conducted themselves and influenced the expectations they held for the future. Though, as suggested by Charles, there is no single eschatological system found in the Pauline epistles, his letters aptly demonstrate that he developed his apocalyptic visions from Judaism and adapted them to his belief that Jesus was the Messiah (1963: 437).

An examination of the undisputed Pauline epistles suggests that the letter to the community in Thessalonica contains the most numerous references to the approaching return of Jesus as the Messiah or “Christ”. Jesus’ imminent return is referred to throughout the letter (1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-11). Ehrman argues that this is indicative that the “most important belief about Jesus to the Thessalonians [...] was that he was soon to return from heaven in judgment on the earth” (2004: 307).

The importance of the expectation of the imminent return of Jesus is evident from the beginning of the text where Paul lays out the core of his teachings and the basis of his message for the letter (Ehrman 2004: 307). “For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead- Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming” (1 Thess. 1: 9-10).

Evidence in Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians also indicates that the members of the community understood why they expected Jesus to return and the implications of his return upon their early Christian group and the greater community that surrounded them. “This world was soon to end, when the God who created it returned to judge it; those who sided with God would be delivered, and those who did not would experience his wrath” (Ehrman 2004: 307). Not only would those who followed Paul’s instructions for the new

Jesus movement be saved, but those who did not or who had strayed from the path would be judged and forced to suffer.

Though the Christians at Thessalonica were Gentiles, their high eschatological expectations and the descriptions of the Parousia contained within the epistle written to them are best understood within the framework of Jewish apocalypticism. Firstly, in order to understand the nature of the eschatological belief system at Thessalonica, it is imperative that the source of their religious beliefs is explored. It would appear highly illogical for an individual who was attempting to promote salvation to teach a worldview or belief system that contradicted his own. Before he adopted the view that Jesus was the messiah and would return to save those who followed him, Paul claimed that he was advanced in Judaism, was zealous for the law and had persecuted the church (Gal. 1: 14; 1 Cor. 15: 9). Considering his comprehension and enthusiasm for Judaism as well as his earlier lifestyle as a Pharisee, it is not surprising that Paul would incorporate elements of Judaism within his instructions.

Paul's adaptation of Jewish eschatological elements is apparent in his allusive comments and the imagery that he uses when discussing the apocalypse in his letter to the Thessalonians. References to the return of Jesus as "sudden destruction [...like] labour pains come upon a pregnant woman" (1 Thess. 5: 3), the evil force as Satan who "blocked [their] way" (1 Thess. 2: 18) and the expectation of future suffering and persecutions as a sign for the future (1 Thess. 3: 3-5) can be found within Jewish apocalyptic texts and are best understood within a Jewish framework (Ehrman 2004: 308). The community's belief in an impending end, an element consistently found in Jewish apocalypticism, is illustrated in their concern for the members in their community

that have died (Cohn 2001: 207). Paul responds to their concern by stating that those who have died will precede those who are still living: “the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thes. 4: 13-18). This incidental evidence suggests that the Thessalonians fully accepted the belief in an imminent return but became anxious when members of their community began to die before Jesus had returned. Clearly, the Thessalonians believed that the Parousia would occur during their lifetime. The notion of an imminent end would only have been encouraged by Paul who reminds the Thessalonians that they “know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night” (1 Thes. 5: 2). Readers are left with the impression that there is very little time to prepare for the Parousia and the establishment of God’s final kingdom. Ehrman argues that the evidence found in 1 Thessalonians suggests that “Paul’s proclamation was designed to transform the Thessalonian pagans into Jewish apocalypticists, who believed that Jesus was the key to the end of the world” (2004: 308).

While there is much information about early Christian communities and eschatological expectations in 1 Thessalonians, Meeks argues that the use of apocalyptic language is commonly found throughout the undisputed Pauline epistles. This consistent use of apocalyptic language and imagery within the Pauline epistles indicates that the worldview was “intelligible and important to his followers” (1983: 171). However, this does not suggest that all communities viewed the imminent end in the same manner, understood Paul’s message in the same fashion, and held the same eschatological expectations. Nor does it suggest that Paul’s message itself was never adapted or changed. Besides the previously examined evidence found in Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians, this paper will examine the apocalyptic language used by Paul in 1

Corinthians to encourage members of the Jesus movement, create a sense of unity, provide stability to current lifestyles and legitimize new visions (Meeks 1983: 171-180).

Like the letter to the Thessalonians, Paul's first letter to the Corinthians suggests a belief in an imminent end and a lack of concern with the long term future. While 1 Corinthians does not appear to provide as much explicit information regarding the Parousia and apocalypticism as 1 Thessalonians, this does not suggest that the belief in an imminent return of the saviour was not important to this community. This letter provides valuable insight into both Paul's belief system and the interpretation of his instructions by the Corinthian community. As the letter indicates, Paul is responding to actual circumstances and concerns of the community. This letter is important for the interpretation of both Paul's beliefs and the actual beliefs of the Corinthians. Furthermore, the letter assists in the modern interpretation of Paul's responses and instructions regarding the "spiritual ones" (*pneumatikoi*) and women. It will be seen later that both of these responses are relevant for understanding how Paul understood the apocalypse and the community's perception of the end times. In actuality, this text provides valuable information regarding the discipline that is expected of the Corinthian community by Paul as a result of his expectation of an imminent end. Furthermore, 1 Corinthians also provides information about the actual belief systems of the Corinthian people.

The notion that the present world will pass away expediently can be found in 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul describes the mystery of the Parousia and the requirements for salvation. "We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet" (1 Cor. 15: 51-52; Charles 1963: 446). Of particular

significance in this chapter is Paul's concern with the resurrection of the dead. Chapter 15 suggests that some Corinthians have come to accept the belief that those who have died will not be bodily resurrected upon the return of Jesus: "Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?" (1 Cor. 15: 12). "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ" (1 Cor. 15: 20-22).

It appears as if some Corinthians, like the Thessalonians, have become concerned with the period of time that they have already waited for the Parousia. Furthermore, Paul's instructions suggest that some Corinthians have begun to act immorally because of this concern. "If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.' Do not be deceived: 'Bad company ruins good morals.' Come to a sober and right mind, and sin no more; for some people have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame" (1 Cor. 15: 32-34). Paul tends to the concerns and actions of some of the Corinthians by reinforcing the instruction that all believers will be resurrected. Chapter 15 also makes use of the Jewish apocalyptic tenet of dualism and the belief that evil forces must be annihilated. "Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For 'God has put all things in subjection under his feet'" (1 Cor. 15: 24-27). This passage appears to encourage patience for the resurrection but never suggests that patience will have to be held much longer.

Paul's heavy criticism of the *pneumatikoi* (a group of people claiming superior spiritual status) in Corinth aptly demonstrates his belief that salvation rested in the future and had not been realized in the present (1 Cor. 4). Apparently, some Corinthians believed that they had begun to enjoy the fruits of salvation: "Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Quite apart from us you have become kings!" (1 Cor. 4: 8). Paul attempts to correct the behaviour and beliefs of the Corinthians by reminding them that evil forces will remain in the world until the return of Jesus. As such, the Corinthian community, like that at Thessalonica, should expect hardships, persecution and suffering (1 Cor. 4: 9-13). Evidently, here we are witnessing the fact that some Christians have different perceptions of the apocalypse than their teacher.

The concern for the impending and imminent future is also apparent in 1 Corinthians 7 where Paul discusses marriage, sexuality and social status. Firstly, Paul states that individuals are to live the lives that they have been assigned: "Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called" (1 Cor. 7: 17, 20, 24). While it appears possible to interpret this instruction as maintaining the importance of popular Greco-Roman social structures, Paul indicates that it is the time-factor and not the traditional social structure that is important. Like the instructions to the Thessalonians, Paul reminds the Corinthians that "the appointed time has grown short [...]. For the present form of the world is passing away" (1 Cor. 7:29-31). Paul uses the example of a slave to demonstrate that there is no need to change one's social status because the end is imminent (1 Cor. 7: 21-24). According to Paul, because the world is expected to come to an end at any moment, there is neither the need nor the time to change one's lifestyle, social status or

present circumstances unless it is to repent and follow Paul's message about Jesus (1 Cor. 7:21).

Paul's letter to the Corinthians provides us with information regarding the impact and influence that high eschatological expectations had on a community. The apocalyptic beliefs of both Paul and the Corinthian community directly influenced the conduct, social and political expectations of this early Christian community. "Such was the faith of the early Christians, and it shaped their view of themselves" (Cohn 2001: 208). Cohn further explains that the ethical standards which the early Christians set for themselves exemplify their readiness for an eschatological end where they will be prepared to enter the kingdom (2001: 209).

Though in some regards, early Christian communities can be considered as revolutionary because they provided individuals with new opportunities, we lack evidence that the apostle sought to achieve a social or political revolution where all current social constructs would be unraveled. Not only does Paul resist permanent changes in Greco-Roman social status structures in 1 Corinthians 7, but in Romans he instructs Christians to be subject to the governing authorities because they have been appointed by God (Rom. 13: 1-7). As was previously suggested, the new opportunity for salvation of all believers in the Jesus movement did not fully extend into the social, economic or political spheres because there simply was no time or need for such an earthly revolutionary movement. The revolution, according to Paul, was to occur after the Parousia.

Paul did not encourage a social revolution. However, this does not mean that some individuals, including women, were not able to achieve new roles of power or

influence within their religious communities. Because the Pauline epistles were incidental letters that responded to actual circumstances, some instructions may have been attempts by Paul to correct behaviour. It is important to remember that the Pauline letters, and all early Christian documents for that matter, represent the opinions of the authors and do not necessarily accurately depict the attitudes and beliefs of the general community. Furthermore, it is also significant that while the letters or texts provide us with information regarding the leaders' instructions, they do little to inform us of how the audience interpreted such instructions.

This chapter has provided a survey of eschatological beliefs in early Christianity and has examined the roots of this worldview. While not directly examining issues surrounding women and their participation within early Christian communities, this chapter provides the necessary background for examining how eschatology influenced the roles women played and the status they were accorded. As we shall see, high eschatological expectations in early Christian groups led to the development of new opportunities for women as long as their religious communities were not perceived as suspicious by both insiders and outsiders. Before I address this key issue regarding apocalypticism and women, a discussion of women and gender in the Greco-Roman world generally is in order.

CHAPTER 2

Women in the Greco-Roman World

Early Christian communities did not exist in a vacuum and it is unrealistic to assume that Christians were completely disassociated from Gentile practices because in most circumstances they were at one time or another “pagans”. Furthermore, it is important to remember that early Christian groups consisted of individuals who converted from previous religious practices and did not instantly evolve into a distinct community without contact with the outside world. This argument is supported by the content of both biblical and non-canonical texts which suggests that many early Christian converts were Gentiles that did not abandon their entire social and belief systems when they joined the Christian community. Early Christians continued to be heavily influenced by their Greco-Roman background and continued to interact with non-Christians.

In order to properly examine the activities, influence and participation of women in the Pauline and Pastoral communities, it is necessary to examine the general status of women in antiquity as well as traditional Greco-Roman preconceptions and values. Because early Christians were influenced by their surrounding societies, it is important to understand which traditions, practices and beliefs affected the manner in which they practiced their belief in Jesus. Furthermore, by understanding common Greco-Roman perceptions of women in antiquity in relation to those found in the Pauline epistles, it may become possible to discover reasons why some women may have joined or been attracted to the Jesus movement. For example, if the majority of women were oppressed by Greco-Roman society and not permitted to fully or even partially participate within their communities, they may have been attracted to a religion that permitted them greater roles. While this methodology does not permit for an examination of the purpose of the

changing roles of women, it certainly acknowledges that such a difference existed and provides a starting point from which to examine the influences of eschatology.

