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B. L. MERKLE'S INTERPRETIVE METHOD APPLIED TO 1 TIMOTHY 2:8-15

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In the September 2006 issue of *JETS*, Benjamin L. Merkle answers an inconsistency which egalitarians note in some complimentary exegeses of 1 Corinthians 11:8-9 (where head coverings are seen as a cultural practice) and 1 Timothy 2:13-14 (where the prohibition against women teaching men is seen as a transcultural principle).<sup>1</sup> Merkle points out that in the first passage, Paul's creation arguments are "only indirectly linked to the need for head coverings,"<sup>2</sup> and support instead the transcultural injunction to maintain gender distinctions. In the second passage, Merkle says, "the Genesis account gives the reasons for why a woman is not to teach or have authority over a man."<sup>3</sup> The creation account here is tied directly to Paul's prohibition. "Therefore," Merkle concludes, "the command for women not to teach or have authority over men should be upheld in the church today."<sup>4</sup>

## II. I CORINTHIANS 11

Merkle's analysis of 1 Corinthians 11:8-9 addresses both the broad context of the situation in Corinth and the textual context in which the verses occur. He discusses the eschatology of the Corinthians, providing evidence from the text as well as analyses by Thiselton and Fee supporting the presence of an 'over-realized eschatology.' Then he turns to 1 Corinthians 11:8-9 specifically.

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<sup>1</sup> Merkle cites Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women, & Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Henrickson, 1992) and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Good News for Women: A Biblical Picture of Gender Equality* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin L. Merkle, "Paul's Arguments from Creation in 1 Corinthians 11:8-9 and 1 Timothy 2:13-14: An Apparent Inconsistency Answered," *JETS*, 40 (September 2006), 548.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 547-8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 548.

His analysis of verses 2-16 can be summarized in chart form:

1 Corinthians 11:2-16 UBS <sup>4</sup>	1 Corinthians 11:2-16 New International Standard	Merkle Analysis
<sup>2</sup> Ἐπαινῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς ὅτι πάντα μου μέμνησθε καί, καθὼς παρέδωκα ὑμῖν, τὰς παραδόσεις κατέχετε.	<sup>2</sup> Now I praise you because you remember me in everything, and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.	
<sup>3</sup> θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι ὅτι παντὸς ἀνδρὸς ἡ κεφαλὴ ὁ Χριστὸς ἐστίν, κεφαλὴ δὲ γυναικὸς ὁ ἀνὴρ, κεφαλὴ δὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὁ θεός.	<sup>3</sup> But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.	Introduction tangentially related to head coverings
<sup>4</sup> πᾶς ἀνὴρ προσευχόμενος ἢ προφητεύων κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων καταισχύνει τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ.	<sup>4</sup> Every man who has <i>something</i> on his head while praying or prophesying, disgraces his head.	
<sup>5</sup> πᾶσα δὲ γυνὴ προσευχομένη ἢ προφητεύουσα ἀκατακαλύπτω τῇ κεφαλῇ καταισχύνει τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῆς· ἐν γάρ ἐστιν καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ τῇ ἐξυρημένῃ.	<sup>5</sup> But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying, disgraces her head; for she is one and the same with her whose head is shaved.	Comparison pointing beyond head coverings to ‘message ... conveyed by one’s appearance.’ <sup>5</sup>
<sup>6</sup> εἰ γὰρ οὐ κατακαλύπτεται γυνή, καὶ κειράσθω· εἰ δὲ αἰσχρὸν γυναικὶ τὸ κείρασθαι ἢ ξυρᾶσθαι, κατακαλυπτέσθω.	<sup>6</sup> For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head.	
<sup>7</sup> ἀνὴρ μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ὀφείλει κατακαλύπτεσθαι τὴν κεφαλὴν εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα θεοῦ ὑπάρχων· ἡ γυνὴ δὲ δόξα ἀνδρὸς ἐστίν.	<sup>7</sup> For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but <b>the woman is the glory of man.</b>	Thesis
<sup>8</sup> οὐ γὰρ ἐστίν ἀνὴρ ἐκ γυναικὸς ἀλλὰ γυνὴ ἐξ ἀνδρός·	<sup>8</sup> For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man;	Argument from creation (Gen 2:21-23)
<sup>9</sup> καὶ γὰρ οὐκ ἐκτίσθη ἀνὴρ διὰ τὴν γυναῖκα ἀλλὰ γυνὴ διὰ τὸν ἄνδρα.	<sup>9</sup> for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake.	Argument from creation (Gen 2:18)

<sup>5</sup> Merkle, 535.

