

II: EXEGETICAL AND THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

3: Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1–3

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Why go all the way back to the first three chapters of the Bible, if our concern is with manhood and womanhood today? Because as Genesis 1-3 go, so goes the whole Biblical debate. One way or the other, all the additional Biblical texts on manhood and womanhood must be interpreted consistently with these chapters. They lay the very foundation of Biblical manhood and womanhood.

My purpose in this essay is to demonstrate from Genesis 1-3 that both *male-female equality* and *male headship*, properly defined, were instituted by God at creation and remain permanent, beneficent aspects of human existence.

Let me define *male-female equality*:

Man and woman are equal in the sense that they bear God's image equally.

Let me also define *male headship*:

In the partnership of two spiritually equal human beings, man and woman, the man bears the primary responsibility to lead the partnership in a God-glorifying direction.

The model of headship is our Lord, the Head of the church, who gave Himself for us.¹ The antithesis to male headship is male domination. By male domination I mean the assertion of the man's will over the woman's will, heedless of her spiritual equality, her rights, and her value. *My essay will be completely misunderstood if the distinction between male headship and male domination is not kept in mind throughout.*

Evangelical feminism argues that God created man and woman as equals in a sense that excludes male headship. Male headship/domination (feminism acknowledges no distinction) was imposed upon Eve as a penalty for her part in the fall. It follows, in this view, that a woman's redemption in Christ releases her from the punishment of male headship.²

What, then, did God intend for our manhood and womanhood at the creation? And what did God decree as our punishment at the fall? The first two chapters of Genesis answer the first question and the third chapter answers the second.

What God Intended at Creation

Genesis 1:26-28

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." [RSV]³

In verse 26, God announces His intention to make man. This divine fanfare, unparalleled in the creation account, sets the making of man apart as a special event. God seems almost to jeopardize His unique glory by sharing His image and rule with a mere creature. Nevertheless, such a one God now intends to create. Verse 26, then, has the force of riveting our attention on God's next creative work, the zenith of His genius and benevolence.

Verse 26 teaches the glory of man in three ways. First, God says, "Let us make man. . . ." In verse 24 God had said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures. . . ." By the sheer power of His spoken will, God had caused the living creatures to emerge from the earth "by remote control as it were."⁴ In the creation of man, however, God Himself acted directly and personally.

Second, man was created to bear the image or likeness of God. Taking in the whole of Scripture, I think it probable that the image of God in man is the soul's personal reflection of God's righteous character. To image God is to mirror His holiness.⁵ Other interpreters construe the image of God in a more general sense, including human rationality, conscience, creativity, relationships, and everything we are as *man*.⁶ But however one interprets the *imago Dei*, God shared it with man alone. Man is unique, finding his identity upward in God and not downward in the animals.

The third indication of man's greatness in verse 26 is his special calling under God: ". . . and let them have dominion. . . ." Man stands between God above and the animals below as God's ruling representative. Man is the crown of creation.

In verse 27, God fulfills His purpose as declared in verse 26. In describing God's supreme creative act, Moses shifts from prose to poetry:

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.⁷

Each of these three lines makes a point. Line one asserts the divine creation of man. *We came from God*. Line two overlaps with line one, except that it highlights the divine image in man. *We bear a resemblance to God*. Line three boldly affirms the dual sexuality of man. *We are male and female*. Nowhere else in Genesis 1 is sexuality referred to;⁸ but human sexuality, superior to animal sexuality, merits the simple dignity given it here. Further, Moses doubtless intends to imply the equality of the sexes, for both male and female display the glory of God's image with equal brilliance: ". . . in *the image of God* he created him; *male and female* he created them." This is consistent with God's intention, stated in verse 26, that both sexes should rule: ". . . and let *them* rule. . . ."

Finally, in verse 28, God pronounces His benediction on man. In verse 22, God spoke His blessing out over the mass of the lower creatures. But here in verse 28 we read, "God blessed them and said *to them*. . . ." With man alone, male and female alike without distinction, God shares an I-thou relationship. In His benediction the Creator also authorizes male and female together to carry out their mission to rule the lower creation.

To sum up: Man was created as royalty in God's world, male and female alike bearing the divine glory equally.

Most evangelical feminists would heartily agree with this interpretation of the text. Genesis 2 and 3 are more controversial. But I must challenge two points of feminist interpretation before moving on to chapter two.

First, in commenting on verse 26, Gilbert Bilezikian notes that God refers to "them," both male and female, as "man." He writes:

. . . the designation "man" is a generic term for "human beings" and . . . encompasses both male and female. This fact is made especially clear in Genesis 5:2 where the word *man* designates both male and female: "He created them male and female; at the time they were created, he blessed them and called them 'man.'" (NIV)⁹

This is a striking fact, indeed. It demands explanation. After all, if any of us modern people were to create a world, placing at its apex our highest creature in the dual modality of man and woman, would we use the name of only one sex as a generic term for both? I expect not. Our modern prejudices would detect a whiff of "discrimination" a mile away. But God cuts right across the grain of our peculiar sensitivities when He names the human race, both man and woman, "man."¹⁰

Why would God do such a thing? Why would Moses carefully record the fact? Surely God was wise and purposeful in this decision, as He is in every other. Surely His referring to the race as “man” tells us something about ourselves. What aspect of reality, then, might God have been pointing to by this means? Bilezikian continues:

Thus, when God declares, “Let us make man in our image . . .” the term *man* refers to both male and female. Both man and woman are God’s image-bearers. There is no basis in Genesis 1 for confining the image of God to males alone.¹¹

Who, I wonder, is teaching that men only bear God’s image? No contributor to this volume will be found saying that. But not only is Bilezikian’s argument diverted by a non-issue, it also fails to explain what the text of verse 26 does say.

How may we understand the logic of God’s decision to describe the human race as “man”? Let me suggest that it makes sense against the backdrop of male headship. Moses does not explicitly teach male headship in chapter 1; but, for that matter, neither does he explicitly teach male-female equality. We see neither the words “male-female equality” nor “male headship” here or anywhere in Genesis 1-3. What Moses does provide is a series of more or less obvious hints as to his doctrine of manhood and womanhood. The burden of Genesis 1:26-28 is male-female equality. That seems obvious—wonderfully obvious! But God’s naming of the race “man” whispers male headship, which Moses will bring forward boldly in chapter two.

God did *not* name the human race “woman.” If “woman” had been the more appropriate and illuminating designation, no doubt God would have used it. He does not even devise a neutral term like “persons.” He called us “man,” which anticipates the male headship brought out clearly in chapter two, just as “male and female” in verse 27 foreshadows marriage in chapter two. Male headship may be personally repugnant to feminists, but it does have the virtue of explaining the sacred text.

Some contend that, in principle, one ought not to refer to the human race as “man.” Such terminology is unfair to half the population, they insist. I am not arguing that one must always use “man” in social and theological discourse to avoid misrepresenting the truth. I am arguing, however, that, in light of Genesis 1:26-27 and 5:1-2, one may not call this linguistic practice unjust or insensitive without impugning the wisdom and goodness of God.

My second challenge is directed at the concept of the image of God found in feminist interpretation. Aida Bensaçon Spencer writes, “Male and female are together needed to reflect God’s image.”¹² That is, man and woman together as collective man, rather than the man and the woman separately as individuals, reflect the image of God. Leaving us in no doubt about her meaning, Spencer makes this claim:

There is no possibility, according to [Genesis 1:26-27], that Adam, the male, could by himself reflect the nature of God. Neither is it possible for Adam, the female, by herself to reflect God's nature. Male and female are needed to reflect God's nature.¹³

There is *no possibility*, in light of Genesis 1:26-27, that either the man or the woman alone could display the image of God? What, then, of Genesis 5:1 and 3?

When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. . . . When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth.¹⁴

God created man in His image. Later, Adam had a son in *his* image. Implication? Adam, who was in God's image, passed the divine image (albeit flawed by sin) on to his son Seth. The divine image resided in the *individuals* Adam and Seth. So Spencer's insistence on a collective divine image in man-plus-woman is unwarranted. Genesis 1:26-27 can and should be construed to say that each individual created by God bore His image, male and female alike.

For this reason, Spencer's practical application of the *imago Dei* to church leadership lacks force. She writes:

Females as well as males are needed in positions of authority in the church to help people better to comprehend God's nature. God's image needs male and female to reflect God more fully.¹⁵

Even if it were true that the *imago Dei* would necessarily be incomplete in a single individual, it would still not follow that both men and women are needed *in positions of church authority* "to help people better to comprehend God's nature."

Genesis 2:18-25

There is a paradox¹⁶ in the creation account. While Genesis 1 teaches the equality of the sexes as God's image-bearers and vice-rulers on the earth, Genesis 2 adds another, complex dimension to Biblical manhood and womanhood. The paradox is this: God created male and female in His image equally, but He also made the male the head and the female the helper.

For clarity's sake, let me restate my definition of male headship (not male domination):

In the partnership of two spiritually equal human beings, man and woman, the man bears the primary responsibility to lead the partnership in a God-glorifying direction.

That is, God calls the man, with the counsel and help of the woman, to see that the male-female partnership serves the purposes of God, not the sinful urges of either member of the partnership.

What will now emerge clearly from Genesis 2 is that male-female equality does not constitute an undifferentiated sameness. Male and female are equal as God's image-bearers. They are spiritually equal, which is quite sufficient a basis for mutual respect between the sexes. But the very fact that God created human beings in the dual modality of male and female cautions us against an unqualified equation of the two sexes. This profound and beautiful distinction, which some belittle as "a matter of mere anatomy," is not a biological triviality or accident. It is God who wants men to be men and women to be women; and He can teach us the meaning of each, if we want to be taught. We ourselves can feel intuitively the importance of distinct sexual identity when we see, for example, a transvestite.