Problems with examining the status of women in antiquity begin with the methodology of using modern concepts. When applying modern concepts to historical situations of the past, we assume that people in antiquity commonly accepted these concepts. However, a thorough examination of antiquity indicates that ancient people would not have understood the definitions or meanings of specifically modern terminology. For example, it is not advisable to use the terms “feminist” or “feminism” when examining the participation of women in early Christianity even though it appears that they played a more active role in their communities. “Feminism” did not exist in the Greco-Roman world and individuals in antiquity would not have understood “feminism” as modern individuals understand the term.

Currently, there is also scholarly debate surrounding the use of the term gender or typifying gender roles when examining the male/female divide in antiquity. It is true that people in the Greco-Roman world would not have understood this concept in the same manner as modern individuals. However, this concept should not be avoided like the term “feminism” because gender is a category and not a social movement. A nuanced scholarly use of the term gender is beneficial because it demonstrates that, though the concept was not employed in antiquity, a gender divide based on sexuality was in place. Using the concept of gender may help scholars to make better sense of ancient cultural behaviour in modern terms.

A historical study of the general status that was accorded to women in the Greco-Roman world is beneficial because it provides us with a starting point with which to

examine the roles that early Christian women played in their communities. Without a basis for comparison, it is impossible to examine how the roles of women in the Pauline and Pastoral communities were similar to, or different from, those of women in the general population. I will use the comparative method to examine how men and women were generally perceived in the Greco-Roman world. This methodology will also be used to compare the perception of women and the statuses attributed to women in Greco-Roman and early Christian communities. General concepts from antiquity such as the public / private divide and honour / shame dichotomies will help us to examine the nature of ancient social structures. This examination will also be useful for a comparison of the depiction of women and female roles within specific Pauline and Pastoral texts with that of overarching ancient gender structures.

“The values of honour and shame have played [...] a prominent role in anthropological studies of Mediterranean regions” (MacDonald 1996: 27). Both Margaret Y. MacDonald and David Cohen examine the reciprocal nature of these concepts and argue that the relationship of honour and shame had a direct impact on what we call gender distinctions and expectations (MacDonald 1996: 27-30; Cohen 1996: 136-142). “In general, anthropological studies have identified honour as a value [that was] embodied by males and shame [...] as embodied by women” (MacDonald 1996: 28). Furthermore, the perceived embodiment of honour by men and shame by women directly impacted the manner in which families and households were either respected or disrespected. Therefore, a woman who was believed to embody shame directly brought dishonour to her family while a woman who lived according to gender standards did not dishonour the male members of her household. In the Greco-Roman world men believed

that women were unable to “demonstrate an appropriate sense of shame”, to guard their chastity and to act in an appropriate manner (MacDonald 1996: 29-31). As such, it was perceived as necessary to protect women from themselves and men as well as forcefully maintain the division and separation of women from the public world in order to defend the honour or reputation of the male members of their families (Macdonald 1996: 28-29). Of particular importance was the fact that “Mediterranean women [were] valued especially for their chastity, an immaterial source” (MacDonald 1996: 28). A violation of a woman’s chastity was not only seen as an attack on the woman, but more importantly upon the household to which she belonged (Cohen 1996: 137). By controlling women, men believed that they could control their own honour.

The Greco-Roman belief that female behaviour must be monitored and controlled by men in order to secure honour and household integrity has been linked with the dichotomous division of society into public and private spheres (MacDonald 1996: 29-30). Men and women became associated with separate spheres and were expected to act within the realm or limitations of such spheres in order to maintain and preserve traditional order (Cohen 1996: 136-137). The ideal seclusion of women within the private/domestic realm was believed to guarantee men with the security and maintenance of their honour. “The separation of women from men and the man’s public sphere within this protected domain is the chief means by which sexual purity is both guarded and demonstrated to the community” (Cohen 1996: 137). The Greco-Roman household unit was concerned not only with the actual activities of the female members of their family, but also with outward appearances and criticism. “As a rule, women took no part in public life” and did not participate in activities deemed appropriate for men (Clark 1996:

49). Because a woman's participation within public life was limited or ideally banned, they were not granted the same civic duties or privileges as men. "Women did not vote, did not serve as *iudices*, were not senators or magistrates or holders of major priesthoods. They did not, as a rule, speak in courts" (Clark 1996: 49). Because a man's sexual activities were not directly linked with family honour and could not bring shame to his household, men were permitted and encouraged to engage in public matters. "While men spent most of their day in public areas such as the marketplace and the gymnasium, respectable women remained at home" (Pomeroy 1995: 79). Any access that women had to the public realm was done through the back door: "women exercised their influence through men and not over them" (Sterling 1995: 72). The reasons that were publicly given for the division and distinction between the male and female population included the rationalization that "women were alleged to be fragile and fickle, and therefore in need of protection. [...] They were emotional, irrational, and intellectually less capable than men" (Clark 1996: 50).

Though each community in antiquity was unique in its own right, evidence suggests that an overarching social and gender structure impacted all people in the Greco-Roman world. Women and men were not treated in the same fashion because notions of gender equality did not exist in antiquity. The general preconceptions that were propagated about the roles and capabilities of women in antiquity by the male population resulted in women being given both low political and social statuses as well as fewer opportunities than men (Cohen 1996: 134). In both ancient Greece and Rome, women were treated as inferior beings that were dependent upon men in all aspects of their lives (Cohen 1996: 134-135; Clark 1996: 36-53; Lefkowitz 1983: 50). Cohen suggests that

women were not treated as individuals, but rather as slaves and children (1996: 134). This argument suggests that the general attitude toward women held by men consisted of the belief that women could not properly take care of themselves nor were they able to subsist without the guidance and control of the male population.

Though women were not granted access to the highly valued and honoured roles found within public life, this does not suggest that they were not given an important domestic role. The main role and function of women in society was to “bear legitimate offspring” (Sterling 1995: 66). Men could not biologically fulfill this role and as such women were perceived as necessary for the maintenance of the household and family unit. Procreation not only served personal goals, but was also perceived as a civic duty. The birth of children was necessary in order to maintain the population (Roetzel 2000: 232). Women were thus identified by their roles as mothers and their ability to reproduce legitimate heirs. A woman who did neither was perceived in a negative fashion by both family and society. “The life and identity of women in this period are defined by their sexual and family roles, whereas men are defined by their roles in citizenship, landownership, and client systems, so that success and failure cannot be gauged on one scale for both” (Wire 1988: 309).

Because women were ideally restricted to the household domain they were generally not given the opportunity to participate in public life fully or assert themselves in public (Pomeroy 1995: 79). If such activity was attempted by women, they were perceived in a negative manner because “in popular belief, not only was self-assertion on a woman’s part regarded as self-indulgence and licentious; crowds of women were considered a public menace” (Lefkowitz 1983: 56- 60). The involvement of women in the

public realm was perceived by men as threatening social order and therefore needed to be restricted.

Cohen warns us to beware of confusing the separation of men and women with the “seclusion and isolation of women” in the Hellenistic world (Cohen 1996: 140). While there is ample evidence that suggests that women’s activities were limited by male expectations in antiquity, there is also evidence of women participating in the public realm. It is important to remember that while belief in the necessity of the private/public dichotomy was real, the division was an ideal association and was not always possible due to the necessity to work among women in the lower classes (Pomeroy 1995: 79-80).

Evidence suggests that women were capable of influencing the public sphere even if they could not fully participate in public civic life. As was previously suggested, women had the opportunity to influence the male members of the household and at times were given the opportunity to act in civic matters. Gregory E. Sterling shows that some wealthy Roman women even acted as benefactors or patrons to members of their community in exchange for honour (1995: 70). There are several examples of wealthy Roman women acting as benefactors to the Jewish community. In an inscription from western Asia Minor, a woman is honoured for erecting an assembly hall and enclosure of the courtyard. In exchange for her substantial donations, she is given the privilege of sitting in the seat of honour of the synagogue (*CIJ* 738; Kraemer 1988: 112; Murray 2004: 16). Another Roman woman named Julia Severa seems to have restored a synagogue in the 50s or 60s CE (Trebilco 1991: 59; Murray 2004: 15-26; *CIJ* 766).

Women also gained access to the public world by participating in religious festivals and maintaining personal relationships (Cohen 1996: 138-139). “While it is

undeniable that women did not operate in the public and political spheres in the way that men did, it does not necessarily follow that they did not have public, social and economic spheres of their own” (Cohen 1996: 134). Many primary sources indicate that both men and women participated in religious festivals: women were not excluded from religious celebrations. Of significance is the ability of women to achieve the roles of priestess or leader as well as participate in female-only festivals or celebrations. For example, at Elis athletic contests were held for and organized by women in honour of Hera (Kraemer 1988: 35; *Elis* I.16.2-8).

Considering the evidence for the participation of women in religious festivals, in religious leadership positions and in acting as benefactors to religious groups, it is necessary to consider that a discrepancy may have existed between the actual participation of women within the Greco-Roman world and the ideal restrictions that were placed upon them by men. The examples that have been provided indicate that women were able to achieve some levels of public participation within their community even though attempts were made to limit their roles to the private sphere. Therefore, the restrictions placed upon women are best perceived as ideals that influenced the manner in which women were treated by men. These ideals were not necessarily strict boundaries that denied women all opportunities.

Now that I have established the importance of the apocalyptic worldview for Pauline Christianity and have provided a framework for understanding the status of women within the world of early Christianity, the next chapter will proceed to examine references to women in the Pauline epistles. While considering the evidence that was examined in this chapter, I will establish what type of status was accorded to women in

early Christian communities in comparison with the status that was accorded to women in the general Greco-Roman world.

CHAPTER 3

Women in Paul's Epistles

“Few who know him are neutral about Paul. Some love him; others hate him. And so it has always been” (Roetzel 1998: 1). While at times Paul's circumstantial instructions appear to be straightforward and beneficial for the entire community, at other times they appear to have the potential of “ruffling people's feathers” and disrupting socially acceptable norms. As has previously been examined with the scholarly examination of Paul's eschatological expectations, the Pauline epistles are complex documents that have been interpreted in numerous ways. Currently, there is debate among the general public and scholars regarding the status that Paul accorded to women in antiquity. Roetzel states that while the majority of scholars and students of Paul hold the opinion that the apostle oppresses women, others see him as a liberator who gave women in antiquity social rights, a higher status and the ability to participate more fully in religious practices (1998: 1-3, 182-190).

In this chapter I will begin by discussing real, named women in Pauline groups. In particular, I will examine their status and discuss how Paul's prescriptions involving women provide further glimpses into both Paul's belief system and the actual practices of real women. This chapter will explore the “actual” status and participation of women in the early Pauline communities by examining both the direct and indirect evidence of the activities of women in the Pauline epistles. This investigation will reveal the manner in which women could and did participate in the Pauline communities as well as the socio-historical situations to which the Pauline letters respond. This evidence will be compared with the experiences of women from the general Greco-Roman world in order to demonstrate that women who belonged to such early Christian communities had the

opportunity to participate more fully within their religious group and thereby crossed some traditional Greco-Roman gender boundaries.

This chapter will suggest that it is not possible to take all biblical evidence at face-value because the texts are prescriptive rather than accurately indicative. Sometimes there is a discrepancy between textual instructions and restrictions placed on women, on the one hand, and the “actual” status accorded to women and their roles within their communities, on the other. Therefore, there is a need to read between the lines in order to get an accurate description of the communities and the situations to which Paul is responding.

This chapter will also provide general background on women in early Pauline communities. In order to examine how a worldview affected a group of individuals, it is necessary to explore the status that they are accorded by both their communities and their leaders. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is not to examine apocalypticism. This chapter will explore the status of women who belonged to Pauline groups and therefore also presumably came to accept Pauline eschatology in some manner.