<sup>10</sup> διὰ τοῦτο ὀφείλει ἡ γυνὴ ἐξουσίαν ἔχειν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς διὰ τοὺς ἀγγέλους.	<sup>10</sup> Therefore the woman ought to have a <i>symbol of authority</i> on her head, because of the angels.	Head covering is itself a symbol which points to a general principle.
<sup>11</sup> πλὴν οὐτε γυνὴ χωρὶς ἀνδρὸς οὐτε ἀνὴρ χωρὶς γυναικὸς ἐν κυρίῳ·	<sup>11</sup> However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.	
<sup>12</sup> ὡσπερ γὰρ ἡ γυνὴ ἐκ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς, οὕτως καὶ ὁ ἀνὴρ διὰ τῆς γυναικὸς· τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ.	<sup>12</sup> For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man <i>has his birth</i> through the woman; and all things originate from God.	
<sup>13</sup> ἐν ὑμῖν αὐτοῖς κρίνατε· πρέπον ἐστὶν γυναῖκα ἀκατακάλυπτον τῷ θεῷ προσεύχεσθαι;	<sup>13</sup> Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God <i>with head</i> uncovered?	
<sup>14</sup> οὐδὲ ἡ φύσις αὐτῆ διδάσκει ὑμᾶς ὅτι ἀνὴρ μὲν ἐὰν κομᾶ ἀτιμία αὐτῷ ἐστίν, <sup>15</sup> γυνὴ δὲ ἐὰν κομᾶ δόξα αὐτῇ ἐστίν; ὅτι ἡ κόμη ἀντὶ περιβολαίου δέδοται [αὐτῇ].	<sup>14</sup> Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, <sup>15</sup> but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering.	Argument from nature supporting gender distinction rather than head covering specifically.
<sup>16</sup> Εἰ δὲ τις δοκεῖ φιλόνηκος εἶναι, ἡμεῖς τοιαύτην συνήθειαν οὐκ ἔχομεν οὐδὲ αἱ ἐκκλησίαι τοῦ θεοῦ.	<sup>16</sup> But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.	Argument from general practice showing general need for distinction rather than specific practice

For the purposes of this paper, it is especially important to note that Merkle believes that a head covering is “a concrete expression of an intangible truth,”<sup>6</sup> and that “What is absolutely crucial in understanding the use of Paul’s arguments from creation in verse 8-9 is that he is not directly using these verses to make the case that head coverings are needed for women when they pray and prophesy. . . . Rather, Paul uses the creation

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<sup>6</sup> Merkle, 536.

account in Genesis to affirm his previous statement that ‘the woman is the glory of man.’”<sup>7</sup>

### III. 1 TIMOTHY 2

In 1 Timothy 2:13-14, Merkle adopts the same method of analysis. He looks at the cultural milieus in Corinth and Ephesus and concludes that Paul was probably addressing a similar type of “over-realized eschatology and resulting asceticism.”<sup>8</sup> He reminds us of the way head coverings expresses a general principle in the Corinthian passage and argues that here, in contrast, “there is no difference between the underlying principle and the cultural expression of that principle.”<sup>9</sup> In addition, he believes that “here Paul is arguing directly for the prohibition he gave in verse 12 since the ground for the prohibition immediately follows the command.”<sup>10</sup> However, when Merkle’s method of interpretation is applied to the broader context of 1 Timothy, different results emerge. Again, a chart of the relevant verses clarifies the analysis.

1 Timothy 2:8 - 3:1 UBS <sup>4</sup>	1 Timothy 2:8 - 3:1 New American Standard	Merkle Analysis	Merkle’s Analysis Applied to Broader Context
<sup>8</sup> Βούλομαι οὖν προσεύχεσθαι τοὺς ἄνδρας ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ ἐπαίροντας ὀσίους χεῖρας χωρὶς ὀργῆς καὶ διαλογισμοῦ.	<sup>8</sup> Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.		Introduction tangentially related to women teaching
<sup>9</sup> ὡσαύτως [καὶ] γυναῖκας ἐν καταστολῇ κοσμίῳ μετὰ αἰδοῦς καὶ σωφροσύνης κοσμεῖν	<sup>9</sup> Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and		Instructions pointing beyond women teaching to women’s attitude of

<sup>7</sup> Merkle, 534.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 540.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 542.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