A man trying to be a woman repulses us, and rightly so. We know that this is perverse. Sexual confusion is a significant, not a slight, personal problem, because our distinct sexual identity defines who we are and why we are here and how God calls us to serve Him.

God has no intention of blurring sexual distinctness in the interests of equality *in an unqualified sense*. In fact, there are many areas of life in which God has no intention of levelling out the distinctions between us. Consider the obvious: God does not value intellectual or aesthetic equality among people. He does not value equality in finances, talents, and opportunity. It is God who deliberately ordains inequalities in many aspects of our lives. When I came from the womb, I had only so much potential for physical, intellectual, and aesthetic development. Some are born with less than I was, others with more. Because God is ultimately the One who shapes our lives, I have to conclude that God is not interested in unlimited equality among us. And because God is also wise, I further conclude that unlimited equality must be a false ideal. But the Bible does teach the equal personhood and value and dignity of all the human race—men, women, and children—and that must be the only equality that matters to God. One measure of our wisdom as God's image-bearers is whether we share this perspective with God. One measure of our reconciliation with God is whether His sovereign decrees draw from us a response of worship or resentment.

How, then, does Genesis 2 teach the paradoxical truths of male-female equality and male headship? The crucial verses are 18-25, but we should first establish the context.

God created the man first (2:7) and stationed him in the Garden of Eden to develop it and to guard it (2:15). God laid a dual command on the man. First, the man was commanded to partake freely and joyfully of the trees God had provided (2:16). Second, the man was commanded not to eat of one tree, lest he die (2:17). Here we see both God's abundant generosity and man's moral responsibility to live within the large, but not unrestricted, circle of his God-ordained existence. For

the man to step outside that circle, to attempt an autonomous existence, freed from God, would be his ruin.

That is the scene as we come to verse 18, which hits us from the blind side:

The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make him a helper suitable for him.”

Amid all this stunning perfection in the Garden of Eden, God said, “There is something wrong here. The man ought not to be alone.” God put His finger on the one deficiency in Paradise. The man needed “a helper suitable for him.”

Surprisingly, however, God did not immediately create this helper. Instead, God paraded the animals before the man for him to name them (2:19-20). Why? Because the man did not yet see the problem of his aloneness. And so God translated the man’s objective aloneness into a feeling of personal loneliness by setting him to this task. In serving God, the man encountered his own need.

This is so, because the task of naming the animals entailed more than slapping an arbitrary label on each beast. The task required the man to consider each animal thoughtfully, so that its name was appropriate to its particular nature. Out of this exercise, it began to dawn on the man that there was no creature in the garden that shared *his* nature. He discovered not only his own unique superiority over the beasts, which the privilege of naming them in itself implied; he also discovered his own solitude in the world.¹⁷ We may surmise that an aching longing welled up within the man for the companionship of another creature on his level.

And so God performs the first surgical operation (2:21-22). Imagine the scene: As the last of the beasts plods off with its new name, the man turns away with a trace of perplexity and sorrow in his eyes. God says, “Son, I want you to lie down. Now close your eyes and sleep.” The man falls into a deep slumber. The Creator goes to work, opening the man’s side, removing a rib, closing the wound, and building the woman. There she stands, perfectly gorgeous and uniquely suited to the man’s need. The Lord says to her, “Daughter, I want you to go stand over there. I’ll come for you in a moment.” She obeys. Then God touches the man and says, “Wake up now, son. I have one last creature for you to name. I’d like to know what you think of this one.” And God leads Eve out to Adam, who greets her with rhapsodic relief:

This is now bone of my bones

and flesh of my flesh;

she shall be called woman,

because she was taken out of man. (2:23)

These are the first recorded human words, and they are poetry. What do they express? The joy of the first man in receiving the gift of the first woman: “This creature alone, Father, out of all the others—this one at last meets my need for a companion. She alone is my equal, my very flesh. I identify with her. I love her. I will call her Woman, for she came out of Man.” The man perceives the woman not as his rival but as his partner, not as a threat because of her equality with himself but as the only one capable of fulfilling his longing within.

This primal event explains why we see men and women pairing off today, as Moses teaches in verse 24: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” The Garden of Eden is where it all started—not in the social evolution of mankind but in the original, pre-fall creation by God. At its very heart, marriage is not a human custom, variable according to changing times; it is a divinely created institution, defined for all ages and all cultures in our shared, primeval, perfect existence.

And what does marriage mean? What distinguishes this particular social institution? Moses reasons that marriage is the re-union of what was originally and literally one flesh—only now in a much more satisfying form, we would all agree. This is why “He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh.”¹⁸ Becoming “one flesh” as husband and wife is symbolized and sealed by sexual union, it is true. But the “one flesh” relationship entails more than sex. It is the profound fusion of two lives into one, shared life together, by the mutual consent and covenant of marriage. It is the complete and permanent giving over of oneself into a new circle of shared existence with one’s partner.

Lastly, verse 25 seals the creation account with a reminder of the perfection in which Adam and Eve¹⁹ first came together: “The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.” They felt no shame because they had nothing to hide. They lived in perfect integrity together.

In the conspicuous phrase, “a helper suitable for him” (2:18, 20),²⁰ we encounter the paradox of manhood and womanhood. On the one hand, the woman alone, out of all the creatures, was “suitable for him.” She alone was Adam’s equal. A man may enjoy a form of companionship with a dog, but only on the dog’s level. With a wife, a man finds companionship on his own level, for she is his equal.

On the other side of the paradox, the woman is the man’s helper. The man was not created to help the woman, but the reverse. Doesn’t this striking fact suggest that manhood and womanhood are distinct and non-reversible? Doesn’t this make sense

if we allow that, while the man and the woman are to love each other as equals, they are not to love each other *in the same way*?²¹ The man is to love his wife by accepting the primary responsibility for making their partnership a platform displaying God's glory, and the woman is to love her husband by supporting him in that godly undertaking.

So, was Eve Adam's equal? Yes and no. She was his spiritual equal and, unlike the animals, "suitable for him." But she was not his equal in that she was his "helper." God did not create man and woman in an undifferentiated way, and their mere maleness and femaleness identify their respective roles. A man, just by virtue of his manhood, is called to lead for God. A woman, just by virtue of her womanhood, is called to help for God.

Must the male headship side of the paradox be construed as an insult or threat to women? Not at all, because *Eve was Adam's equal in the only sense in which equality is significant for personal worth*. Woman is just as gifted as man "with all the attributes requisite to attaining wisdom, righteousness and life."²² In a parallel sense, a church member has as much freedom and opportunity to achieve real significance as does a church elder; but the elder is to lead, and the member is to support. There is no cause for offense.

Why then do some godly people resist this teaching so energetically? One reason is a smothering male domination asserted in the name of male headship. When truth is abused, a rival position (in this case, feminism) that lacks *logically* compelling power can take on *psychologically* compelling power. But male domination is a personal moral failure, not a Biblical doctrine.

If we define ourselves out of a reaction to bad experiences, we will be forever translating our pain in the past into new pain for ourselves and others in the present. We must define ourselves not by personal injury, not by fashionable hysteria, not even by personal variation and diversity, but by the suprapersonal pattern of sexual understanding taught here in Holy Scripture.

The paradox of Genesis 2 is also seen in the fact that the woman was made *from* the man (her equality) and *for* the man (her inequality). God did not make Adam and Eve from the ground at the same time and for one another without distinction. Neither did God make the woman first, and then the man *from* the woman *for* the woman. He could have created them in either of these ways so easily, but He didn't. Why? Because, presumably, that would have obscured the very nature of manhood and womanhood that He intended to make clear.²³

Another indication of the paradox is that Adam welcomes Eve as his equal ("bone

of my bones and flesh of my flesh”), yet he also names her (“she shall be called Woman”).²⁴ God charged the man with naming the creatures and gave him the freedom to exercise his own judgment in each case. In doing so, Adam brought the earthly creation under his dominion. This royal prerogative extended to Adam’s naming of his helper.²⁵ Nevertheless, the name he gives her, “Woman,” springs from his instantaneous recognition of her as the counterpart to “Man.”²⁶

Let us note this carefully. In designating her “Woman” the man interprets her identity in relation to himself. Out of his own intuitive comprehension of who she is, he interprets her as feminine, unlike himself, and yet as his counterpart and equal. Indeed, he sees in her his very own flesh. And he interprets the woman not only for his own understanding of her, but also for her self-understanding. God did not explain to the woman who she was in relation to the man, although He could have done so. He allowed Adam to define the woman, in keeping with Adam’s headship. Adam’s sovereign act not only arose out of his own sense of headship, it also made his headship clear to Eve. She found her own identity in relation to the man as his equal and helper *by the man’s definition*. Both Adam and Eve understood the paradox of their relationship from the start.

Still another signal of the paradox is detected in verse 24. Because the woman alone is the man’s very flesh, their re-union in marriage is a “one flesh” relationship. Adam could not have joined himself to a lesser creature without degrading himself. But it is the man who leaves his parents to found a new household with his new wife at his side. His wife does not leave her family to initiate the new household; this is the responsibility of the head.

Genesis 2 supplements Genesis 1 by showing that God’s commission that we “have dominion over the earth” (1:26, 28) as male and female works out practically through marriage. And in marriage the man heads the home for God and the wife helps him to fulfill the divine calling.