While not yet examining the purpose for this increase in the participation of women within early Pauline communities, this chapter will provide the necessary background to understand how high eschatological beliefs changed the manner in which individual women acted and were treated by their male peers. By comparing the evidence for the status of women in early Christianity provided in this chapter with that of later Pastoral communities, it becomes possible to see how high eschatological beliefs enhanced the status of women within their communities.

Examining the status that women held in early Christian communities is a complex undertaking because the instructions that are provided for proper female conduct in the New Testament are not consistent throughout. For example, while the Pauline epistles list some women as co-workers or leaders within early Christian communities, deuterio-Pauline material is used to support “the view of Paul as a male chauvinist” (Roetzel 1998: 182-183). Furthermore, the study of women in Pauline communities is complicated because the undisputed Pauline letters do not treat women in a consistent fashion nor does the primary evidence suggest that women from different communities responded to Paul’s instructions in the same fashion. For example, Phoebe is commended as a deaconess in Romans 16:1-2, but women are instructed to be silent and submissive in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. The study of women within Pauline communities is then further complicated when pseudonymous texts such as the Pastoral epistles and extra-biblical texts are taken into account. Some texts or traditions like “The Acts of Paul and Thecla” completely contradict the views presented in documents like 1-2 Timothy because women are depicted as active, influential and powerful within the Christian community (MacDonald 1983: 19).

The manner in which a scholar approaches and examines primary evidence greatly affects the results that are unearthed. As feminism and women’s studies have become socially acceptable and scholars have investigated such studies in an academic setting, it has become evident that past research was not always accurate. Furthermore, recent research suggests that the representation of women in ancient documents does not necessarily reflect lived realities in antiquity. Until recently, when attempting to examine the lives of women in early Christianity, scholars focused their research solely on biased

perceptions and ancient texts that were written by men. MacDonald argues that “instead of concentrating primarily on male attitudes toward women as has been done in the past, the focus should shift to reconstructing the lives of women” (1999: 199). This approach requires that scholars research the participation and status of women within early Christian groups without focusing on the few key passages that were used to subordinate women in antiquity and are deemed as chauvinist in the present (MacDonald 1999: 199-200). While many of the examples used to support such an argument are actually from the Pastoral epistles and not Pauline, evidence is also taken from the Pauline letters. “Women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church” (1 Cor. 14: 34-35). An examination of the rhetorical style that Paul uses as well as the consideration of the situations to which he is responding will shed light upon his instructions, the intended audience and the social structures of the Pauline communities (Wire 1990: 181).

Because the Pauline letters are the earliest available Christian documents, they provide scholars with the earliest descriptions of Christian communities, theologies and social worldviews available. For this reason, Pauline literature is a valuable resource for the examination of the activities of women and their expectations within early Christian communities. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians is loaded with references to women and incorporates more instructions regarding the behaviour and expectations of women than any other authentic Pauline epistle. For this reason, this chapter will spend a significant amount of time examining 1 Corinthians, Paul’s instructions to the community and the situations to which he is responding.

In 1 Corinthians Paul claims that “it has been reported to [him] by Chloe’s people that there are quarrels among [them]” (1 Cor. 1: 11). This brief reference to Chloe is not pertinent to understanding Paul’s instruction on divisions and quarrels within the Corinthian community, nor does the reference provide readers with any direct evidence regarding Chloe’s status. However, the inclusion of Paul’s source of information does provide scholars with some valuable indirect evidence regarding a female Christian and her position within the community. “The very phrase ‘Chloe’s people’ offers a clue as to her status in society at large and possibly also in the Corinthian community” (MacDonald 1999: 200). Though Paul’s reference to Chloe and her people does not suggest that she had the same opportunities as men in antiquity, it does suggest that she was able to exert some form of influence within her religious community (MacDonald 1999: 200-201).

Firstly, it is interesting to note that, in the case of Corinth, it is a woman who is alerting Paul of problems, divisions and quarrels within the Christian community (Wire 1990: 41). These verses in 1 Corinthians 1:11-17 serve the function of revealing “that Paul knows more about what is going on in Corinth than what he was allowed to know in the letter written to him” by the Corinthians (Witherington 1995: 98). Without the information that was provided to Paul by “Chloe’s people”, he would not have been aware of the divisions regarding religious affiliation. Chloe serves as a valuable resource to Paul. The fact that Paul instructs the Corinthians on an issue brought to him by “Chloe’s people” suggests that he trusts Chloe as a reliable individual and does not exclude information from his letter because the source is a woman (Wire 1990: 41). Wire proposes that it is also possible that Paul uses Chloe’s name in order to “add credibility [to the] description” in his letter (1990: 41). If this interpretation is correct, it seems

probable that people within the Corinthian community perceived Chloe as a credible individual. Ben Witherington argues that Chloe was probably a prominent businesswoman from Corinth and her people are most likely to be slaves that acted as business agents (1995: 99). This example of Chloe suggests that some of the women that had contact with Paul and the early Christian movement had the opportunity to influence their communities and were not always given secondary roles to men.

While there does appear to be a tendency among scholars to accept Chloe as an influential member of the Corinthian community, there is a possibility that the reference to her people by Paul was meant to include only her immediate family. While at first this suggestion may appear to lower Chloe's status within the general community, a brief examination of the context of Greco-Roman families suggests otherwise. A family in the Greco-Roman world did not simply include one's immediate family. This designation of family could also refer to Chloe's entire household which would have included extended family, "her slaves, freed-persons, or dependent workers" (MacDonald 1999: 200). MacDonald suggests that Paul's reference to the message carriers as "Chloe's people" could indicate "that she was the head of the household" (MacDonald 1999: 200). Regardless of whether the reference to "Chloe's people" was meant to include members of an extended household or members of her immediate family, she was an influential or powerful member of the community who had the financial resources to maintain a household and pay for the travel of "her people".

Though Paul's letter to the Romans does not include many instructions that are directed specifically at women, he does mention several women by name in the last chapter of the epistle. Included in this list of prominent Christians are Prisca who is noted

for risking her life for Paul as well as Junia who was imprisoned with Paul and is given the title “apostle” (Rom. 16:3-7). Of particular interest is the recommendation or commendation of “[their] sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae” (Rom. 16:1). Paul instructs the community to treat Phoebe in a welcoming and hospitable manner because “she has been a benefactor of many and of [himself] as well” (Rom. 16:2). Like the reference to Chloe in 1 Corinthians, this passage does not provide readers with direct evidence about the status or communal expectations of women in the Roman community. However, these passages, unlike the previously examined brief reference to “Chloe’s people”, provide descriptive information about an active woman who belonged to an early Christian community and about her designated title.

The characteristics that are attributed to Phoebe in Romans 16 provide readers with valuable evidence that is indicative of the levels of participation which women could obtain within Pauline communities. “Paul’s description of Phoebe [...] implies that she played an important part in the development of the Pauline mission” (MacDonald 1999: 208). Though the exact meaning of the word “deacon” in the early church is unclear, the reference to Phoebe as a deacon, a title generally only attributed to men, indicates that she held a substantial and influential role in the early Christian community (Walters 1995: 182-184; MacDonald 1999: 208). Walters argues that “it is rather obvious that the terms Paul used to commend Phoebe are no different from those he would have used if he had been commending a man” (Walters 1995: 172). Like the reference to Chloe in 1 Corinthians, the commendation of Phoebe in Romans demonstrates that Paul did not limit positions of power and influence to male members of the church. While not suggesting that Phoebe was able to achieve gender equality in the early church, her title

demonstrates that she was able to achieve and be recognized under a title that was most usually used to describe men. This suggestion also applies to the previously mentioned Junia who is designated as prominent among the apostles. Considering the fact that Paul feels the need to constantly defend his title as apostle, it appears unlikely that he would use the term loosely to describe another person.

That Paul also refers to Phoebe as a benefactor (*prostotes*) to himself and other Christians is also significant for understanding her role within the early church. The title demonstrates that she acted as a type of patron for numerous individuals including both men and women (Romans 16:2; MacDonald 1999: 208-209). In fact, Paul recommends that people in the Roman community welcome and assist Phoebe because she has acted as a patron and assisted, served or helped the church (Rom. 16:1-2). The fact that Phoebe gave Paul and the early church financial support suggests that she obtained “a significant level of both economic means and social independence” (Castelli 1999: 224). While the role of benefactor was not limited to men in the Greco-Roman world, traditional social and economic structures facilitated men’s adoption of this position more so than women’s. Therefore, not only was Phoebe successful in obtaining an influential title within the early church, but she was also acknowledged as providing the community with the type of support that was most often provided by men in antiquity.

It is of interest that Paul recommends Phoebe to all members of the Roman community: both men and women are expected to follow Paul’s instructions regarding the deacon and “welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints” (Rom 16:2). Though Paul does not describe Phoebe’s actual role within the church, his reference to her suggests that she ministered “powerfully [...] in behalf of a variety of people- not only

women” (Walters 1995: 190). Though the position of female teacher or instructor was not uncommon in the Greco-Roman world, generally it was socially acceptable for women to teach other women. Instructors or religious leaders for the male population tended to be other men. Walters argues that though it is unclear whether Phoebe obtained authority within the church, she would have been perceived as a religious leader by both men and women within the community (Walters 1995: 185). With this leadership position, Phoebe would have been able to exert some forms of influence over the women and men of her religious community (Walters 1995: 184-185).

Paul’s letter to the Philippians also provides readers with indirect information regarding roles and levels of participation among women. In the final chapter of the text, Paul urges both Euodia and Syntyche “to be of the same mind in the Lord” (Phil. 4:2). Though the obvious aim of this reference is to resolve a dispute between these two women, the reason behind the instruction reveals more. Not only are Euodia and Syntyche members of the religious community, but Paul claims that these women “have struggled beside [him] in the work of the gospel” (Phil. 4:3). Both MacDonald and Pollard argue that these passages indicate that female missionaries worked alongside Paul, with men and on their own without a male counterpart or companion (1999: 204-206). Pollard takes this argument a step further and argues that the reference to Euodia and Syntyche “seems to indicate full participation [of women] in the missionary effort” (1995: 275). Though there is no indication that women were prominent leaders or ministers within Philippi, their participation in evangelizing the community as missionaries assisted in the spread of the Jesus movement into the outside world (Pollard 1995: 280; MacDonald 1999: 205).

I suggest that since Greco-Roman society was divided into public and private dichotomies where women were ideally restricted to the domestic realm, the attempt to convert gentile women in the public world would have had limitations. Because early Christian membership extended beyond the male population and therefore also into the private domain, there was a need to engage individuals who had access to the private realm.

References to missionary work performed by women permits scholars to surmise how early Christians received access to the private realm of the household. Female missionaries would have been able to educate women within the household simply because they were women. Considering the nature of the private/public dichotomy that was idealized in antiquity and the belief that women needed to be protected from both themselves and the male population at large, it seems unlikely that male missionaries would have had easy access to the private sphere or potential female converts. This indirect evidence indicates that women played an important missionary role within the early Christian movement, were granted the ability to travel, worked alongside Paul and other men and assisted in the spread of Christianity in ways that were not possible for men because of their ability to access the private realm.

This brief examination of specific references to women in the Pauline letters indicates that “women were prominent members of the community and acted as leaders” (MacDonald 1999: 210). The examples of Chloe, Phoebe, Junia, Euodia and Syntyche suggest that women were able to achieve significant levels of influence, recognition and respect within early Christian communities. “The references to specific women in Paul’s letters indicate that women’s leadership in this early period was neither different than that

of men nor of lesser value to the community than the contributions of men” (MacDonald 1999: 210). Like men, women made theological, social and economic contributions to the early Christian movement and as such can be considered as key players in the development of their religious communities.

