

A review of Brian J. Dodd, *The Problem with Paul* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1996) by Andreas J. Köstenberger.\*

Brian Dodd, who serves as pastor of Antioch United Methodist Church in Antioch, California, and as an adjunct professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary, asks the following questions of "problematic Paul":

Was Paul a chauvinist?

Was he a prude?

Was he anti-Semitic?

Why did he condone slavery?

How might he have fared on the Oprah Winfrey Show?

Now the most pressing contemporary issue for some may, of course, be the final one, but for our purposes, it seems appropriate to focus on Dodd's second chapter, entitled "The Male Chauvinist and the Modern Woman." Here the author seeks to vindicate Paul against the charge that he was a male chauvinist. Sure enough, Paul emerges, not a sexist, but a "proto-feminist" (Dodd's term).

Some of this may be a legitimate effort to interpret Paul's views to a culture (end-of-twentieth-century North America) that is rapidly moving away from the biblical vision of manhood and womanhood. But, as will be seen, Dodd's revisionist enterprise comes at the heavy price of questionable interpretive procedures and an extremely selective perusal of the available literature on the subject.

*Question:* what do the following examples have in common? (1) Dodd notes that Paul's commendation of Phoebe in Romans 16:1–2 ("receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints") "equals" that of Timothy in 1 Corinthians 4:17 and 16:10–11. Hence Phoebe's and Timothy's ministries should be considered equal as well. (2) Dodd observes that the same term, "coworker," is used for both Priscilla and men such as Aquila, Apollos, Timothy, Mark, and Luke (e.g. Rom. 16:9, 21; 1 Cor. 3:9). Hence their ministries are the same. (3) Dodd observes that, when Paul calls Junia an "apostle" in Romans 16:7, this means that "Paul recognizes this highly authoritative status of this woman missionary." According to Dodd, there is no difference between the ministries of Junia and Paul.

*Answer:* what these examples have in common, in short, is a serious disregard for context. In fact, Dodd is guilty of, not one, but at least two serious interpretive fallacies: first, his reasoning is an instance of a procedure called "illegitimate totality transfer" (a term first used by James Barr in his classic *Semantics of Biblical Language* [London: SCM, 1961], 218) which supposes that the meaning of a word in a specific context is much broader than the context itself allows, so that the word's entire range of meaning is imported into a given reference; second, a word's sense (e.g. coworker) and reference (particular individuals) are linked by Dodd in an unwarranted fashion, which gives the impression that a given word means the same thing in any conceivable context. Dodd thus utterly fails to distinguish between the possible meanings of a given word and its actual meaning when referring to a specific individual in a particular context.

The following example may serve as an illustration of this fallacy. I may say, "My neighbor is a soldier in the Army Reserve. Gen. Colin Powell is a soldier. Therefore my neighbor and Gen. Powell have the same job." But you will immediately reply, "True, your neighbor and Gen. Colin Powell are both soldiers, but that does not mean that their rank and range of responsibilities are the same." And that is precisely the point.

Why engage in such technicalities? Because this kind of reasoning has become increasingly common in semipopular treatments concerning gender issues, and because it is Dodd, an egalitarian, who manifestly violates the accepted canons of responsible scholarship, a charge often leveled against complementarians.

Reading Dodd's specific treatment of individual gender passages, one is amazed at how he manages to eliminate all references to male headship. In 1 Corinthians 11, for instance, Dodd detects "indications of a profeminist Paul": women, as well as men, are granted power to prophesy. While conceding that the chapter emphasizes "the male-female hierarchy in the order of things," Dodd notes that Paul strikes "an egalitarian balance" when he affirms that man is not independent from woman (1 Cor. 11:11–12). But by the end of Dodd's discussion, Paul's teaching of male headship has totally disappeared. Thus he sums up the message of 1 Corinthians 11 as follows: "Though men and women are to dress differently for worship according to the conventions of their culture, they are mutually interdependent on each other [*sic*]." All that is left is cultural relativity and male-female interdependence. One cannot help but wonder whether this interpretation is really true to Paul's intentions.

Dodd's treatment of Ephesians 5:21–33, entitled "mutuality in Ephesians," makes no mention whatsoever of the term "head" which is at the very heart of the passage. In a phrase that surely requires more precise formulation, the author concludes that women are equally saved, gifted, and sent as men.

First Timothy 2 is not addressed by Dodd until the penultimate page of this chapter, and then almost as an afterthought. Indeed, delaying discussion of 1 Timothy 2 until the conclusion is already firmly in place has become almost standard procedure in egalitarian exegesis. Disappointingly, Dodd does not offer his own interpretation of this significant text but merely refers to Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives* as support for a culturally relative reading of 1 Timothy 2. Since 1 Corinthians 11, like 1 Timothy 2, is based on creation but commonly considered to be culturally relative, the same reasoning should apply to 1 Timothy 2. But this argument will not stand, since it is not the culturally relative aspect of 1 Corinthians 11 (the wearing of a head covering as a visible expression of male headship over the woman) that finds a parallel in 1 Timothy 2, but the universally applicable teaching supported by creation order (male headship in analogy to God's headship over Christ). More accurately, 1 Timothy 2:13, in analogy to 1 Corinthians 11:8–9, appeals to creation order in order to support the permanent normativity of male headship in the church. Furthermore, while the wearing of a veil may be cultural-specific, the underlying principle, male headship, is arguably not, a fact that is completely ignored by Dodd.

What is the value of Dodd's "vindication of Paul" in contemporary culture? Highly questionable indeed. For it involves the distortion of Paul's true intention, words, and beliefs, which is far too high a price to pay for making Scripture palatable to (post-)modern man. Paul may need an interpreter who can explain him to those today who have difficulty hearing his true message — but this is not the man, and this is not the book.

\*This review first appeared in *CBMW News* 1/4 (1996): 12–13, and is posted with permission.