We ought to be sufficiently agile intellectually and emotionally to accept this paradoxical truth. Christians, of all people, have a reason to live with paradox. After all, God exists as one Godhead in three Persons, equal in glory but unequal in role. Within the Holy Trinity the Father leads, the Son submits to Him, and the Spirit submits to both (the Economic Trinity). But it is also true that the three Persons are fully equal in divinity, power, and glory (the Ontological Trinity). The Son submits, but not because He is God, Jr., an inferior deity. The ranking within the Godhead is a part of the sublime beauty and logic of true deity. And if our Creator exists in this manner, should we be surprised and offended if His creaturely analog on earth exists in paradoxical form?

But what does evangelical feminism have to say about Genesis 2? Spencer adopts a most eccentric view of “a helper suitable for him.”²⁷ She dissects the Hebrew word translated “suitable for him” (*kenegdô*) into its three constituent parts: *ke* + *neged* + *ô*, that is (very roughly), “as + before + him.” Spencer then paraphrases the sense as “a helper ‘as if in front of him.’” This is not strictly incorrect, but it would be more effectively paraphrased, “a helper corresponding to him.” That is, the woman is a helper suitable for the man, on his level, in contrast to the animals. But Spencer goes further in interpreting the *neged* element in the construction: “‘Front’ or ‘visible’ seems to suggest superiority or equality.”²⁸ A helper superior to Adam? Spencer cites as evidence favoring her view the fact that the noun *nagîd* means “leader,” which it does. She reasons as follows:

The same preposition [*neged*] when converted into a noun (*nagîd*) signifies “a leader, ruler, prince or king,” an “overseer.” Literally it signifies the “one in front.”²⁹

There is no evidence, however, that *neged* is “converted into a noun” to become *nagîd*.³⁰ By Spencer’s line of reasoning we could argue that the English adjective “front” converts into the noun “frontier,” suggesting that the word “front” connotes sparse habitation and primitive living conditions. This is simply invalid reasoning. Moreover, if *neged* means “superior to,” then what are we to make of, say, Psalm 119:168? “All my ways are before (*neged*) you.” Is the psalmist saying, “All my ways are superior to you, O Lord”? Not only is that an unbiblical notion, the whole burden of Psalm 119 is the excellency and authority of the law over the psalmist. The *neged* element in *kenegdô* merely conveys the idea of direct proximity or anteposition.³¹ The woman, therefore, is a helper corresponding to the man, as his counterpart and equal.

It is the word “helper” that suggests the woman’s supportive role. Spencer argues, however, that this description of Eve “does not at all imply inherent subordination.”³² She adduces the fact that God Himself is portrayed in Scripture as our “Helper,” which He is. She then interprets this fact: “If being ‘one who helps’ inherently implies subordination, then, in that case, God would be subordinate to humans!”³³ This reasoning is not really fallacious. The fallacy lies in the implication of what she says, namely, that God cannot be subordinate to human beings. It is entirely possible for God to subordinate Himself, in a certain sense, to human beings. He does so whenever He undertakes to help us. He does not “un-God” Himself in helping us; but He does stoop to our needs, according to His gracious and sovereign will.

Similarly, I subordinate myself to my children when I help them with their homework. I do not empty my mind of my own knowledge; but I do come down to their level to see their questions from their perspective and to point them toward solutions they can understand. Their needs set my agenda. In this sense I

subordinate myself to my children whenever I help them with their homework.

So it is with God. When He helps His people, He retains His glorious deity but (amazingly!) steps into the servant role, under us, to lift us up. He is the God who emptied Himself and came down to our level—below us, to the level of slavery—to help us supremely at the Cross. Therefore, the fact that the Old Testament portrays God as our Helper proves only that the helper role is a glorious one, worthy even of the Almighty. This Biblical fact does not prove that the concept of helper excludes subordination. Subordination is entailed in the very nature of a helping role.

I see this fallacy again and again in feminist argumentation. “Subordination=denigration” and “equality = indistinguishability.” Whence this insight into reality? Is the Son of God slighted because He came to do the will of the Father? Is the church denigrated by her subordination to her Lord? Are church members less than “fully redeemed” on account of their submission to their pastors and elders? Are children less than “fully human” by virtue of their submission to their parents?³⁴

“But,” someone will say, “doesn’t hierarchy in marriage reduce a woman to the status of a slave?” Not at all. The fact that a line of authority exists from one person to another in both slavery and marriage, and, for that matter, in the Holy Trinity, in the Body of Christ, in the local church, in the parent-child relationship—the fact that a line of authority exists from one person to another in all of these relationships does not reduce them all to the logic of slavery. Feminists seem to be reasoning that, because *some* subordination is degrading, *all* subordination must necessarily be degrading. On the contrary, what Biblical headship requires and what slave-holding forbids is that the head respect the helper as an equally significant person in the image of God.

Why then this arbitrary equation of submission with dehumanization in manhood and womanhood? For what logical reason *must* equality be defined in terms of position and role? This thinking did not spring up out of evangelical soil. It grew up out of worldly soil, and it has been transplanted into evangelical soil and is sustained there artificially by the potent fertilizers of the worldliness and doctrinal confusion widespread in the evangelical movement.

Bilezikian concludes his discussion of Genesis 2 with the following statement:

Whenever the principle of equal rights is denied and one sex is subjected to another, a natural outcome is the denial of the right of privacy for the subordinated party. Violation and exploitation ensue. The obscenities of rape, prostitution and pornography are the sinful results of male dominance. To strip a woman naked and hold her down under the power of a knife, a fistful of money, or the glare of a camera is the supreme expression of man’s rule over woman. Such rulership was not a part of God’s creation ideal.³⁵

I challenge this intemperate statement at several levels. First, the issue is framed in terms of “equal rights.” That sounds noble, but does God really grant husbands and wives equal rights *in an unqualified sense*? Surely God confers upon them equal worth as His image-bearers. But does a wife possess under God all the rights that her husband has *in an unqualified sense*? As the head, the husband bears the primary responsibility to lead their partnership in a God-glorifying direction. Under God, a wife may not compete for that primary responsibility. It is her husband’s just because he is the husband, by the wise decree of God. The ideal of “equal rights” in an unqualified sense is not Biblical.

Second, the “natural outcome” of godly male headship is female fulfillment, not a denial of female rights. And anyway, in a one-flesh relationship, who has a “right of privacy”? I am an open book to my wife—not that I always enjoy that, but it is true. After nineteen years of marital intimacy with her in every sense, privacy is more than a moot point; the very idea is inane. If you wish to preserve your right to privacy, don’t get married!^{[36](#)}

Third, how is it that in the last twenty years or so, as we have increasingly lost our understanding of male headship and as feminist ideals have been aggressively pursued throughout our society—how is it that, under these conditions, sexual exploitation and confusion and perversity have exploded in incidence? Male headship is not to blame. Male domination and feminism are the two viruses attacking our sexuality today. They vandalize God’s creation and multiply human misery. How can anyone who loves God’s glory, who feels for people, and who cherishes the gift of our sexuality not be inflamed at the enormities being committed by these two monsters, male domination and feminism?

Finally, Bilezikian asserts that such perversities as rape, prostitution and pornography are “the supreme expression of man’s rule over woman.” But if we define “man’s rule” from Holy Scripture as godly male headship, then the supreme expression of it is the woman’s nobility, fulfillment, and joy.

Bilezikian’s incautious paragraph simply asserts the feminist perspective without evidence or argumentation. Neither does he show any awareness of the nuances of the position he earlier claimed to be answering—a position, like ours, which advocates male headship without male domination.^{[37](#)}

What God Decreed at the Fall

How did our fall into sin affect God’s original, perfect, and paradoxical ordering of the

sexes? What did He decree as our punishment at the fall?

Those who deny the creation of male headship in Genesis 1-2 often argue that, in Genesis 3, God imposed male headship/domination (no distinction is allowed) upon the woman after the fall. As the corollary to this interpretation, they go on to argue that redemption in Christ reverses this decree and reinstates the woman to “full equality” with the man. We have seen, however, that God built male headship (not male domination) into the glorious, pre-fall order of creation. Our purpose here is to summarize the doctrine of manhood and womanhood taught in Genesis 3, especially in verses 16-19, and then to challenge feminist interpretation of this passage.

Genesis 3 is one of *the* crucial chapters of Holy Scripture. If it were suddenly removed from the Bible, the Bible would no longer make sense. Life would no longer make sense. If we all started out in Edenic bliss, why is life so painful now? Genesis 3 explains why. And if something has gone terribly wrong, do we have any hope of restoration? Genesis 3 gives us hope.

Because Paul in 1 Timothy 2:14 cites the woman's deception as warrant for male headship to be translated from the home into the church,³⁸ we will survey the narrative of that deception on our way to verses 16-19.

In verses 1-5, Satan, masquerading in the guise of the serpent, draws Eve into a reconsideration of her whole life. To paraphrase and amplify his reasoning,

“Queen Eve,” the serpent inquires in astonishment and disbelief, “something is bothering me. Is it really true that God forbade you two to eat of any of these trees? That perplexes me. After all, didn't He pronounce everything ‘very good’? And hasn't He put both you and King Adam in charge of it all? Our loving Creator wouldn't impose so severe a limitation on you, would He? I don't understand, Eve. Would you please explain this problem to me?”