Despite the fact that primary evidence indicates that women such as Chloe, Phoebe and Junia were able to achieve significant roles within the early Christian movement, the argument that all women had the opportunity to achieve roles of high status may appear somewhat optimistic. While certain leadership positions were available to Christian women, there is also evidence that indicates that others were only available to men (Pollard 1995: 280). Pollard attempts to raise doubt regarding feminist findings of equality based on the use of indirect evidence. He argues that “suggestions that [women] were prominent leaders in the Philippian church are without foundation” (1995: 280). However, scholars such as Pollard base their arguments solely on explicit statements and fail to examine the evidence and purpose behind the letters. While it is important not to get beyond ourselves and conclude that women were provided with a form of equal participation within early Christianity, the references to women as co-workers, deacons and apostles do suggest that women were prominent within early Christian communities and could achieve levels of religious authority. Furthermore, if one considers that women were underrepresented in texts, it is also possible that women played a greater role in early Christian communities than has been previously assumed.

Beyond the specific references to individuals within the Pauline epistles, Paul’s letters also contain preaching and instructions for all members of the early communities being addressed. It is therefore not surprising that these letters would also include general

instructions and information regarding the activities and the expected behaviour of women. An examination of this material is crucial for understanding the role that eschatology played in the status of women because it provides evidence for the majority of women in early Christian communities. Secondly, because the Pauline letters contain the earliest written evidence of Christian communities, they provide a starting point from which we can examine the changes in the status of women as well as the evolution of the worldview of eschatology.

When it comes to examining Paul's prescriptions, MacDonald argues that scholars need "to see through Paul's teachings on how women *should* behave in order to catch a glimpse of how women *actually* behaved" (1999: 211). Early Christian texts, including a leader's instructions and theological statements are prescriptive and do not necessarily describe historical situations in an accurate fashion. Though Paul does not always describe the behaviour he is attempting to correct, a thorough examination of the evidence reveals that women in early Pauline communities may not have acted in the manner which Paul had expected or wanted. It is therefore imperative that we examine both Paul's instructions regarding the behaviour of women in order to discover the role he attributed to women in early Christian communities as well as explore the actual activities of these women in an attempt to discover how these communities responded to the Pauline message.

Because Pauline literature is occasional and responds to specific problems within particular communities, it is likely that Paul is responding to a particular incidental problem in 1 Corinthians 7 (Baumert 1996: 25). This argument is supported by the opening verse in 1 Corinthians 7 where Paul states that the chapter concerns "the matters

about which [they] wrote” (1 Cor. 7:1). According to Baumert, either Paul is responding to a question that the Corinthians posed or is attempting to change their beliefs and behaviour (1996: 23-25). An initial reading of 1 Corinthians 7 might suggest that Paul instructs the Corinthians that gender equality should exist and that it is preferable for both men and women to remain celibate (MacDonald 1996: 133). However, an in depth reading of the relevant passages and a consideration of historical circumstances suggests that Paul is not presenting “a systematic anthropology or ethics” (Baumert 1996: 23).

1 Corinthians 7 not only deals with the activities and behaviour of women within their early Christian community, but also addresses the issue of sexuality and the choice of some Corinthians to abstain from sexual relationships (Baumert 1996: 27). The choice of celibacy by some early Christians would not have “always been understood by the others” because Greco-Roman society centered on the ideal of the family (Baumert 1996: 27). Evidence for Paul’s preference for a celibate lifestyle can be found throughout 1 Corinthians. Paul claims that if unmarried or widowed women can practice sexual self-control, it is better for them to remain unmarried and focus on matters of God (1 Cor. 7:8-9, 32-35; Wire 1990: 84; MacDonald 1999: 211). Though married women are not denied access to salvation and Paul does not claim that they are lesser individuals because of their marital status, he states that it is better for individuals to remain “in whatever condition you were called” (1 Cor. 7:24, 28). It is therefore preferable for virgins to remain virgins and married women to remain married (1 Cor. 7:25- 28). As will be seen later, this instruction is directly related to Paul’s apocalypticism.

Upon considering the lifestyles and choices that were generally available to women in Greco-Roman society, some scholars suggest that it is possible that celibacy

would have attracted women to the church in Corinth and influenced their lifestyle choice after joining the Jesus movement (Kraemer 1992: 139; MacDonald 1999: 211- 213).

Because the traditional household structure was idealized in antiquity, the practice of remaining celibate was directly in conflict with Greco-Roman standards. Remaining celibate and unmarried would have freed women from certain expected gender obligations including the roles of wives and child-bearers. As such, women who followed a celibate lifestyle were permitted to engage in activities that were previously deemed completely inappropriate for women.

In a society where women were valued for their domesticity and the services they rendered for the men in their family, a choice for celibacy would have been perceived as a threat to the traditional household structure, the male heads of household and the state (MacDonald 1999:211-212; Massey 1988: 30). Marriage provided men within the Greco-Roman world with a form of social stability. Generally, the female population could be controlled within marriages and they served the function of populating male-run communities (Clark 1996: 43-44). The choice of some Corinthian women to remain celibate challenged the authority that men held over the bodies of women and the expected civic duty of women to repopulate society. The Roman authorities expressed their concerns over the choice of celibacy by some women and “took direct measures, in the form of legislation, to discourage inclinations to remain unmarried, childless, or both” (MacDonald 1999: 212). Such laws were established and maintained by the Emperor Augustus as well as his successors. Marriage was mandatory for all women (even widows) between the ages of 20 and 50. “Unmarried and childless women experienced

restrictions on inheritance and were denied certain privileges of legal independence” (MacDonald 1999: 212).

The opening passages in 1 Corinthians 7 are also significant for the examination of the status of women because they provide “a monotonous series of parallel statements about mutual obligations of men and women” (MacDonald 1996: 133; Wire 1990: 82-83). “Each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does” (1 Cor. 7:2-4). In a society where women were ideally seen as tools to be used by men, Paul’s instruction for mutual obligation would have been perceived as radical. Though it was expected in the Greco-Roman world that women were to be subject to their husbands’ full authority, Paul’s instruction that husbands are expected to subject themselves to their wives did not conform to Greco-Roman ideals, values or beliefs (Wire 1990: 82-83). Generally, wives did not have any type of authority or control over their husbands and could only hope to silently influence their husbands or families (Clark 1996: 49).

MacDonald suggests that a consideration of the incidental evidence and actual Corinthian circumstances that initiated Paul’s instructions in chapter 7 perhaps reveals the apostle was attempting to “balance more extremist ascetic tendencies in Corinth” (MacDonald 1996: 133). If MacDonald’s suggestion is correct, then Paul’s intentions and instructions in this chapter may not solely include the promotion of celibacy and mutual obligation. Paul may be attempting to ease Corinthians from anxieties and concerns by providing them with instructions for appropriate behaviour within and outside of

marriages (MacDonald 1996: 134). Paul instructs that people should only be celibate if they can do so without becoming anxious about this lifestyle. If a person attempts to remain celibate despite their anxiety, they will become distracted from “devotion to the Lord” because they will focus their energies on maintaining a celibate life (MacDonald 1996: 136). It is for this reason that Paul states that “it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion” (1 Cor. 7:9). Paul’s concern for individuals who are not able to maintain self-control suggests that the Corinthians had regard for those who were able to maintain the celibate lifestyle and gave those individuals who could not less respect.

MacDonald proceeds to argue that “Paul’s parallelism actually masks a particular concern for the behaviour of women” (1996: 134). Furthermore, the attempt to balance extremist tendencies suggests that women in the Corinthian community placed a high importance on celibacy and virginity in order to achieve their goal of “personal holiness, not pleasing the Lord” (MacDonald 1996: 136). This argument suggests that women in the Corinthian community were following an extreme celibate lifestyle for personal rather than religious reasons. If correct, this theory indicates that some Corinthian women attempted to liberate themselves from the traditionally accepted roles for women through the use of celibacy. While Paul does promote celibacy throughout chapter 7 because it allows for unhindered worship and prayers, he never suggests that celibacy should be used as a tool for social innovations: celibacy is only valuable when used for proper religious purposes.

Though 1 Corinthians 7 indicates that some women maintained a celibate lifestyle, this chapter should not be used to suggest that the majority of Corinthian women rejected marriage. Furthermore, it is important to remember that Paul instructed

the Corinthians that marriage was not a sin and could have the potential of benefiting those who did marry (1 Cor. 7:36-38). While a choice for celibacy by women involved a type of transcendence over traditional Greco-Roman boundaries, a choice of marriage did not exclude the opportunity to play an important role in the advancement of the early church (MacDonald 1996: 202-204). When discussing divorce in mixed Christian-gentile marriages, Paul states that it is better to remain married if the unbeliever consents to do so. "And if any women has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him" (1 Cor. 7:13). Mixed marriages would have presented a challenging situation for a woman in early Christianity because they would have been forced to live on the border between Christianity and the rest of society (MacDonald 1996: 196-204). An example of this challenge can be seen in 1 Peter 3:1-6 where the author claims that some women who lived in mixed marriages were treated with hostility and suffered because they did not "share [their] husband's customs and religion" (MacDonald 1996: 198, 200). "Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives" (1 Peter 3:1-2). It is interesting to note that while Paul instructs both Christian men and women to remain married to their unbelieving spouses, generally the entire household belonged to the religion of the male head of the household. It is therefore unlikely that Christian men would be persecuted by their gentile wives for their religious beliefs while the opposite was not necessarily the case.

Paul's instruction for women to remain in mixed marriages may have resulted in the promotion of the submission of wives to husbands, including the possibility of

physical domestic violence towards women. However, these Christian women were never considered as individuals who did not impact and influence the church or their families. While celibate women were granted a type of social liberation, women who were married to Gentiles had the opportunity to obtain a certain amount of unsung power (Wire 1990: 85; MacDonald 1996: 199, 203). Paul instructs the Corinthians that Christian women who remained in mixed marriages had the opportunity to save their husbands. "For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife. [...] Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband" (1 Cor. 7:14-16). Paul further instructs that the maintenance of such mixed marriages by Christian women benefits the children: "Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy" (1 Cor. 7:14). Upon divorce in the Greco-Roman world, "children remained with their fathers, since they were agnatically related to him" (Pomeroy 1995:158). Because in most circumstances a divorce resulted in the alienation of the children from the mother, Christian women were encouraged to remain married to their Gentile husbands in order to save their children and convince them to accept Christianity as opposed to their father's pagan religions (1 Cor. 7:14; Wire 1990: 85).

Christian women who remained married to their pagan husbands also held the opportunity to influence individuals outside of the mother-father-child relationship. Paul assumes that women in mixed marriages can be effective as missionaries and influence the domestic realm if they act cautiously and accept Greco-Roman household ideals (MacDonald 1996: 202-203). Upon acting as missionaries, women introduced Christianity into their personal relationships with other women. "Paul [...] sees such mixed marriages as a source for winning new members" (MacDonald 1999: 214).

Considering the evidence for possible brutality within mixed marriages, women within such circumstances would have had to have been cautious, courageous and patient in order to teach their husbands, children and others about the Jesus movement. The women who remained married to pagans are proof that power and influence was accessible to women beyond traditional leadership roles.

A cursory reading of the instruction for women to cover their heads when praying or prophesying in 1 Corinthians 11 suggests that women were not permitted to participate fully in religious rituals and were expected to be submissive to men. “Any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head - it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved” (1 Cor. 11:4-5). In this chapter, Paul argues that women should pray or prophesy in a different fashion and confirms their distinctions through the use of imagery: “For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. Indeed man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man” (1 Cor. 11:7-9). Paul uses these distinctions as reasons that women should have a symbol of authority over their heads (1 Cor. 11:10). Wire argues that “it appears likely that public head coverings [were] associated with women’s subordination to males within traditional structures of marriage and family” (1990: 130). Respectable women were not only ideally held within the domestic realm, but were expected to cover their heads to show their submission. In this particular circumstance, it appears as if Paul both accepts and promotes the maintenance of traditional Greco-Roman gender standards.