ἐαυτάς, μὴ ἐν πλέγμασιν καὶ χρυσίῳ ἢ μαργαρίταις ἢ ἱματισμῶ πολυτελεῖ,	discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments;		self-restraint (Thesis). See also verse 15.
<sup>10</sup> ἀλλ' ὁ πρέπει γυναιξὶν ἐπαγγελλομέναις θεοσέβειαν, δι' ἔργων ἀγαθῶν.	<sup>10</sup> but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness.		Restraint goes beyond dress to attitude and behavior.
<sup>11</sup> γυνὴ ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ μαθησθήτω ἐν πάσῃ ὑποταγῇ·	<sup>11</sup> Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness.		Cultural examples of women behaving with self-restraint
<sup>12</sup> διδάσκειν δὲ γυναικὶ οὐκ ἐπιτρέπω οὐδὲ ἀυθεντεῖν ἀνδρός, ἀλλ' εἶναι ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ.	<sup>12</sup> But <b>I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man</b> , but to remain quiet.	Thesis; no difference between symbol and principle	
<sup>13</sup> Ἄδὰμ γὰρ πρῶτος ἐπλάσθη, εἶτα Εὐά.	<sup>13</sup> For it was Adam who was first created, <i>and</i> then Eve.	Argument from creation (Gen 2:7, 22)	Arguments from creation point beyond women's specific roles to the need for self-restraint in behavior, especially vis à vis men.
<sup>14</sup> καὶ Ἄδὰμ οὐκ ἠπατήθη, ἡ δὲ γυνὴ ἐξαπατηθεῖσα ἐν παραβάσει γέγονεν·	<sup>14</sup> And <i>it was not</i> Adam <i>who was</i> deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression.	Argument from creation (Gen 3:6, 13)	
<sup>15</sup> σωθήσεται δὲ διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας, ἐὰν μείνωσιν ἐν πίστει καὶ ἀγάπῃ καὶ ἀγιασμῶ μετὰ σωφροσύνης·	<sup>15</sup> But <i>women</i> shall be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.		Again, behavior is emphasized.
<b>1 Timothy 3:1</b> πιστὸς ὁ λόγος. Εἴ τις ἐπισκοπῆς ὀρέγεται, καλοῦ ἔργου ἐπιθυμεῖ.	<sup>NAS</sup> <b>1 Timothy 3:1 ¶</b> It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires <i>to do</i> .		

In the first half of his article, Merkle used the logical progression of Paul's thoughts to support the thesis that in the Corinthian passage "the practice (head coverings) is dependent on culture, but the principle (gender distinctions) is

transcultural.”<sup>11</sup> In 1 Timothy, although Merkle confines his analysis of this passage to verses 13 and 14, when we look at the broader structure of Paul’s discourse, we see the same kind of transcultural principles with cultural applications.

Whether the passage begins in verse 8 or 9 is disputed. Knight rightly notes the theme of prayer which connects verse 8 to the preceding passage as well as the lack of verb in verse 9 which ties verse 8 to what follows and concludes that “it is best to understand it as a transitional verse.”<sup>12</sup> Whether one looks at verse 8 or 9, however, in either case the passage begins with an introduction only tangentially related to women’s roles, similarly to 1 Cor 11:3. Verse 9 then offers specific instructions, but just as 1 Cor 11: 5-6 gave a comparison which pointed beyond the specific behaviors towards the honor and shame which that behavior produced, here too, women’s modest dress and, in verse 10, behavior, point beyond the specific practices towards the attitude which Paul desires women to have.

Knight notes in regards to verse 8,

Paul may want to emphasize here the posture or gesture as appropriate to the seriousness and urgency of prayer in general and prayer for all people and authorities in particular and as providing for a unity of body and mind in prayer (the body joining with the voice and heart in being lifted up to God). But this does not seem to be the focus of this passage.

He goes on to note that the phrase *holy hands* “is surely intended to stand for the entirety of human life, including particularly the central inner dimensions of heart and

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 542.

<sup>12</sup> George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1992), 130.

mind, as indicated by the following words.”<sup>13</sup> In verses 9 and 10 as well, the specific instructions are examples of a principle which Paul wants upheld.<sup>14</sup>

The whole passage (verses 9-15) is framed by the word σωφροσύνη. BDAG offers “reasonableness, rationality” (But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. Acts 26:25) and “good judgment, moderation, self-control.” Mounce adds to that “the mean between two extremes, and . . . ‘chastity.’”<sup>15</sup> In verse 9, then, Paul exhorts women to dress with moderation and contrasts inappropriate outward dress with appropriate inward attire. In verse 15, at the close of the passage, women are encouraged to “continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.” The word here is the same as in verse 9. So in the same way that gender distinction is the principle addressed in 1 Corinthians 11, here the principle is for women to exercise good judgment.