Eve hadn't even known there was a “problem.” But the Serpent's prejudiced question unsettles her. It knocks her back on her heels. And so the Serpent engages Eve in a reevaluation of her life *on his terms*. She begins to feel that God's command, which Adam had shared with her,³⁹ has to be defended: “We *are* allowed to eat of these trees, serpent. But there is this one tree here in the center of the Garden—God said, ‘Don't eat of it; don't even touch it, lest you die’.” God had actually said, “You shall *freely* eat from *any* tree, with only one exception.” But Eve's misquote reduces the lavish generosity of God's word to the level of mere, perhaps grudging, permission: “We *may* eat from the trees.” Already the Garden doesn't look quite the same to Eve. No longer is the Tree of Life at the center of things (cf. 2:9). She doesn't even mention it. Now, in her perception of reality, the forbidden tree is at the center. Life is taking on a new, ominous feel. Eve also enlarges God's prohibition with her own addition, “you may not touch it.” In her mind, the limitation is growing in

significance. At the same time, she tones down God's threat of punishment: "you shall *surely* die" becomes the weaker "lest you die."

With Eve's view of the consequences of sin weakened, the Serpent springs on that point: "You will not surely die." Now we see that he hasn't been seeking information at all. He knows exactly what God had said. And then the Serpent pretends to let Eve in on an important secret:

"Eve, I'm going to do you a favor. I hate to be the one to break this to you, but you deserve to know. God has a motive other than love for this restriction. The truth is that God wants to hold you back, to frustrate your potential. Don't you realize that God Himself has this knowledge of good and evil? He knows what will enrich life and what will ruin life. And He knows that this fruit will give you two that same knowledge, so that you will rise to His level of understanding and control. Eve, it may come as a shock to you, but God is holding out on you. He is not your friend; He is your rival.

"Now, Eve, you have to outwit Him. I know this Garden seems pleasant enough; but, really, it is a gigantic ploy, to keep you in your place, because God feels threatened by what the two of you could become. This tree, Eve, is your only chance to reach your potential. In fact, Eve, if you *don't* eat of this tree, you will surely die!"

It was a lie big enough to reinterpret all of life and attractive enough to redirect Eve's loyalty from God to Self. The lie told her that obedience is a suicidal plunge, that humility is demeaning, and that service is servility. *And so Eve begins to feel the aggravation of an injustice which, in reality, does not exist.*

Having planted the lie in her mind, the serpent now falls silent and allows Having planted the lie in her mind, the serpent now falls silent and allows Eve's new perception of reality to take its own course (3:6). With Moses' enable-ment, we can imagine what her thoughts might have been:

"It doesn't *look* deadly, does it? In fact, it makes my mouth water! How could a good God prohibit such a good thing? How could a just God put it right here in front of us and then expect us to deny ourselves its pleasures? It's intriguingly beautiful, too. And with the insight it affords, I can liberate us from dependence upon our Creator. And who knows? If He finds out we've caught on to Him, He'll take this tree away and we'll be stuck in this prison forever! Let's eat it now while we have the chance!"

After his careful, detailed description of Eve's deception, Moses describes the actual act of Adam and Eve's sin very simply, as a matter of fact, without a hint of shock: ". . . she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it" (3:6b).⁴⁰

Mark well what the text says and what it does not say. The text does not say, ". . . she took some and ate it. Her husband, who was with her, also took some and ate it." What actually happened is full of meaning. Eve usurped Adam's headship and led the way into sin. And Adam, who (it seems) had stood by passively, allowing the deception to progress without decisive intervention—Adam, for his part, abandoned

his post as head. Eve was deceived; Adam forsook his responsibility. Both were wrong and together they pulled the human race down into sin and death.

Isn't it striking that we fell upon an occasion of sex role reversal? Are we to repeat this confusion forever? Are we to institutionalize it in evangelicalism in the name of the God who condemned it in the beginning?

But if Adam and Eve fell into sin together, why does Paul blame Adam for our fall in Romans 5:12-21? Why doesn't Paul blame both Adam and Eve? Why does Genesis 3:7 say that it was only after *Adam* joined in the rebellion that the eyes of *both* of them were opened to their condition? Why does God call out to *Adam*, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9)?⁴¹ Why doesn't God summon both Adam and Eve to account together? Because, as the God-appointed head, Adam bore the primary responsibility to lead their partnership in a God-glorifying direction.

This may explain why Satan addressed Eve, rather than Adam, to begin with. Her calling was to help Adam as second-in-command in world rulership. If the roles had been reversed, if Eve had been created first and then Adam as her helper, the Serpent would doubtless have approached Adam. So Eve was not morally weaker than Adam. But Satan struck at Adam's headship. His words had the effect of inviting Eve to assume primary responsibility at the moment of temptation: "*You* decide, Eve. *You* lead the way. Wouldn't *you* rather be exercising headship?" Just as Satan himself fell through this very kind of reasoning, so he used it to great effect with Eve. Presumably, she really believed she could manage the partnership to both Adam's and her own advantage, if she would only assert herself. Adam, by contrast, defied God with eyes wide open.⁴²

When confronted by God, Adam does not actually lie. He just shifts the blame to Eve: "The man said, 'The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it'" (3:12). Why is it that we all feel Adam's face-saving, despicable hypocrisy in his factual, but evasive, reply to God? Because we recognize, if only intuitively, that Adam bears the final responsibility for what happened. Eve, when challenged, can only hang her head and admit, "The serpent deceived me" (3:13).

In 3:14-15, God curses the Serpent, condemning him to humiliation and to ultimate defeat under the victorious offspring of the woman.⁴³ Our only hope as a fallen race is God's merciful promise to defeat our enemy, which He will accomplish through human instrumentality.

In verse 16 God decrees a just settlement with the woman:

I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing;
with pain you will give birth to children.
Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you.

God's decree is two-fold. First, as a mother, the woman will suffer in relation to her children. She will still be able to bear children. This is God's mercy providing the means by which He will carry out His death sentence on the Serpent. But now the woman will suffer in childbirth. This is God's severity for her sin. The new element in her experience, then, is not childbirth but the pain of childbirth.

Second, as a wife, the woman will suffer in relation to her husband. The exact content of her marital suffering could be defined in either of two ways. Either she will suffer conflict with her husband, or she will suffer domination by him.⁴⁴ The form and logic of Genesis 4:7b bear a most striking resemblance to our passage:⁴⁵

3:16b: *w'el-'išēk t'sūqātēk' w'hū' yimšol-bāk*
4:7b: *w'ēlēk t'sūqātō w'attāh timšol-bō*

And 4:7b reads, “[Sin’s] desire is for you, but you must master it.” To para phrase and amplify the sense: “Sin has a desire, Cain. It wants to control you. But you must not allow sin to have its way with you. You must rule over it.”

How does this parallel statement illuminate the interpretation of 3:16? Most importantly, it clarifies the meaning of the woman’s “desire.” Just as sin’s desire is to have its way with Cain, God gives the woman up to a desire to have her way with her husband. Because she usurped his headship in the temptation, God hands her over to the misery of competition with her rightful head. This is justice, a measure-for-measure response to her sin.⁴⁶

The ambiguous element in the equation is the interpretation of the words translated in the *NIV*, “and he will rule over you.” We could draw one of two conclusions. First, God may be saying, “You will have a desire, Eve. You will want to control your husband. But he must not allow you to have your way with him. He must rule over you.”

If this is the sense, then God is requiring the man to act as the head God made him to be, rather than knuckle under to ungodly pressure from his wife. Accordingly, 3:16b should be rendered: “Your desire will be for your husband, but he must rule

over you.”⁴⁷ In this case, we would take “rule” as the exercise of godly headship. This interpretation matches the reasoning in 4:7 more nearly, but another view is possible.

Second, God may be saying, “You will have a desire, Eve. You will want to control your husband. But he will not allow you to have your way with him. He will rule over you.” If this is the true sense, then, in giving the woman up to her insubordinate desire, God is penalizing her with domination by her husband. Accordingly, 3:16b should be rendered: “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”⁴⁸ The word “rule” would now be construed as the exercise of ungodly domination. As the woman competes with the man, the man, for his part, always holds the trump card of male domination to “put her in her place.”

But however 3:16 should be interpreted, nothing can change the fact that God created male *headship* as one aspect of our pre-fall perfection. Therefore, while many women today need release from male domination, the liberating alternative is not female rivalry or autonomy but male headship wedded to female help.⁴⁹ Christian redemption does not redefine creation; it restores creation, so that wives learn godly submission and husbands learn godly headship.

In 3:17-19, God decrees His judgment upon Adam:

“Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’

“Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

“It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.

“By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

God gives Adam up to the painful and ultimately futile attempt to eke out a living from the cursed ground. Notice four things in the text. First, work is not Adam’s punishment, just as childbearing was not Eve’s punishment. The new punitive element is his pain in working the ground and his ultimate defeat in it. After a lifetime of survival by the sweat of his brow, the ground from which he was first taken will swallow him up in death.

The second important point here is God’s rationale for this punishment. God does not say, “Because you have eaten of the tree which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it’. . . .” God does say, “*Because you listened to your wife* and ate from the tree. . . .” Adam sinned at two levels. At one level, he defied the plain and simple command of 2:17. That is obvious. But God goes deeper. At another level, Adam

sinned by “listening to his wife.”⁵⁰ He abandoned his headship. According to God’s assessment, this moral failure in Adam led to his ruination.

⁵¹ The third interesting point is the very fact that God addresses Adam with this introductory statement, “Because you have listened. . . .” God does not address Eve in this way, but God does issue a formal indictment to Adam before his sentencing. Why? Because Adam was the head, the finally responsible member of the partnership. His disobedience, not Eve’s, was the pivotal factor in the fall. Notice this. God says, “It is because of *yo*, Adam, that the ground is cursed” (verse 17). God does not say, “It is because of you both, Adam and Eve,” as if they shared equal responsibility in an unqualified sense.