Paul's treatment of the issue at hand indicates that he is not offended by the activities of prayer and prophecy by Corinthian women: with this instruction Paul attempts to change the manner in which women engage in these rituals but does not exclude women from participating in these religious activities. This circumstance permits us to have a closer look at Paul's treatment of women and the distinctions between men and women.

Paul's instruction for women to cover their heads when they engage in this ritual activity and his reference to their innate differences suggests that he believed that men and women were distinct. As such, men and women should not dissolve sexual distinctions and certain traditional social boundaries (Castelli 1999: 232; Kraemer 1992: 146-147). Paul believed that differences according to sexuality including the status, prestige and authority that were attributed to men should be maintained because they were "God given and divinely warranted" (Gal. 3:28; Castelli 1999: 229; Witherington 1995: 236, 240). While never claiming that men and women are unequal, Paul argues that the duality that exists between men and women or maleness and femaleness "is good and is to be celebrated": men and women are equal in God but must retain their differences in this world (Witherington 1995: 236; Talbert 2002: 85). Paul's instructions on public order indicate that social boundaries, including sexual distinctions, will only be dissolved once the resurrection has taken place and should not be challenged in the present (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor. 17- 29).

By examining the circumstantial evidence behind Paul's instruction for Corinthian women to cover their heads during public worship and to follow the Greco-Roman ideal of female submission, it is possible to find indications of how Corinthian

women were actually praying and prophesying. 1 Corinthians 11 provides scholars with a good example of the contrast that existed between prescriptive instructions and actual behaviour. It is obvious that while Paul attempted to limit female participation within these activities as a result of his views on nature and creation, his instruction indicates that women were praying and prophesying with their heads uncovered (Talbert 2002: 90). Of particular interest is the indication that women actually did pray and prophecy (1 Cor. 11:5). MacDonald argues that the participation of women in this communication of “God’s will directly in the midst of the assembly” is significant because Paul singles it “out as the most important spiritual gift” in 1 Corinthians 14:1 (MacDonald 1999: 215).

Some scholars argue that the participation of women in prophecy suggests that these women were attempting to quash sexual distinctions (Wire 1990: 130; MacDonald 1999: 215-216). By praying and prophesying with uncovered heads as the male members of the community did, women were rejecting established Greco-Roman expectations of behaviour and attempting to create a community without sexual differences (Wire 1990: 126, 130). Talbert agrees with this position and claims that “certain Christian women discarded their head coverings and led in public worship in a way that said to their culture, ‘We have transcended our femaleness’” (2002: 90). It is the circumstantial evidence and Paul’s response of limiting the manner in which women prayed and prophesied that permits the interpretation that women had the opportunity to obtain a considerable amount of participation or freedom within religious practices. “In contrast to Paul, the women prophets in Corinth’s church do not experience in themselves a struggle against God that requires radical restrictions of the body” (Wire 1990:182).

Though Paul's letter to the Galatians does not provide any gender specific instructions, "throughout the history of the church, [his statement] in Galatians 3:28 has provided impetus for religious and social change" (Hailey 1995: 131). "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:27- 28). The interpretation of this verse and the implications that it has for the participation of women in early and modern Christian communities has long been debated. While some scholars use this instruction to prove that Paul sought to undo an injustice, others claim that it only has relevance in the realm of salvation (Hailey 1999: 133-144).

Paul's instruction concerning the lack of ethnic, gender and other distinctions in Christ in Galatians provides valuable information regarding his position on salvation but does not provide any information regarding the interpretation of the instruction by women in the Galatian community. However, an in-depth examination of this passage can provide insight into possible reasons why Christian women acted in ways that were considered to break traditional gender boundaries. A superficial reading of this passage appears to indicate that Paul believed that distinctions among all Christians were to be abolished. People were no longer to be physically considered as Jews, Greeks, slaves, free, men or women. Though as scholars we are inclined to press the issue further, people in antiquity may have been inclined to take the passage at face value. Some of Paul's followers may have come to understand that men and women were equal not only in salvation but also in the present Christian community. MacDonald suggests that women

may have interpreted Paul's teaching to mean that there were no longer distinctions between men and women in the earthly realm (MacDonald 1999: 215).

Such an interpretation would have affected the manner in which Christians understood the nature of salvation and the social constructs of their religious communities. This interpretation allows for the possibility that early Christians perceived the Jesus movement as a revolutionary movement where all boundaries were to be dissolved. In the case of gender, the removal of male/female typology would have permitted women greater access to roles that were previously restricted to men. Furthermore, if we accept MacDonald's theory that this concept of salvation was not distinct to Galatia, it has the potential to inform scholars about the belief systems and possible interpretations of Pauline teachings within different early Christian communities. For example, Gal. 3:28 could be used to assist the interpretation of the removal of head coverings by women in Corinth (MacDonald 1999: 215-216). If Paul consistently instructed that salvation was provided to all Christians equally and that all Christians were equal in Christ, Corinthian women may have applied this teaching to actual religious practices including prayer and prophecy.

Paul's instruction for women in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 to remain silent and submissive in church appears to contradict other teachings in Paul's letter to the Corinthians where he attempts to transform rather than eliminate female participation. "Women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church" (1 Cor. 14:34-35). A majority of modern scholarship suggests that these passages were added by

an interpolator in order to bring Pauline instructions into harmony with “the more restrictive teaching in the Pastoral epistles” (Wire 1990: 149-152; MacDonald 1999: 216).

However, there are scholars such as Osburn, who believe that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 are Pauline and represent a call for orderly participation within the Corinthian community (Osburn 1995: 242). If these verses are authentically Pauline, we must consider that they respond to a specific circumstance where Corinthian women were not submissive and spoke and participated in the churches. Regardless of who wrote these passages, it is obvious that the author had the intention of limiting the manner in which women could participate in churches by eliminating current practices among women. If put into practice, this instruction would have limited the leadership and influence women extended over their communities. Like the circumstances of women praying and prophesying with uncovered heads, Galatians can assist in the interpretation of these passages. If we assume that the Corinthian women accepted that there was no longer male or female in the earthly realm, we can understand a possible reason for their actions. They prayed and prophesied as men did because they believed that, in some sense, they could no longer be distinguished from the male members of their community.

This chapter has provided an overview of the status accorded to both actual individuals and women in general within the Pauline epistles. I have demonstrated that women in Pauline communities broke traditional gender boundaries and participated in roles that were previously limited to men. An understanding of the role that Paul and early Pauline communities attributed to women is necessary for the examination of the participation of women within these early Christian groups. This examination is

imperative for the study of the impact of eschatology on the status of women because without the study of women within the Pauline letters it is impossible to determine any correlation between high eschatological expectations and the participation of women within early Christianity. Upon comparing the evidence discussed in this chapter with that found in later non-Pauline material that exhibits low eschatological expectations, it becomes possible to examine how apocalypticism and changes in the expectation of the end times actually affected women in early Christianity.

CHAPTER 4

Women in the Pastoral Epistles

The New Testament includes numerous letters attributed to Paul in connection with his travels among the Gentile converts. Though it was traditionally believed that Paul had actually written all of these epistles, there is debate surrounding the authenticity of some letters and general scholarly unanimity about the pseudepigraphic nature of others (Ehrman 2004: 385). Included among the pseudonymous texts are the Pastoral epistles, namely 1-2 Timothy and Titus. These texts were “ostensibly written by Paul to two of his younger colleagues who were pastors of churches, giving them pastoral advice about how to deal with problems in their communities” (Ehrman 2004: 394). The purpose of this chapter is not to debate the authenticity of these texts; here I approach them as pseudepigraphic writings which nonetheless provide valuable sources of information about early Christian communities and the women that lived in them.

Though they are not Pauline and undoubtedly represent teachings of a later author, the pastoral advice regarding false teachers and the internal organization of the communities provides scholars with information regarding the transformation of early Christian communities as well as changes in early Christian instruction during the first two centuries. This chapter will examine the Pastoral letters for evidence regarding the status accorded to women in communities with low eschatological beliefs. Of particular interest for this chapter is the description of women, the roles that are attributed to women and the limitations which are placed upon women in later documents such as the Pastoral letters. Before proceeding to examine the influence of eschatological views on early Christian communities and their impact on women, a comprehensive comparison of the roles of women within such groups is necessary. The evidence that is presented in this

chapter will later be compared and contrasted with that found in the previous chapter.

This process will allow for a comparison between the status and participation of women within communities with high expectations of an imminent return of Jesus with communities with low eschatological expectations.

Though short in length, the first letter to Timothy contains a significant amount of information regarding the actual behaviour of women and the Christian communal expectations of women. Because “most of the letter consists of instructions concerning Christian living and social interaction”, it is not surprising that women would be included among the exhortations (Ehrman 2004: 386). The issue of social interaction is critical for understanding the status of women in both the Pauline and the Pastoral letters. The worldview of the Christian communities and leaders affects the manner in which individuals are treated and even how such individuals perceive themselves. Unlike the Pauline epistles that have been examined thus far, 1 Timothy focuses solely on the limitation of the activities of women within early Christian communities. The Pastor has maintained Paul’s desire to save the world. However, because the social circumstances of the early Christian community and the relationship between insiders and outsiders have changed, the description of how the world is to be saved is different in the Pauline and the Pastoral letters.

Though the other Pastoral letters (2 Timothy and Titus) make fewer references to the participation of women than 1 Timothy, they can also be used to further comprehend the author’s understanding of the status of women. Generally, all of the Pastoral epistles “desired to bring Paul’s authority to bear upon the changed circumstances of church life, reflect the life of a community where the balance between isolation and engagement of

the world has shifted towards greater engagement” (MacDonald 1996: 155). The author no longer focuses on the necessity of the separation between the church and outsiders: the Pastor spends a significant amount of time examining the structure of the community and the proper organization of the church.

“In comparison to earlier Pauline writings, the Pastorals are striking for the evidence they provide for church offices” (MacDonald 1996: 155). The highly structured organization of the church no longer allowed for women to hold positions of authority and attempted to place strict rules upon the selection and actions of male leadership (1 Tim. 3:1-13). The list of requirements for the position of bishop or deacon as set out by the author suggests that he sought to find individuals that were beyond any form of traditional Greco-Roman reproach. Furthermore, the guidelines indicate that the author sought respect for the leaders within and outside of the community: “Moreover, [the bishop or deacon] must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil” (1 Tim. 3:7).

Similar to the list of requirements found in Paul’s letter to Timothy, the letter to Titus also provides instructions regarding the selection of elders and bishops. Elders are required to be “blameless, married only once, whose children are believers, not accused of debauchery, and not rebellious. For a bishop, as God’s steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain; but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled” (Tit. 1:6-8). It seems that this instruction was both preventative and responsive. The instruction was preventative because the author sought a positive engagement with the outside community and responsive because past social interactions

had brought criticism of the early Christian community. The author only makes brief references to the religious requirements for leadership positions in this letter. His concern is with the behavioural activities that may cause future problems.

Of particular relevance to this study of the Pastoral epistles is the absence of women from the list of leadership requirements. The author clearly states that authority within the church must be male. The absence of women from this list comes as no surprise when the previous chapter is taken into account. The letter indicates that both the religious and social communities are intended to be institutionalized. The Pastorals “clearly display an effort to establish rules to govern the lives of women in the community, to limit their involvement in certain ministerial roles, and to ensure that they remain faithful to their duties as wives in a Greco-Roman household” (MacDonald 1996: 155). This chapter will provide valuable information for the study of the changing role of women within the early church. The lack of authority granted to women by the Pastor proves that such limitations were placed on women. Furthermore, this evidence suggests that women within earlier Christian communities had the opportunity to engage in leadership type roles.