Paul then goes on in verses 11 and 12 to give further applications. Within the broad principle of moderation, the quiet demeanor of women is addressed. Here again, we have a repeated word: ἡσυχία. BDAG lists “quietness, rest” as translations (Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. 2 Thessalonians 3:12), as well as “silence” (And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew dialect, they became even more quiet. Acts 22:2).

This is not the word for complete silence, σιγή, but rather a quietness related to

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<sup>13</sup> Knight, 129.

<sup>14</sup> Knight puts it this way: “That his emphasis is on their effect and not on the items as such, is seen in the first part of v. 9, which sets out this concern as his guiding principles (“with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly”). It is with braided hair, gold, pearls, and very costly garments as violations of this principle, not with hair however arranged or gold, pearls, or garments in and of themselves that he is concerned,” 138.

<sup>15</sup> William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 2000), 113-4.



orderliness and respect.<sup>16</sup> This again points to an underlying principle of quiet moderation for women. Paul's prohibition of women teaching men is his example of the way that principle, grounded in creation, is put into place.

As mentioned previously, Merkle sees the creation argument as grounds for this specific application since it follows it directly. However, it actually comes not after the prohibition but rather after the restatement of the principle, ἀλλ' εἶναι ἐν ἡσυχία. Both the order of creation and Eve's deception, then, must be examined to see if they offer the grounds for Paul's theme.

Implications of the order of creation have been affirmed, denied and debated, of course. Engaging each author's conclusions is beyond the scope of a 30 minute presentation. To simplify Paul's statement here, however, we can somewhat obviously affirm that if Adam was created first, then Eve was created second. To uphold this order of creation, then, requires women to exercise quiet self-restraint.

An interesting and perhaps relevant cross-cultural example would be the chivalrous behavior expected of men in America and in Europe. Here, it used to be considered appropriate for men to step aside and allow a woman to go through a doorway first, perhaps holding the door for her. In Europe, however, decorum dictated that a man would enter a room first in order to verify that it was safe for the woman to enter. In both cases, the man is showing care for the woman, although the practices are opposite. In

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<sup>16</sup> "The Greek word connotes quietness or rest, rather than absence of speech." Susan Foh, "A Male Leadership View: The Head of the Woman is the Man," in Bonnidell Clouse and Robert G. Clouse, ed., *Women in Ministry: Four Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1989), 103 n. 12. One might argue, of course, that the principle of quietness would automatically preclude a woman from teaching since that is usually a vocal activity. However, the attitude that is being discussed – one of quietness of spirit and orderliness of conduct – can certainly be maintained while teaching.

both cases, quiet self-restraint on the woman's part would be to accept the care shown to her, neither pushing herself ahead of the European man nor refusing to step ahead of the American. Other examples and situations will require more complex analyses and solutions; however this example shows the way a woman can exercise the same attitude in culturally opposite behaviors.

The second argument which grounds the principle of quietness and self-restraint comes from the fall. Here Paul notes that Eve rather than Adam was the one deceived. Connections between this event and teaching ability or appropriateness are also debated. Merkle mentions (without necessarily upholding) the susceptibility of women to deception, the violation of the headship of man, and Eve's lack of education.<sup>17</sup> However, at the very least, Eve did not exercise self-restraint and this is enough to ground the principle which Paul teaches. Once again, the exegetical method Merkle used in 1 Corinthians applies. A transcultural principle is being taught, grounded in creation, with specific examples of cultural practice.

Merkle's interpretive method is clear and helpful in setting forth the issues. 1 Corinthian 11:2-16 enjoins us to maintain gender distinctions, since God chose to create us as men and women. In our culture, this will be expressed in part by gender-appropriate choices in dress, jewelry, style and behavior. The same analytical process can also be applied to 1 Timothy 2:8 – 3:1. When the broader context is included, this passage calls for women to behave with self-control in a way that Eve did not. In some cultures, this will be expressed by reserving adult teaching roles for men. In our culture, however, this

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<sup>17</sup> Merkle, 542-4.

need not be the case. Women who have the gift of teaching are able to do so while still maintaining an attitude of restraint towards any men who choose to listen.