The fourth point here is that God told Adam alone that he would die. But Eve died, too. Why then did God pronounce the death sentence on Adam alone? Because, as the head goes, so goes the member.

By these dreadful, and yet hopeful, oracles of destiny, God shapes for us the existence we all share today. Under these conditions, our pain alerts us to a great truth: This life is not our fulfillment. This life is not meant to be a final experience. Our pain and limitations point us to God, to the eternal, to the transcendent, where our true fulfillment lies.

Adam understood this truth, I think. Instead of turning away from the bar of God’s justice in bitterness and despair, Adam turns to his wife and says, “I believe God’s promise. He has not cast us adrift completely. He will give us the final victory over our enemy and we will again enjoy the richness and fullness of life in God. And because you are the mother of all those who will truly live, I give you a new name—Eve, Living One. I believe God, and I honor you.”⁵² In contrast to the cruel, cutting words of verse 12, Adam reaches out in love to Eve and they are reunited in faith and hope.

I personally find that, after studying this profound and moving passage on its own terms, it is depressing to read feminist commentary. A work of truth and beauty is being defaced. For example, Bilezikian writes:

The fall had spawned the twin evils of woman’s suffering in labor and of man’s laboring in suffering. As a result of Satan’s work, man was now master over woman, just as the mother-ground was now master over man. For these reasons, it is proper to regard both male dominance and death as being antithetical to God’s original intent in creation. Both are the result of sin, itself instigated by Satan. Their origin is satanic.⁵³

I respond in two ways. First, Bilezikian misrepresents the opposing view. Responsible interpreters do not advocate demeaning, oppressive “male domi-

nance.” They advocate selfless male headship, in which the man undertakes to serve his wife and family by providing the leadership that will glorify God and benefit them without regard for the price the man must pay to fulfill that responsibility. Headship calls us men to lay down our lives for our families.

Second, if Bilezikian would still argue that the exercise of male is Second, if Bilezikian would still argue that the exercise of male *headship* is satanic, then I must conclude that he is profoundly misguided. In his Conclusion he refers to “the repulsive pagan practice whereby one spouse exercises power over the other.”⁵⁴ If the mere exercise of headship power is repulsive and pagan (and, presumably, satanic as well), then is it repulsive when a parent exercises power over his child? It can be. But *must* it be?⁵⁵ Is it pagan when a church elder exercises power over a church member? It can be. But *must* it be?⁵⁶ Is it satanic when Christ exercises power over His church? That *cannot* be! His headship over us is our salvation. It follows, therefore, that the ugliness and paganism evident in other relationships must be blamed not on the exercise of power itself but on sinful abuses of the exercise of rightful power. The origin of marital misery lies not in male headship, which God created for our blessing, but in a multitude of other, personal factors.

Bilezikian also labors to mitigate the moral repugnance of Eve's role in the conspiracy of Genesis 3. He seems to wish for Eve a sort of victim status in the affair. One must read his entire presentation to appreciate this unusual moral perspective, but let me quote him at one point:

The only ray of hope in the statement of the curse appears in relation to the woman. In Adam all die, but Eve, as the mother of the living, shall bring forth life—and from her seed will issue redemption.⁵⁷

But does the Bible set Adam and Eve off as death over against life? Paul, in Romans 5, sets Adam and *Christ* off as death over against life. Bilezikian's feminism seems to have swept him away into an anti-male prejudice that completely misses the point of Genesis 3.

Concluding Appeal

Male-female equality and male headship, properly defined, are woven into the very fabric of Genesis 1-3. Non-evangelical feminists recognize this. To quote one such writer, “Feminist theology must create a new textual base, a new canon. . . . Feminist theology cannot be done from the existing base of the Christian Bible.”⁵⁸ Evangelical feminists, however, cannot create a new feminist canon without losing their evangelical credentials. So they reinterpret the sacred canon that exists to suit their

purposes. I do not charge that they do so consciously. God alone knows our secret thoughts. But all of us know the stripping experience of discovering, to our dismay, that we have been making the Bible say things it does not really say. To make such a discovery and then to change is simply to grow in grace.

What might be the principal source of evangelical feminist blindness to the Biblical text? Consider the following. *There is no necessary relation between personal role and personal worth.* Feminism denies this principle. Feminism insists that personal role and personal worth must go together, so that a limitation in role reduces or threatens personal worth. But why? What logic is there in such a claim? Why must my position dictate my significance? The world may reason that way. But doesn't the gospel teach us that our glory, our worth, is measured by our personal conformity to Christ?⁵⁹ Or have we lost confidence in the gospel's perspective on reality? The absurdity of feminism lies in its irrational demand that a woman cannot be "a serious person" unless she occupies a position of headship.

Fortunately, this type of reasoning has already been put to the test in real life, so we can see its practical consequences. Look at the world. Is it any wonder that we see all around us a mass stampede for power, recognition, status, prestige, and so on? But the world's reasoning is invalid. Authority does not authenticate my person. Authority is not a privilege to be exploited to build up my ego. Authority is a responsibility to be borne for the benefit of others without regard for oneself. This alone is the Christian view.

Ironically, feminism shares the very premise upon which male domination is founded, namely, that my personal significance is measured according to my rung on the ladder, and my opportunity for personal fulfillment enlarges or contracts according to my role. By this line of reasoning, the goal of life degenerates into competition for power, and no one hungers and thirsts for true fulfillment in righteousness. No wonder both male domination and feminism are tearing people apart!

I appeal to my readers in the name of God, I appeal to you on the ground of Genesis 1-3, to reconsider rationally the basis of your personal significance. Your glory is found only in the image of God within you, as you resemble His holy character, whatever niche you may occupy in His larger scheme of things.

4: Women in the Life and Teachings of Jesus

James A. Borland

This chapter has two goals: (1) to show that Jesus placed a high value on women, and (2) to show that Jesus recognized role distinctions for men and women. Jesus' high regard for women is seen in how He recognized their intrinsic equality with men, in how He ministered to women, and in the dignity He accorded to women during his ministry. Jesus' recognition of role distinctions for men and women is demonstrated by His choosing only men to serve as His apostles with their primary tasks of preaching, teaching, and governing. Women, however, served in other important capacities, such as praying, providing financial assistance, ministering to physical needs, voicing their theological understanding, and witnessing to the resurrection.

Some may question whether Jesus' teaching and practice regarding the status of women harmonize with the rest of Biblical truth. Was His teaching radically different from Old Testament revelation? Are Jesus and Paul contradictory? Is a wife's submission to her husband a one-way street, or are there mutual aspects involved in the teaching about submission?¹

Different positions have been taken relative to these questions, ranging from that of radical feminists² to more traditional evangelical views. The evangelical community seeks to interpret the text as inspired and authoritative. Such is the case with a number of evangelical feminists who are discarding the more traditional viewpoints.³ For Hull, Bilezikian, and others, sex roles are essentially unimportant. They see no "subordination of women to men" in home, church, or society, but rather a "mutual submission and therefore equal opportunity for men and women to serve in both church and society."⁴ Equal opportunity to serve as an ordained elder, bishop, pastor, or teacher is one of their primary concerns.

One starting place for the evidence in the New Testament is to examine the position of women in the life and teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. The evidence in the four Gospels demonstrates that our Lord placed a high value on women, while He continued to recognize role distinctions for men and women.

I. Christ Placed a High Value on Women.

The place of women in the first-century Roman world and in Judaism has been well-

documented and set forth in several recent books.⁵ Most frequently, women were regarded as second-class citizens. Even the Old Testament presents situations where women were depersonalized. But such indications do not equal endorsement. God never authorized or approved behavior that depersonalized women. There are other things recorded in Scripture such as child sacrifice, polygamy, ritualistic sex in religion, and wife abuse that have never been sanctioned by God.

The cultural mores and the historical setting into which God spoke His revelation must be distinguished from that revelation itself. Only God's Word is inspired, not human folkways and customs.⁶ Moreover, later cultural developments and deviations from God's truth must not be confused with revelation from God.

Jesus' regard for women was much different from that of His contemporaries. Evans terms Jesus' approach to women as "revolutionary" for His era.⁷ But was His treatment of women out of character with Old Testament revelation, or with later New Testament practice? Other chapters in this volume will show that it was not.

A. Jesus Demonstrated the High Value He Placed on Women by Recognizing Their Intrinsic Value as Persons.

For Christ, women have an intrinsic value equal to that of men. Jesus said, ". . . at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female'" (Matthew 19:4; f. Genesis 1:27). Women are created in the image of God just as men are. Like men, they have self-awareness, personal freedom, a measure of self-determination, and personal responsibility for their actions.

Scanzoni and Hardesty point out that "Jesus came to earth not primarily as a male but as a person. He treated women not primarily as females but as human beings."⁸ Jesus recognized women as fellow human beings. Disciples come in two sexes, male and female. Females are seen by Jesus as genuine persons, not simply as the objects of male desire.⁹ Hurley believes "the foundation-stone of Jesus' attitude toward women was his vision of them as *persons* to whom and for whom he had come. He did not perceive them primarily in terms of their sex, age or marital status; he seems to have considered them in terms of their relation (or lack of one) to God."¹⁰

Examples of this even-handed treatment of women by Jesus are found in the four

Gospels. First, Jesus regularly addressed women directly while in public. This was unusual for a man to do (John 4:27). The disciples were amazed to see Jesus talking with the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar (John 4:7-26). He also spoke freely with the woman taken in adultery (John 8:10-11).¹¹ Luke, who gives ample attention to women in his Gospel, notes that Jesus spoke publicly with the widow of Nain (Luke 7:12-13), the woman with the bleeding disorder (Luke 8:48; cf. Matthew 9:22; Mark 5:34), and a woman who called to Him from a crowd (Luke 11:27-28). Similarly, Jesus addressed a woman bent over for eighteen years (Luke 13:12) and a group of women on the route to the cross (Luke 23:27-31).