The restrictions placed on women extend beyond the requirement lists for leadership roles. 1 Timothy 2:8-15 suggests that the Pastor did not want women of the community drawing attention to themselves through religious or social practices. Women are instructed to “dress [...] modestly and decently [...] and to] learn silence with full submission” (1 Tim. 2:9- 11). Furthermore, the author limits the manner in which women could contribute to their religious community. He restricts the role of teacher to men (1 Tim. 2:12): “For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the

woman was deceived and became transgressor” (1 Tim. 2:13-14). The author uses the Genesis story in order to rationalize the subordination of women within the community. Women were no longer permitted to teach, were restricted to silence and were expected to be submissive because of their gender. The letter to Titus provides early Christians with further instructions regarding the behaviour and expectations of women.

Tell the older women to be reverent in behaviour, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, so that they might encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be self-controlled, chaste, good managers of the household, kind, submissive to their husbands, so that the word of God may not be discredited (Tit. 2:3-5).

According to the author, women are to be valued based on their ability to conform to traditional Greco-Roman gender roles. Submission is considered to be good while assertiveness is considered to be dangerous. Women who crossed traditional gender boundaries challenged the authority of men as well as Greco-Roman social and familial structures. This transcendence also contributed to outsiders’ criticism of the early Christian community and the message that it taught.

Despite the fact that the author limits the participation of women within the religious community, the Pastor claimed that not all was lost because women were still granted the opportunity to achieve salvation. The manner in which women within the Pastoral communities could achieve salvation was drastically different from that presented in the Pauline letters. Rather than accepting and following Jesus’ message in order to achieve salvation, women were instructed that they could be saved “through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty” (1 Tim. 2:15).

Again, it is important to remember that the Pastoral epistles, like the Pauline letters, contain both descriptive and prescriptive instructions. Therefore, the instructions do not necessarily represent actual circumstances. By examining the purpose behind such instructions that limit the participation of women, it becomes possible to understand how women were actually acting or participating within their early Christian community. Though the author indicates that the letter intended to restrict the activities of women, the fact that the instruction was needed is indicative that women were not acting in a silent or submissive manner. If women had been acting within the traditional Greco-Roman gender boundaries, there would have been no need to state that “[he permits] no woman to teach or have authority over a man; she is to keep silent” (1 Tim. 12).

Careful analysis of these letters suggests that women were acting in manners that were considered to be immodest and improper. These supposedly inappropriate activities attracted attention to the women within early Christian groups. Furthermore, these activities were the cause for both insiders and outsiders to question the ability of women to teach men and hold authority over communities. Though at times the Pauline epistles suggest that women acted in ways that drew attention to the early Christian community, unlike the Pastoral letters, they do not require that women be completely submissive and without significant roles within the church. The manner in which early Christian women had interpreted the previous instructions regarding the participation of women within their communities had come under challenge by the church leadership. The tone throughout this Pastoral letter suggests that the cause for the institutionalization of the church and the return to traditional Greco-Roman gender roles is the criticism of the early

Christian community by outsiders. Furthermore, the author also saw a general need to provide the church with an ordered hierarchical structure.

In her book, *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion*, MacDonald provides a thorough examination of the perceptions that “pagans” had of early Christian communities. Of particular importance to this thesis is her exploration of the criticism of Christian women by pagans. An examination of “the interplay between early Christianity and the Greco-Roman world [... illustrates] how pagan sources can add to our knowledge of early Christianity itself” (1996: 50). This interplay and the available pagan texts provide scholars with information about how outsiders viewed the activities of early Christian women and possible reasons behind the prescription instructions in early Christian writing.

In a work titled “Octavius”, Minucius Felix “cites pagan criticisms of Christianity and then offers a defence of Christianity against paganism” (MacDonald 1996: 59). In this text, Felix refers to anti-Christian polemic which is believed to be based on the Roman orator Marcus Cornelius Fronto’s thought. While never providing specific cases of incidents involving women, Fronto criticizes the nature of women (gullible and weak), the participation of women within Christianity, the visibility of women in the group and the blurring of the public and private domains (*Octavius* 8-9; MacDonald 1996: 60). This example demonstrates that outsiders criticized the participation of women in the public world and claimed that the male world had been brought into the domestic female realm. “The heart of Christianity’s threat lies in rendering the public sphere and extension of the private. [...] However much the reality of church as ‘new family’ facilitated the involvement of women, it clearly also heightened Christianity’s offensiveness and left

women vulnerable to scrutiny” (MacDonald 1996: 61). This evidence of anti-Christian polemic lends insight into the desire of church leaders to conform to traditional Greco-Roman standards and restrict the participation and influence of women. The Pastoral epistles include a response to pagan criticism and seek to find a solution for such criticism (MacDonald 1996: 62-65).

The only religious position for women that is supported by the church leadership in 1 Timothy is the category of widow. Though this position entails social and financial support, as well as assistance from the church, the author seeks to curtail and restrict membership. “Honour widows who are really widows” (1 Tim. 5: 3). The author’s concern about outside opinion regarding the structure and the operation of the religious communities suggests that he would have also been concerned about the manner in which outsiders perceived the activities of early Christian women. MacDonald argues that 1 Timothy 5:11-15 offers insight into public opinion regarding early Christian women. The author considers real widows to be women beyond childbearing age who are utterly dependent upon the church and who exhibit and exemplify female virtues and qualities (MacDonald 1996: 162- 163). “She must be well attested for her good works, as one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the saint’s feet, helped the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way” (1 Tim. 10). The author is concerned with a woman’s ability to demonstrate her worthiness of both the title of widow and the support of her community. Women who could not demonstrate their worthiness were no longer granted the privilege and honour of the title widow.

Ehrman suggests that the author of this text believes that both women and widows have caused social troubles within the community and cannot be trusted (2004: 387). The

author's refusal to put younger widows on the list and his insistence that traditional household roles be maintained suggests that church leadership and outsiders had problems with the roles and levels of participation that women in this community had achieved. The author describes younger women as incurring "condemnation for having violated their first pledge. Besides that, they learn to be idle, gadding about from house to house; and they are not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not say" (1 Tim. 5: 12-13). This suggests that younger women who had gained the title of widow played a type of ministerial role within the community by traveling to households and teaching others. "While the author of the Pastorals depicts the visits as frivolous and lacking in ministerial purpose, we should not assume that the young widows themselves understood their activities this way" (MacDonald 1996: 158). Considering that earlier Christian texts promote the assistance and necessity of women for the conversion of other women in the private realm, there is reason to believe that these widows took initiative in assisting the church and instructing individuals.

The travel of some women from house to house and the refusal of some women to maintain their celibacy oath would have caused concern both inside and outside of the Christian community. "In the case of the Pastoral epistles it seems that what outsiders are saying about early Christian women is being internalized and transformed into a teaching about the behaviour of women" (MacDonald 1996: 159). The author responds to the threat of the shaming of the community by promoting strong male leadership, the submission of women back into the household realm as well as the acceptance of traditional Greco-Roman gender roles (1 Tim. 5:14; MacDonald 1996: 159- 160).

The author's concern with female virtues and the maintenance of traditional Greco-Roman gender roles is suggestive of a general concern about the dangers of women leading celibate or ascetic lifestyles. The author describes false teachers as those who "forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods" and warns the community against the hypocrisy of these liars (1 Tim. 1:2- 3). This form of lifestyle that is described by the Pastor reminds us of 1 Corinthians 7 regarding marriage and the ability of widows or unmarried women to remain in their present state.

Of particular importance for the subject of the changing status of women and the role of asceticism in early Christianity is Paul's response to the Corinthians about marriage, celibacy and asceticism. If we accept that 1 Cor. 7 is indicative of a community that promoted asceticism and grew concerned when some individuals could not maintain this lifestyle or became distracted with physical relationships, we may also surmise that the community to which the Pastor is writing also held asceticism in high regard. 1 Timothy, like the Pauline epistles, is addressing real circumstances that the author finds problematic. Not only does the author claim that ascetic teachings are false, but he promotes marriage and childbearing throughout the letter (1 Tim. 2:15; 5:9- 15). In fact, the manner in which women are to maintain feminine virtues and achieve salvation is through the motherly act of childbearing (1 Tim. 2:15). Furthermore, as has already been seen in this chapter, the only position of authority or leadership within the church available to women is that of widow, a role which the author has now limited to women who are beyond childbearing years and have brought up children (1 Tim. 5:9- 10).

The Second Letter to Timothy provides us with further information regarding the author's belief in the need to monitor the activities and beliefs of women. Though false

teachers are not described as women, their victims evidently are: "For among them are those who make their way into households and captivate silly women, overwhelmed by their sins and swayed by all kinds of desires" (2 Tim. 3:6). This verse insinuates that women, not men, would be led astray by false teachers. It was assumed that women needed to be monitored because they were gullible. This letter suggests that male authority figures within the early church found no religious use for female asceticism and believed that attempts to maintain a celibate lifestyle by women could lead to immoral lives (1 Tim. 2:11-15).

A comparison of the rejection of the female celibate lifestyle by church leadership in the Pastoral epistles with the possible promotion of an ascetic lifestyle found in 1 Corinthians 7 provides an example where male leaders within early Christian communities have transformed their ideals of honour and shame.

The usual means of protecting honour in the household and community has to a certain extent been abandoned under Paul's leadership. While men continue to view chaste women as a special reflection of the shame of household and community, they no longer seek to ensure that the chastity of women is only guaranteed by marriage (MacDonald 1996: 162).

1 Corinthians 7 suggests that Paul provided women with a choice: they could retain their honour through marriage or through celibacy. If women chose to maintain their honour through a celibate lifestyle, men were no longer required to protect these women and lost a degree of their control over ascetic women. "In the Pastoral epistles there is a shift back toward traditional patterns for maintaining values of honour and shame" (MacDonald 1996: 162). The Pastor rejects the option of celibacy for women, promotes the maintenance of traditional Greco-Roman gender roles and shows a deep concern for the ability of women to demonstrate to the greater community that they possess acceptable

feminine qualities and virtues. By accepting the role of marriage, childbearing and the maintenance of the household, women “give the adversary no occasion to revile” the church (1 Tim. 5: 14).

The example of the transformation of the honour and shame dichotomy within early Christianity reveals the impact and influence of both inside and outside opinion surrounding the issue of the increase in autonomy that women experienced through celibacy. This chapter has demonstrated that the concern for criticism influenced and changed the status of Christian women. Though evidence in both the Pauline letters and the Pastoral epistles suggests that women actually played significant and public roles within the church, the later Pastoral epistles attempted to completely limit the roles of women and attempted to reinstate them within traditional gender roles where they were to remain submissive, passive, silent and under the complete control of men.

So far I have presented evidence that provides a general overview of the participation of women within early Pauline and Pastoral communities. These general conclusions are not meant to deny that significant differences existed between the status of women from one community to the next. Though these differences existed, one should not be discouraged from searching for evidence about the general status accorded to women in early Christianity. If cautious, it is possible to use distinct early Christian texts to compare, contrast, correlate or interpret while still recognizing the differences that existed between the different communities.

Though textual evidence found within early Christian texts suggests that diversity existed, an interpretation of the historical circumstances behind these various early Christian documents reveal some common characteristics with which we can draw some

general conclusions. The conclusions do not dismiss the differences that existed between communities; they indicate that in some early Christian groups there were consistencies in the treatment and behaviour of women. These relative consistencies suggest that early church leadership attempted to control the status and participation of women. Drawing general conclusions about the status of women within early Christian groups provides us with information regarding church leadership and can offer insight into religious beliefs such as eschatology.

CHAPTER 5

Women of Different Status

Thus far, I have examined evidence found in the Pauline and Pastoral epistles for the status and participation of women within the early church. The textual evidence that has been considered in this thesis suggests that women who belonged to the earliest Pauline churches were granted greater roles and participation within their religious communities than women who belonged to the later Pastoral communities. Evidence suggests that women in the time of Paul were granted leadership roles while women in the Pastoral communities were subordinated under traditional Greco-Roman gender constraints. This chapter will further explore this suggestion by providing a brief and comparative study of the differences in the status accorded to women in the Pauline and Pastoral communities. The information provided in this chapter is significant for understanding the impact of eschatology on the status of women in early Christianity for two reasons: first, because Pauline and Pastoral communities held different eschatological beliefs, and second, because the status accorded to the women in these communities was different.

The Pauline letters describe female leadership, permit women to participate in prayer and prophecy as well as achieve the same level of salvation as their male counterparts. In comparison, the Pastoral epistles appear to offer women little in the way of participation within their religious communities when compared with earlier Christian groups. The Pastor limits the manner in which women could participate within the church to silence and submissive presence. These roles, including the traditional activity of childbearing would merit salvation. The Pastor's division of roles and methods of achieving salvation reflect traditional Greco-Roman notions of gender.

Though a cursory examination suggests that women in the later Pastoral communities were not granted the same freedoms as women in the Pauline communities, it is important to remember that early Christian texts contain a significant amount of prescriptive evidence. Again, it is necessary to read between the lines and examine the causes for the instructions rather than only the instructions themselves. I would argue that women who belonged to the Pastoral communities, like the women in the Pauline communities, were acting in ways that were deemed inappropriate by traditional Greco-Roman standards. Furthermore, it could also be argued that an interpretation of the status accorded to women in the Pauline letters must be more complicated than a cursory reading allows.

Paul's epistles suggest that women were granted greater roles within the early church than were previously allowed by traditional Greco-Roman standards. Women in some early Christian communities were treated as individuals in their own right rather than as attachments to the male members of their household. While exceptions to the rule did exist, women in the Greco-Roman world generally were not given independence or personal identities: women were perceived as an extension of the male members of their family. Even a woman's name was an extension of her father's (Massey 1988: 1, 3, 8). The general absence of the association of a woman's identity with her father, husband or owner in the Pauline epistles suggests that women were accorded a personal identity and that they were not necessarily perceived as property within early Christian communities. "In a culture that routinely identified free persons by the names of their fathers, the absence of filiation for both women and men (with a few exceptions)" in the Pauline epistles "is intriguing" (Kraemer 1992: 137). Furthermore, the filiation of women with

men in early Christian texts is absent for women of all social classes: no distinction is made between women who are financially independent and women from lower classes (Kraemer 1992: 137). Kraemer argues that the restructuring of the household is evident in the terminology that Paul uses to address the members of the early churches. "The familial terminology Christians adopted for members of the community is relatively egalitarian: sister or brother is the label of choice" (MacDonald 1992: 141).

The general instructions for women in the Pauline letters suggest that women were given the opportunity to participate in roles that were otherwise restricted to men. Though evidence in the Pauline epistles suggests that Paul provided women with opportunities within the church that were not available to women within the general Greco-Roman world, an in-depth examination of his letters also suggests that he did not believe in the complete annihilation of traditional social boundaries or structures. The increase in status does not appear to be a social revolution where women were granted a long-term increase in earthly power. The evidence suggests that Paul did not intend to abolish all social standards. Paul wanted people to remain in their "original state": the Pauline epistles reveal that Paul believed that God purposely created the distinctions and differences within the earthly realm (Wire 1990: 86, 125-126).

The prescriptive and instructional nature of the letters suggests that some women were acting in ways that were considered radical and inappropriate by the author. These letters indicate that women were "afforded [...] a flexible system in which departure from the normative standards for women was legitimized while the standards themselves were not wholly obliterated" (Kraemer 1992: 140). Women took more freedom than Paul was prepared to give. For example, in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul instructs women to pray or

prophesy with their heads covered. Though Paul does not exclude women from prayer and prophecy, he does restrict the manner in which women participate in this activity. The fact that Paul needs to address the Corinthian congregation about the necessity of women covering their heads during such an activity suggests that women were praying and prophesying with their heads uncovered. This instruction suggests that the “actual” lives of women are not accurately represented in the case of prophecy in Corinth. Because Paul’s letters are prescriptive, it is necessary to examine what the author is attempting to correct rather than what he is instructing (Roetzel 1998: 79). The evidence suggests that women were granted greater opportunities in the Pauline communities. However, these women in the Pauline communities extended their freedoms and powers further than Paul intended.

While permitting women greater access to roles that had previously been limited to men, Paul did not encourage individuals to create a social revolution where women or other individuals who had been discriminated against would be provided with “social equality”. It is important to remember that Paul sought to maximize salvation in a period when he thought the end of the world was imminent: there was no time or need for a social, political or economic revolution because the messiah was expected to return momentarily. “However that may be, let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called. [...] Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called” (1 Cor. 7: 17-20). This is important for understanding how Paul and his communities understood the impact of the imminent apocalyptic intervention of God. While there was no need to maintain traditional boundaries, there was no time for social change.

A superficial reading of the Pastoral epistles suggests that the women who belonged to the Pastoral communities were heavily subordinated, forced into traditional Greco-Roman gender constructs and stripped of any status increase that had been previously granted to early Christian women. However, we need to search beyond the surface. The instructions in the Pastoral letters could be interpreted as attempting to correct behaviour that the author perceived as problematic rather than simply maintaining acceptable behaviour. The instructions in the Pastoral letters do not necessarily reflect the actual circumstances of the social living conditions of his communities because they are prescriptive. This suggests that the women who are being addressed are playing significant roles in the development of early Christianity. Furthermore, they may be participating in ways that may be perceived as unconventional by both outsiders and insiders. I suggest that the church leadership attempted to control and limit the participation of women in the Pastoral communities because women had taken greater liberties than had been intended by particular male leaders. Social order was questioned because male powers were threatened.

The exploration for the involvement of women within early Christian communities extends beyond the evidence found in the New Testament. An examination of non-canonical evidence such as that found in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, as well as the Phrygian, or Montanist, movement, indicates that women in some early Christian communities were not only granted roles that transcended traditional Greco-Roman gender boundaries, but were granted significant leadership roles where they could influence and instruct men. An examination of some of these other texts that describe women will provide a framework for the Pauline and Pastoral situations and a

comprehensive understanding of the participation of women in early Christianity generally.

Because the protagonist of the text is a woman, the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* is a valuable text for understanding both the participation of women and their opportunities within their religious Christian communities. While Paul does play a prominent role in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, the text focuses upon Thecla's conversion to Christianity, her determination to follow Paul, her trials, her tribulations, her travels, her brushes with martyrdom and her success at achieving a position of leadership within the Christian movement. There is an abundance of secondary literature that explores the *Acts of Thecla* as a document that suggests that women in early Christianity were granted the opportunity to participate in the same capacity as men and were granted a form of female independence (MacDonald 1983: 53). While this needs to be qualified by the fact that Thecla is portrayed as participating in these roles in "manly fashion", it is still significant that she participates in roles that were previously limited to men.

The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* depict Thecla as an independent and virtuous woman who has obtained a leadership position within early Christianity. Remembering that a woman's purpose, in antiquity, was to bear legitimate children, Thecla's rejection of motherhood, matrimony, female adornment and traditional female roles indicates that she has gained access to roles that were previously limited to men. Of particular significance for the examination of the status accorded to women in early Christianity is Thecla's achievement of a teaching leadership position at the end of the text. "And Thecla arose and said to Paul: 'I am going to Iconium.' But Paul said: 'Go and teach the word of God!'" (*ATh* 41). This is not to suggest that the story illustrates a circumstance of gender

equality: this text depicts a woman who must struggle in order to achieve a type of equality in “the realm of gender roles” (Wehn 2004: 156).

Davis suggests that “the ascetic tenor of the *ATH* suggests that the communities who told Thecla’s story would have valued and practiced chastity as a central manifestation of the gospel” (2001: 20). “Women who chose to live free of marriage received [...] an increased autonomy, and the right to exercise control over their bodies and their sexuality; for men, especially for husbands who controlled the sexuality of their wives, it meant a limitation on their autonomy as regards control over the female body” (Wehn 2004: 152). An increase in female independence meant a decrease in male control.

The evidence found in the Pauline and Pastoral epistles coupled with evidence from these early Christian documents leaves us with the following conclusions about the status of women and the roles that they played within their religious communities: early Christianity, as practiced in the first century, provided women with the opportunity to participate in social activities and in roles that had previously been limited to men in the Greco-Roman world. This increase in the opportunity to participate within society permitted women to engage in a type of gender boundary crossing. Though the Pauline epistles suggest that women did participate in some activities on an equal basis with men, evidence does not indicate that the author promoted a social revolution that would have a long term influence on the earthly realm. Paul’s focus on the imminent end influenced the manner in which he treated individuals and expected his religious constituents to treat their fellow Jesus followers. For example, in 1 Cor. 12, Paul instructs the community that the church is one body with many members.

The members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. [...] But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that

there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together (1 Cor 12: 12-26).

Though each member is different and holds a different function within the community, each individual is significant and vital for the entire group. This passage suggests that an individual of high social standing was no longer more important than an individual of low social standing. This instruction is significant for the study of the status of women because in a world where society was greatly divided by social class and gender, Paul instructed his communities that all individuals were important and dissension was inappropriate.

Despite the fact that the author of the Pastoral epistles is interested in the subordination of women and relegates them to traditional Greco-Roman expectations, there is no indication that his instructions reflect the actual behaviour of women or the treatment of women by the men in these communities. The Pastor's letters provide prescriptive evidence and do not support the contemporary behaviour of the women within his communities. This argument is supported by other early Christian documents, such as the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, where women have obtained leadership positions and generally have struggled against some form of "male resistance" in order to achieve such positions. I suggest that women were active in church leadership positions in both the Pauline and Pastoral communities. It is the acceptance of women in leadership positions by specific men in leadership that has changed.

The authors of the Pauline epistles and the Pastoral letters do not directly explain the reasons for the statuses that they accord to women. Furthermore, the Pastor does not explain his motivations for limiting the participation of women and returning their

lifestyles to that of women in the general Greco-Roman world. By examining the instructions, attitudes and worldviews of both Paul and the Pastor, it becomes possible to understand the influence of eschatology on the status of women in early Christianity. From this point, I will examine the reasons for the change in the ability of women to participate within their religious communities.

CHAPTER 6

Eschatology and the Status of Women

The status of women in early Christianity and the attempt to curtail the gain of such status and participation by certain leadership figures is intriguing. After completing an examination of apocalyptic beliefs, women in the Greco-Roman world, as well as women in the Pauline and Pastoral letters, this paper now has the background to examine possible correlations between the subordination of women and a delayed expectation of the end times.

Throughout this thesis, I have stressed the importance of examining both prescriptive and incidental evidence in order to come to an accurate description of the actual practices of women in early Christianity. This process allows an understanding of the purposes behind early Christian instructions. Of particular importance for this study, this methodology allows scholars a more accurate interpretation of the church leadership's view of eschatological conditions.

I have suggested that the instructions of early church leaders had been subject to the interpretation of members of the early Jesus movement. This argument is supported by evidence found in the Pauline and Pastoral letters. The purposes behind the instructions may not have been simply to instruct: the authors may have been attempting to correct what they perceived as inappropriate behaviour.

Because my goal is to posit eschatological expectations as one among the reasons for the change in the status of women within early Christianity, it is necessary that I examine the instructions of individuals in leadership positions. While these instructions do not necessarily reflect the contemporary beliefs of the communities that the authors are instructing, it is important to remember that eventually the worldviews of these leaders came to be accepted as mainstream Christianity. While not denying the

importance of individual interpretations of the instructions and their application to daily lives, I am suggesting that generally the worldviews of early leaders influenced the majority of the church.