A second aspect of Jesus' regard for the full intrinsic value of women is seen in *how* He spoke to the women He addressed. He spoke in a thoughtful, caring manner. Each synoptic writer records Jesus addressing the woman with the bleeding disorder tenderly as "daughter" (references above) and referring to the bent woman as a "daughter of Abraham" (Luke 13:16). Bloesch infers that "Jesus called the Jewish women 'daughters of Abraham' (Luke 13:16), thereby according them a spiritual status equal to that of men."¹²

Third, Jesus did not gloss over sin in the lives of the women He met. He held women personally responsible for their own sin as seen in His dealings with the woman at the well (John 4:16-18), the woman taken in adultery (John 8:10-11), and the sinful woman who anointed His feet (Luke 7:44-50). Their sin was not condoned, but confronted. Each had the personal freedom and a measure of self-determination to deal with the issues of sin, repentance, and forgiveness.

Jesus' regard for the intrinsic equality of women and men is also exhibited in his view of divorce and lust. In His treatment of divorce (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18), Jesus clearly regards women not as property but as persons. They have legitimate rights and should be respected. Evans succinctly notes, "Women are not objects to be dismissed at will."¹³

Jesus' condemnation of the sin of lust was crucial in allowing Him and His followers to enjoy social contact as male and female, something nearly foreign to the Jewish mores of His age. Jesus said that "anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). Why not separate men and women to avoid temptation as the rabbis practiced? Because Jesus came to seek and to save, to teach and to reach (Luke 19:10). That included women as well as men. Jesus' disciples were to have a righteousness that "surpasses that of the Pharisees" (Matthew 5:20).

Jesus "called upon his disciples to discipline their thoughts rather than to avoid women."¹⁴ Lust does not have to be fed but can be controlled. Jesus demanded

such control from His disciples, allowing males and females to associate together and to work in harmony with one another. Although such social contact between the sexes would be unthinkable to first-century rabbis, Jesus' teaching about the sinfulness of lust helps to explain the relationship men and women sustain both in His earthly ministry and in the apostolic church.¹⁵ In the early church, women frequently labored together with men (Acts 16:14-15; Romans 16:3, 12; Philippians 4:3).

B. Jesus Demonstrated the High Value He Placed on Women by Ministering to Women.

Another way in which Jesus showed the high value He placed on women was in ministering to them in a vital and practical manner—both physically and spiritually. Numerous healings and the casting out of demons from women display Jesus' care and concern for women. Several such incidents are only briefly recorded. Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law and allowed her in return to minister to Him (Mark 1:30-31; Matthew 8:14-15; Luke 4:38-39). Jesus also was concerned for a widow in Nain (Luke 7:11-15). He met her as she was weeping just before burying her only son. With compassion, He spoke to her and raised her son to life. Later, Christ healed a woman who was hopelessly bent over for eighteen years (Luke 13:10-17). Courageously, on the sabbath and inside the synagogue before hostile religious leaders, Jesus helped and defended this poor woman. He spoke to her, tenderly placed His hands on her, and caused her to stand erect, for which she glorified God. He then acknowledged her equal standing with men in Israel's religious heritage by referring to her as a daughter of Abraham (cf. John 8:33, 39).

Mentioned in all three Synoptic Gospels are two additional interwoven stories. Illustrating great faith while breaking religious and social customs, a poor woman, rendered ceremonially unclean for twelve years by a bleeding disorder, touched Jesus in a large crowd (Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48). Instead of rebuking her, Jesus addressed her tenderly as "daughter," publicly strengthened her faith, and bid her go in God's peace.¹⁶ Jesus then proceeded to the house of Jairus, who, with his wife, had just lost a twelve-year-old daughter. In addition to being rendered ceremonially unclean by the woman's touch in the crowd (Leviticus 15:19-22), Jesus also touched the dead girl and restored her to her parents (Matthew 9:23-25; Mark 5:35-43; Luke 8:49-56). Jesus' ministry to needy and hurting women is clearly seen in these events. From the bottom of the social order to the top (the girl's father was a ruler of the synagogue), Jesus aided women just as He did men.

Another woman, a foreigner, a Canaanite of Syrophoenicia, whose daughter was demon-possessed, asked Jesus' help (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30). She was persistent, intelligent, and witty, and exemplified *great faith*, a phrase elsewhere applied only to a centurion (Matthew 8:10; Luke 7:9). In rabbinic writings women are seldom presented positively and rarely illustrate faith or theological acumen.¹⁷ But Jesus used her as an illustration of His previous teaching about defilement (Matthew 15:10-20; Mark 7:14-23). Jesus' disciples considered this Gentile woman unclean (cf. Acts 10:28). Jesus tested her spiritual tenacity, enlarged her understanding of spiritual truth, then granted her request, complimenting her for her faith.

The fourth Gospel records Jesus' concern for His mother's welfare as voiced in His dying words to John (19:26-27). Jesus wanted His mother to be cared for properly after His death.

Besides ministering to physical needs, Jesus dealt with women spiritually. The foremost example of this is found in John 4. Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman as an individual and met her specific needs. Jesus apparently showed her the same attention, care and interest He showed to men. In fact, an interesting contrast is evident between Nicodemus (chapter 3) and the Samaritan woman (chapter 4). He was secretive; she was open. He doubted; she accepted. Jesus also taught her specific religious truths about God, worship, and the Messiah. As great as these particulars are, some feminists have exaggerated the details and surmised additional concepts to enhance the role of women.¹⁸ However, three aspects of this occasion do stand out. (1) Jesus spoke to a *woman* (v. 27), which amazed the disciples. (2) She was a Samaritan (v. 9). (3) He taught her religious truth in contrast to the current rabbinic practices. This point is more fully developed in a later section of this chapter. Two other passages (John 7:53-8:11 and Luke 7:37-50), commented on above, show Christ meeting similar spiritual needs in other women.

Two additional incidents deserve mention. On one occasion a woman spoke up from the crowd saying how blessed Jesus' mother was to bear and nurse Him (Luke 11:27-28). Jesus did two important things. He gave her His undivided attention by listening to her comment, and He mildly corrected her and pointed her toward further spiritual understanding. He said that hearing and keeping the Word of God are the primary spiritual tasks. Jesus does not deny His mother's place of importance, but goes beyond it to a wider spiritual truth.

An additional story concerns Salome, Zebedee's wife (cf. Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40; 16:1), ambitiously seeking positions of utmost power and honor for her two sons, James and John. She seems to have "worshiped" with a selfish motive (Matthew 20:20-22). This incident comes only shortly after Jesus' promise of thrones to the twelve (Matthew 19:28). In fact, the disciples "thought that the kingdom of God

was going to appear at once” (Luke 19:11). They were anxious to secure their positions of authority. James and John may have asked through their mother, not desiring a further rebuke from Christ for seeking preeminence (Mark 9:34-37; Luke 9:46-48). Again, Jesus’ mild rebuff is turned into a spiritual lesson on humility and self-sacrifice. Jesus was consistently willing to dialogue and interact with women.

Thus, Jesus showed how highly He valued women by ministering to them and meeting their needs—even the need to be heard. He healed women, dialogued with them, and showed women the same care and concern He showed to men.

C. Jesus Demonstrated the High Value He Placed on Women by According Them Dignity in His Ministry.

Jesus accorded dignity to women in His ministry in three ways: (1) by employing women as illustrations in His teaching, (2) by teaching women theological truths, and (3) by having women participate in His life and ministry. As indicated above in Section A (and also note 5), women were not always held in high repute by many of Jesus’ contemporaries. Jesus’ ministry gave a renewed respect to the place of women in His society.

First, women were employed by Jesus quite freely as illustrations in His teaching. Mention of the queen of the south (Matthew 12:42; cf. Luke 11:31) reminded His audience how a foreign queen travelled far to find the truth, but it was also used to warn of coming judgment for those who reject Christ. Jesus likened the kingdom of heaven to the leaven worked into bread dough by a woman (Matthew 13:33). Some debate whether the leaven represents the rapid expansion of God’s kingdom or rather the spread of evil (cf. Matthew 16:6, 12). In either case, Jesus chose to use an illustration that would no doubt awaken the interest of His female listeners.

Jesus also taught (Matthew 24:41; cf. Luke 17:34-37) that at the time of His second coming (in power and glory) women would be about their daily tasks, in this case grinding grain on a hand-mill. These women as well as men will be divided and judged over their relationship to Christ. One goes to judgment (Luke 17:37), while the other enters into the kingdom. Another parable Jesus taught mentioning women almost exclusively is that of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-10). Jesus used them as examples of readiness (or lack of the same) for Christ’s kingdom.

Jesus mentioned the widow of Zarephath (Luke 4:26) as an example of those outside Israel who receive God’s blessings. The healing of the leper Naaman (Luke 4:27; cf. 2 Kings 5:2-4) illustrated the same point one verse later, but brought

thoughts to mind of the faithful witness of the Israelite maid.

Jesus' parable of lost things (sheep, shekel, and son) in Luke 15 presents some interesting parallels between the shepherd and the woman. Jesus uses male and female, each with different roles, with neither elevated or depreciated.¹⁹ Both serve to illustrate God's seeking the lost and rejoicing over their salvation.

The need for steadfast prayer was illustrated by a widow's persistence before a corrupt judge (Luke 18:1-5). Female hearers must have taken heart to hear Jesus praise a woman's persistence in their male-dominated culture. Jesus also commented on a poor widow who gave all she had to God in the women's court of the temple (Luke 21:1-4; cf. 20:1; Mark 12:41-44). Her heart attitude allowed her to give a much larger percentage (she gave 100 percent) than all the others because she must have trusted God to fully meet her needs.

Jesus not only chose women to illustrate His teaching, but also was concerned that women should be allowed to sit under His teaching as well. This may not seem surprising to those ready to enter the twenty-first century, but it was unusual in Jesus' day.

Feminists see Luke 10:38-42 as crucial in showing women being taught by Christ. Hull calls it "the most significant encounter . . . because it taught that women should prefer studying theology over a preoccupation with domestic chores."²⁰ Unfortunately, Hull misrepresents "traditionalists" when she reports them as saying women should not study theology.²¹ Certainly, women are to learn and apply the Word of God. This is vitally important. But actually, the application is much broader than Hull implies. *Every* believer must make countless decisions throughout life, constantly choosing to act as a pupil with Jesus as the teacher. It does not mean that other duties or Christian graces are to be ignored, but it does imply that some things ("what is better," v. 42) are more important than other things. There are no role distinctions for learning from Christ.

On a later visit of Jesus to Bethany, it was Martha who was taught by Jesus while Mary sat in the house (John 11:20). For Martha, "Her growth is his goal, even in the midst of her tears of mourning for her brother" (Lazarus).²² Jesus instructed her about the resurrection, and even that He was the resurrection and the life (John 11:25-26). Thereupon, Martha gave a superb confession about Christ, saying, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world" (John 11:27, *NKJV*). On two other occasions Christ personally taught female disciples, even if in non-traditional teaching settings. On His way to the crucifixion, Jesus gave an extended proverb to a group of wailing women (Luke 23:27-31). He said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your

children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!'" He was saying that the future would see a worse judgment, probably using an *a fortiori* argument. If Christ, whom Pilate declared to be an innocent man, could be crucified, what will happen to those whom Rome judges to be guilty? Christ's final teaching to a woman is contained in His post-resurrection words to Mary Magdalene concerning His ascension (John 20:17). Jesus asks Mary to convey His words to the others, which she does (20:18).

An additional way that Jesus accorded dignity to women during His ministry was in having women participate in His life and ministry. Luke 2 mentions both the briefest and the most extensive of female associations in the life of Jesus. Anna of Asher was a godly, aged prophetess who resided in the temple area (Luke 2:36-38). She gave thanks for Jesus, whom she recognized as Messiah, when His parents presented him to God at six weeks of age (Luke 2:22; cf. Exodus 13:12, 15; Leviticus 12:2-6). Luke purposely pairs her actions with those of Simeon, just as he balances Zachariah's story with that of Mary's. Care is taken to show female participation.

The woman whom God chose to have the most extensive association with Jesus was His mother, Mary. But apart from the annunciation and birth narratives of Matthew and Luke, she is mentioned only five times in the Gospels—the trip to Jerusalem (Luke 2:41-51); the Cana wedding (John 2:1-11); accompanying Jesus to Capernaum (John 2:12); asking for Jesus (Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21); and at the cross (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40; John 19:25-27). Mary's life was significant for at least three reasons. (1) She was a firsthand witness of Jesus' divine origin *and* true humanity. (2) She was a tremendous model of godliness, faith, dedication, and patience, among other good qualities. (3) She, along with other women, was incorporated into the new life of the church at Pentecost.²³

Other women who participated in Christ's life fit into one of two groups—(1) those who served Him in some way, and (2) those who witnessed to His resurrection.

In the first category were two one-time participants as well as a group of women who served more frequently. Two women served Christ by anointing Him. Luke records an anointing of His feet by a notoriously sinful woman (7:36-50). The other Gospels tell of Mary's anointing of His head and feet with a pound of precious spikenard (Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:2-8). These women served Christ out of love and appreciation, but Mary's anointing was even more significant because she did it with a view to His approaching death (Matthew 26:12; Mark 14:8; John 12:7). Mary had true spiritual insight, no doubt gained from Jesus' teaching. They both were truly thankful, and Christ accepted their thanks while healing, forgiving, and liberating as the different cases called for.

Those who ministered to Christ more frequently included Martha in Judea and a group of women in Galilee. Luke 10:40 records Martha attempting to get a meal ready for about fifteen persons. Jesus did not order her to stop serving but gently corrected her attitude about Mary. Martha served at another supper just a week before Christ's death (John 12:2), suggesting that her service was more than just occasional.

Luke 8:2-3 recounts another group of women who ministered to Jesus and His disciples financially.²⁴ They may have served Jesus in other general ways as well, since the term is used of these women twice elsewhere without any reference to money (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:41).²⁵ Their labor was important and some of their names are recorded—Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and Salome. There were also many others (Luke 8:3). We are not told how often these women travelled with Christ and the apostles. Hurley has suggested that they were more active while Jesus was in the Galilee region near their homes,²⁶ but Matthew 27:56 mentions their travel with Christ all the way to Jerusalem. Apparently when Jesus travelled in Judea (most of John's Gospel) and Samaria, He may sometimes have had the apostles make other arrangements for food and other provisions (Luke 9:52).

A final indication of the dignity accorded women in the ministry of Jesus is seen in the importance given to women in the resurrection accounts. In Christ's day, women were not considered reliable witnesses. Josephus warns, for example, "But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex."²⁷ Still, God chose to use women as His initial witnesses to His disciples.

It may be an overstatement to say that the women sent from the tomb were "certainly . . . given a 'quasi-apostolic role.'"²⁸ To invent the role of a quasi-apostle seems foreign to the intent of these passages. The uniqueness of the role of an apostle will be discussed in the next major section of this chapter.

The question remains, why were the women chosen as witnesses of the resurrection? Was God bestowing a special honor on these women? Was God trying to indicate larger roles for women in His new community of believers? I believe both were intended.

All four Gospel writers bestow a great honor on the women who lovingly and with servant hearts came early to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body, thus paying their last respects. What if they were frightened and surprised by what they saw and heard (Matthew 28:5-8; Mark 16:5-8; Luke 24:2-9; John 20:1-2)? They still faithfully bore witness of Jesus' resurrection to His disciples and, no doubt, to countless others in the months and years that followed.

Some have contrasted the faith of the women witnesses with the unbelief of the apostles, but as Hurley notes, “Neither the women nor the disciples were really ready for the resurrection. The women had to be convinced by the angel.”²⁹ The important point is that God did use women along with men at this strategic juncture in human history.

These women not only were the first witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection, but also stand perpetually as examples for all believers. These women led the way in proclaiming the gospel—that Christ died for our sins, was buried, but rose again for our justification the third day. The duty and high privilege of witnessing for Christ is still open to every believer, without distinction as to gender.

II. Christ Recognized Role Distinctions for Men and Women.

Christ not only valued women very highly, but also demonstrated a clear role distinction between men and women. Nowhere is this issue seen more clearly than in Jesus’ selection of only men for the role of apostle. Many Biblical feminists question the significance of this obvious role distinction, or explain it as cultural or as temporary. Siddons’s brief comment is that dangers in travel and the “male-dominated” social structure of the time were reasons for the apostles’ being only men.³⁰

But Jesus was not averse to breaking social customs when He felt it necessary. He criticized Pharisees to their face in public (Matthew 23:13-36), healed on the sabbath (Mark 1:21-27; Luke 13:14; John 5:8-10), and cleansed the temple (John 2:14-17; Matthew 21:12-13). Against custom, Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman (John 4:7-9), ate with tax collectors and sinners (Matthew 9:11), and even ate with unwashed hands (Mark 7:1-23)! The point is that when moral issues were at stake, Jesus did not bend to cultural pressure. No, it was not social custom or cultural pressure that caused Jesus to appoint an all-male group of apostles. Had He so desired, He could easily have appointed six men and their wives as apostles, since the wives of the apostles frequently accompanied them (1 Corinthians 9:5). But no such arrangement was initiated.

In fact, Jewish culture did accept women into positions of leadership. Just three decades before Herod the Great took over as king, Israel was ruled for years by Queen Alexandra. The fact that an occasional judge (Deborah, Judges 4-5), or ruler (Athaliah, 2 Kings 11:3) was a woman also demonstrates that female leadership was

possible. Even though many women have excellent leadership qualities, God still has clear role distinctions in mind when apostleship and eldership are considered.

After spending all night in prayer (Luke 6:12), Jesus chose His twelve apostles (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:13-19). Apostleship was to involve leadership, rulership, and the reception of special revelation. Several functions of the apostles were immediately discernible: (1) The apostles were to be with Christ, undoubtedly to learn extensively and to be trained firsthand (Mark 3:14-15). (2) The apostles were the obvious official leaders in the early church. See Acts 2:14; 5:12, 18, 40, 42; 6:2-4; 9:29; 15:2, and Galatians 1:17. (3) Special ruler-ship was committed to the apostles. Christ promised that the apostles would sit on twelve thrones ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30). (4) Christ promised the apostles reception of special revelation (John 16:13-15) and a special teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). (5) As a testimony of the fact that male leadership in the church has been permanently established by Christ, the names of the twelve apostles are forever inscribed on the very foundations of heaven itself. "Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb"

(Revelation 21:14, *NKJV*).