This paper has demonstrated that, over the course of time, church leadership felt the need to make changes in the status that they accorded to women. While in the Pauline communities women were granted more opportunities than women in the general Greco-Roman world, the Pastor reinforced traditional Greco-Roman gender boundaries and limited the participation of women. Because eschatology was a worldview of significant importance in early Christianity, apocalypticism impacted the manner in which individuals lived their lives and conducted themselves around other people. As such, eschatology would have impacted the manner in which women were treated within early Christian communities. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the change in eschatological expectations as a determining factor when examining the change in the status granted to women in early Christianity. This chapter will examine the differences that exist between the status and levels of participation granted to women in the Pauline and Pastoral communities in light of eschatological beliefs. This chapter will demonstrate that the expected time of the apocalypse impacted the manner in which women could participate within early Christianity. Communities with imminent eschatological beliefs granted women greater opportunities to participate in religious life while communities with less prominent eschatological expectations accepted traditional Greco-Roman gender roles.

Thus far, I have demonstrated that women who joined the earliest Pauline communities enjoyed an increase in status and opportunities. The opportunity to participate more fully within their religious communities provided some women with a

life that did not conform to the Greco-Roman expectations of the “ideal woman”. The women who benefited from these new forms of participation were no longer limited to the household domain. These women were granted leadership roles that were previously limited to men. “The negation of sexuality, marriage, and childbearing brought with it the possibility of expanded roles for women within the Jesus movement, including substantial participation in the public life of Christian communities” (Kraemer 1992: 139). When early Christian women rejected traditional Greco-Roman gender standards, they blurred public and private dichotomies and had the opportunity to participate in roles that were generally restricted to men.

In my examination of the influence of Jewish apocalypticism upon early Christian belief systems, I have demonstrated that early Christians in Pauline communities expected an imminent end. A brief comparison between the eschatological expectations of members in Pauline communities with those in the Pastoral communities will provide valuable evidence for determining factors that influenced the status of women in early Christianity.

There is scholarly debate surrounding the exact nature of Paul’s eschatological beliefs. However, for present purposes, the importance lies in the time frame of the apocalypse. I have suggested that Pauline literature reflects high eschatological beliefs, the expectation of an imminent return of Jesus and the preparation for this arrival. It would be misleading to assume that all early Christian communities adopted apocalyptic worldviews in the same way. However, the Pauline epistles suggest that communities instructed by Paul held fairly consistent views regarding the end times, the return of the saviour and salvation (Meeks 1983: 171-172). In the previous examination of

eschatology, it was determined that followers of the early Jesus movement were concerned with the time period of the apocalypse. As is evident in 1 Thessalonians, members of Pauline communities in the middle of the first century were already questioning the delay in the return of Jesus. "Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (1 Thes. 5:1-2). The notion that the Thessalonians were concerned with the end time is also expressed in their concern that the members of their community have already died. "[...Those] who are left until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself [...] will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thes. 4: 15-17). Paul reassures the community that their concerns are unfounded: the return of Jesus was imminent.

Not all early Christian communities held the same eschatological belief system. The Pastor did not have the same eschatological worldview as Paul. Certain scholars including Reggie M. Kidd argue that it is impossible to distinguish the eschatological worldviews presented in the Pauline letters from those in the Pastoral letters. Kidd examines historical, sociological and inscriptional evidence to argue against "the discontinuity between the acknowledged Pauline letters and the Pastorals" (1990: 9). Kidd also uses the comparative method to examine similarities and differences between the Pauline epistles, the Pastoral letters, Greco-Roman society and other primary texts. The text presents a solid argument against the "bourgeois nature" of early Christianity by thoroughly examining the historic and social nature of first century Rome.

Kidd's argument is problematic, however. When examining the Pastoral Letters, Kidd does not approach the texts in the same historical and critical manner that he uses to examine other texts or evidence. I suggest that Kidd is writing in an apologetic manner in order to legitimize the Pastoral epistles as Pauline literature.

In the Pastoral letters, the author attempts to establish structure, order and provide long-term solutions for outside criticism. For example, the Pastor provides strict instructions regarding the necessary qualifications of deacons and bishops (1 Tim. 3:1-13). He reminds his recipients to be careful when selecting the officers: "Do not ordain anyone hastily" (1 Tim. 5:22). This intense focus of the Pastor on the requirements for religious offices suggests that he had long term visions for the religious communities he instructed and is concerned with the views of outsiders, their criticism of the church. The process of selection suggests that the Pastor foresaw a long period of time before the end of the physical world.

The Pastor's focus upon the maintenance of traditional Greco-Roman social structures suggests that he does not believe that the end of the world is imminent in the way that Paul did. Instead of focusing upon the equal salvation of all individuals who follow the Jesus movement, the Pastor reinforces the need to be submissive to kings, leaders and figures of authority (1 Tim. 2:1; 1 Tim 6:2; Tit. 2:9; Tit. 3:1). "Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient" (Tit. 3:1). The Pastor's instructions to maintain specific traditional Greco-Roman hierarchical social, political and economic relationships or structures suggests that church leadership was concerned with being discredited by both outsiders and insiders. Outside criticism and negative perceptions caused the early Christian community to suffer social difficulties (MacDonald 1996: 49-

126). I am not suggesting that the Pastor or the communities he instructed did not foresee a return of Christ. It is the expected time when the Parousia was to come that has changed since the establishment of the Pauline communities. Evidence for a change in eschatological worldviews can also be found in the lack of urgency that is found within the Pastoral epistles but is present in the Pauline letters. I suggest that church leadership came to understand that the return of Jesus was not imminent and as a direct result their eschatological worldviews changed. The timeline change in the expectation of the Parousia had a long-term effect on the structure of the community. A comparison of Paul's eschatological expectations with those found in the Pastoral epistles will shed light upon the social expectations of the authors and the communities that they instructed.

Members of Pauline communities expected that the end of the world was imminent. As such, these earliest Christians placed less value upon traditional Greco-Roman social structures and a greater emphasis upon preparing for the imminent return of Jesus. These Christians, under the guidance of Paul, determined that it was crucial to perform the necessary works, to be as faithful as possible, as well as spread Jesus' message in a timely fashion. The Pauline literature that has been examined here suggests that women were interested in joining early Christian groups, played a key role in the development of early Christian communities and achieved leadership roles.

The desire of early Christian women to participate fully in their communities appears to be a trend rather than an isolated incident. Kraemer suggests that "for many women, being a Christian was a conscious decision" (1992: 131). Regardless of whether early Christian leaders agreed with an increase in the participation of women within their communities, the opportunity for female leadership and an increase in social status could

have provided a motivation for conversion. It would seem unlikely that women who sought to participate more fully in their religious community would have joined the early Christian movement if membership did not provide more opportunities or freedoms than the traditional Greco-Roman cults. It seems that the expectation of the return of Jesus in the near future influenced the manner in which women were treated by members of the early Christian communities and by Paul himself.

Traditional Greco-Roman views of women were promoted within the church. As time passed, there was a return to traditional gender boundaries. As is demonstrated in the Pastoral letters, female leadership and the increased opportunities for women within early Christianity, though still promoted by a few communities, were eventually eliminated by the majority of Christian communities in favour of a male dominated hierarchical church.

There is little doubt that the Pastor foresaw a long-term waiting period before the return of Jesus. However, when one keeps in mind that prescriptive evidence does not necessarily represent real life circumstances, it is impossible to state with certainty that those addressed in the Pastoral letters came to believe that the end of the world had been “postponed”. Despite the lack of evidence found in the Pastoral letters regarding the eschatological belief systems of the average early Christian, it would appear possible to deduce their worldview from other types of evidence. This paper has examined the concerns that the Thessalonians had regarding the apocalypse, the time frame of the end times and the salvation of the members of their community that had already died. If we consider that the earliest Christians in Thessalonica came to worry about the time frame of the end times in the middle of the first century, it would not appear to be a long stretch

to consider the possibility that communities that were established long after the original Pauline Christians had died questioned the timeline of the Parousia as time passed.

Because church leaders including the Pastor no longer perceived the apocalypse as imminent, the manner in which women were treated changed. Without the expectation of the impending end of the world, there was more of a need to focus on current and long-term social, political and economic circumstances. The Pastor demonstrates that he felt a need to establish structured Christian communities that conformed to traditional Greco-Roman standards. Therefore, there was no need to change contemporary social systems or neglect gender boundaries.

This renewed interest in the traditional Greco-Roman social structures would have directly influenced the participation of women within early Christianity. First, the lack of urgency would have negated the need for female missionaries. Second, with the belief that they had more time before the Parousia, Christian leaders would have become more concerned than their predecessors about persecution and outsiders' criticisms of the participation of women within their communities.

An exploration of the purpose behind the interest in a gender hierarchy by early Christian leaders requires an examination of the internal motives for an increase in structure and boundaries. A long-term Christian community that was more socially streamlined with the contemporary Greco-Roman society would have, in some cases, attracted more individuals into converting and would have made social life easier for the converts. However, in order to achieve a full understanding of early church hierarchy, it is necessary to consider possible reasons for the promotion of submission, hierarchy and traditional social structure.

If we accept that the Pastor was attempting to correct the behaviour of women and other individuals who did not belong to the upper classes, then we also must accept that these individuals of “lower social standings” as well as other “lesser individuals” had achieved an actual form of social standing or power within early Christian communities. This argument can be corroborated with evidence found in the Pauline letters where Paul discusses the increased participation of women within the church including their ability to prophesy, instruct and achieve leadership positions. Support can also be found in non-canonical texts such as the previously examined *Acts of Paul and Thecla* where a woman is not only the protagonist of the story but completely ignores certain Greco-Roman gender standards.

With the change in eschatological expectations, and the desire to form long lasting Christian communities, some male church leaders may have felt social as well as personal pressures to reconfigure their religious communities. Without the urgency to convert pagans and use female missionaries, male church leaders may have chosen to return to traditional Greco-Roman gender boundaries in order to secure their leadership positions and maintain the perceived superiority of their own position as men.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the status of women in Pauline communities, the Pastoral communities and the general Greco-Roman world. I have demonstrated that women in the earliest Jesus movement were granted greater opportunities for participation than women in the contemporary Greco-Roman world. I have also shown how the author of the Pastoral letters limited participation by women and reinforced traditional Greco-Roman social structures.

Moreover, eschatology played an integral part in the early Jesus movement. Early Christian leaders's perception of women was affected by eschatological expectations. Women who belonged to the earliest Pauline communities (high eschatological expectations) experienced greater opportunities than women who belonged to the Pastoral communities (low eschatological expectations) that utilized traditional gender boundaries. The women in the Pastoral communities were behaving in ways that were deemed inappropriate by the Pastor and the Greco-Roman community at large. Women in the Pastoral communities had enjoyed the ability to participate in leadership positions but male church leaders attempted to restrict women's ability to participate in such roles because of men's concern with outside criticism. Communities with high eschatological beliefs expected an imminent return of Jesus and had granted women leadership positions. Communities such as those described in the Pastorals no longer held high eschatological expectations and therefore had to contend with long-term problems like outside criticism. Furthermore, these communities would have felt a need to develop order and structure. I argue that lowered eschatological expectations contributed to the development of hierarchy and structure along with a return to traditional Greco-Roman

gender boundaries. This transformation in the apocalyptic worldview therefore also changed the status attributed to women. With gender hierarchy reinforced, women were no longer granted the opportunity to participate in male leadership roles.

With the realization that the end of the world was not imminent, male church leaders may have sought to secure their positions of power within the church. In the early Jesus movement, individuals who held lesser social, economic or political positions by Greco-Roman standards were granted the opportunity to participate in ways that were previously limited to the elite male members of their community. These new opportunities included leadership roles and the opportunity to influence members of their community, as well as help themselves and others achieve what they considered salvation. The promotion of a highly structured process for the selection of church officials with specific qualifications, as well as the insistence that traditional hierarchy be maintained, suggests that, by the time of the Pastoral epistles, church leadership was reluctant to stray far from Greco-Roman standards. As a result, women and other members of lower social standing were limited in the ways that they could participate within the early church.

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