None of the above roles was performed by the women who followed Christ or ministered to Him. Though highly valued and given a new dignity by Christ, their roles were different from those of the men Christ selected for His top leadership positions. Women gave to Christ, served Him, fellowshiped with Him, accompanied Him, learned from Him, prayed, and testified of their salvation³¹ or of Christ's resurrection. But no woman in Christ's ministry was called, commissioned, or named as an apostle, or even performed in the role of an apostle. These roles and functions Christ reserved for men.³²

Spencer discounts these distinctions implied in Christ's choice of men as His apostles. She reasons, "If Jesus' choice of twelve male disciples signifies that females should not be leaders in the church, then, consistently his choice also signifies that Gentiles should not be leaders in the church."³³ In another setting Spencer voiced the same argument. "If the twelve included only Jews, why should we not say that only Jews can be pastors/elders?"³⁴

Her logic can be seen in the following syllogism:

- A. Jesus chose only male apostles.
- B. Jesus chose only Jewish apostles.
- C. Therefore, church elders must be male and Jewish.

Of course, the argument is invalid, so the conclusion is unproven. Historically, we know it to be false. Spencer wants us to see that Gentiles *did* occupy eldership positions in scores of “Gentile” churches founded by Paul. She would like us to conclude that if Jewishness is not required for eldership, neither should maleness be required.

But even a superficial analysis of the New Testament reveals that the Jews occupied a *unique* position during Christ’s earthly ministry. Jesus was born to be a “ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel” (Matthew 2:6). Jesus was termed “the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25), and He proclaimed, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24). He announced a soon-coming kingdom (Mark 1:15) and sent His apostles at first only to the Jews (Matthew 10:6), promising them eventual rulership over the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30; cf. Acts 1:6). Considering the Jewishness of Christ’s mission to redeem Israel (Luke 24:21), it is not surprising to find all Jews on the initial list of apostles. It was not cultural pressure but God’s plan to bring salvation through the Jews that led to twelve Jewish apostles.

With the resurrection, Christ’s mission expanded to include Gentiles (Matthew 28:19) “in this one body” (Ephesians 2:16), the church. Gentiles were not only saved, but became elders in the new organizational units of local churches. A Gentile (Luke) wrote two books of the New Testament (Luke and Acts), and several Gentiles such as Titus and Epaphroditus were Paul’s apostolic assistants and coworkers. Thus, Jewish apostles were unique and foundational, but Gentiles rapidly came to assume leadership in the church.

But was maleness, like Jewishness, to be discarded as a requirement for apostle or elder? Was maleness only foundational as well? There is clearly a difference in this case. First, the church did not start as all male and then later become both male and female. Christ’s followers were male and female from the beginning, and both men and women were present at the beginning of the church at Pentecost (Acts 1:14). Second, from all we can tell, male leadership was perpetuated by those whom Christ initially taught, trained, and to whom He committed the future leadership of His church. Since Acts continually reminds us of the leading of Christ and of the Holy Spirit in the work of the church and its leaders, the assumption is that leadership choices were also made in that manner.

That male leadership is to continue as the norm is borne out almost immediately once the church begins. In Acts 1:15-26, the first and only replacement apostle was selected. Evans asserts that women no doubt met the requirements to be an apostle “as set out in Acts 1:21-22.”³⁵ She overlooks, however, that one of the very conditions listed is to be a male—“. . . it is necessary to choose one of the *men*

[Greek *andron*] who have been with us . . .” (Acts 1:21, emphasis added).³⁶

A further example is not the direct teaching of Jesus, but additionally strongly suggests that male leadership in the church was Jesus’ intention. This comes out of the selection instructions and results in Acts 6, where the first leaders besides the apostles were appointed. Plenty of women were numbered among the believers according to Acts 1:14; 5:1 and 5:14. A problem arose regarding the neglect of certain women (Acts 6:1). The church was told to select seven qualified *men* (*andras*, Acts 6:3). If the instruction had been to look for seven “human beings”(*anthropous*), and then only men had been selected, we might say their choice was cultural or perhaps happenstance. Instead, the choice of men was deliberate.

Therefore, we can conclude that in the choice of the twelve apostles, in the choice of only men to write the New Testament Scriptures, in the other leadership tasks given uniquely to the apostles, in the pattern of male leadership followed by those whom Jesus taught most closely, and even in the twelve names inscribed on the foundations of the heavenly city, Jesus clearly affirmed an abiding role distinction between men and women and an abiding leadership role for men.

But even though clear role distinction is seen in Christ’s choice of the apostles and in the exclusive type of work they were given to perform, no barriers need exist between a believer and the Lord Jesus Christ, regardless of gender. Jesus demonstrated only the highest regard for women, in both His life and teaching.

He recognized the intrinsic equality of men and women, and continually showed the worth and dignity of women as persons. Jesus valued their fellowship, prayers, service, financial support, testimony and witness. He honored women, taught women, and ministered to women in thoughtful ways.

As a result, women responded warmly to Jesus’ ministry. Have things changed too drastically today for us to see this same Jesus? Not at all. Modern women can find the same rich fulfillment in serving Christ as did the Marys and Marthas of Judea, or the Joannas and Susannas of Galilee.

5: Head Coverings, Prophecies, and the Trinity: 1

Corinthians 11:2-16

Thomas R. Schreiner

Introduction

²I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you. ³Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. ⁴Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. ⁵And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. ⁶If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. ⁷A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. ⁸For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; ⁹neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. ¹⁰For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head. ¹¹In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. ¹²For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. ¹³Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, ¹⁵but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. ¹⁶If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.

First Corinthians 11:2-16 has some features that make it one of the most difficult and controversial passages in the Bible.¹ For instance: How does verse 2 relate to verses 3-16? What does Paul mean by the word *head* in verse 3? Can we identify the custom regarding the adornment of women in the passage? In what sense is woman *the glory* of man (verse 7)? What does Paul mean when he says that the woman is to have authority on her head (verse 10)? Can we comprehend the reason why a woman is to have authority on her head, namely, *because of the angels* (verse 10)? And finally, what does the word *nature* mean in verse 14?

The difficulties with this text could lead one to say that it should not be used to

establish any doctrine or teaching on the role relationship of men and women. Indeed, one might claim that only clear passages should be used to form a doctrine, and this passage is too obscure. No one, or at least few people, would argue that women should be adorned with veils today, leading some to say that this passage is culturally bound and no longer viable in the twentieth century.

In contrast to this position, I will argue that the central thrust of the passage is clear. There are difficulties, but some of the key issues are not as difficult as it has been claimed, and the issues that remain obscure do not affect the central teaching of the passage. Also, while wearing head coverings no longer speaks to our culture, there is an abiding principle in this text that is applicable to the twentieth century.

The Relation of 11:2 to 11:3-16

How does verse 2 relate to the following verses? Verse 2 says, "Now I praise you because you remember me in everything, and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you." The following verses (11:3-16), however, do not seem to be an example of the Corinthians holding fast to the Pauline traditions. The behavior of the Corinthian women is contrary to the custom of Paul and the other churches, according to verse 16. Presumably, Paul would not instruct the Corinthians regarding proper adornment for women if they were already following his instructions in this matter. It is probably the case, then, that 11:2 functions as a complimentary introduction before Paul begins to criticize the Corinthians on certain practices. Indeed, 11:2 is most likely the introductory statement for all of chapters eleven through fourteen. Even though the Corinthians are not following the traditions regarding women (11:3-16), the Lord's Supper (11:17-34), and spiritual gifts (12:1-14:40), the situation of the church is not bleak in every respect.

What is the Adornment for Women in this Passage?

One of the perplexing questions in this passage is this: What custom regarding adornment is referred to here? We cannot treat this complex question in detail, but the two most probable suggestions can be set forth: (1) The custom Paul recommends is for women to wear shawls. (2) Paul objects to long, loose hair that falls down the back; he wants women to follow the usual custom of piling their hair up on top of their heads.

In favor of the view that Paul is speaking against women wearing their hair loose

and falling down the back are the following arguments:² (1) There is no extant evidence that full veiling, familiar in Islam, was current in Paul's time. Therefore, the custom described cannot be veiling. (2) The same Greek word that describes the practice of the Corinthian women in 11:5 (*akatakalyptos*) ["unveiled," according to RSV] is used in Leviticus 13:45 (LXX)³ about a leper's hair, which is to hang *unloosed*. The problem with the Corinthian women, then, is that they were wearing their hair loose and flowing down their backs. (3) The word *apokalyptō*, which is somewhat related to *akatakalyptos*, is used in Numbers 5:18, where a woman suspected of adultery had to unbind her hair and wear it loosely. The wearing of long, loose hair by an adulteress would support the idea that wearing one's hair loose was considered shameful. (4) Respectable women in Paul's time did not appear in public with their hair long and flowing down their backs. They wore their hair piled up on their heads in a bun. Paul wants the Corinthian women to adhere to this custom.

Despite these arguments in favor of the view that Paul is commanding the wearing of hair on top of the head by women, it is probable that Paul is speaking of wearing a head covering of some kind, such as a shawl.⁴ That a shawl rather than a full veil is in Paul's mind is indicated by the word *covering* (*peribolaios*) in 11:15, which is not the usual word for veil but probably refers to a wraparound. The evidence in favor of this position is as follows: (1) The verb translated as "cover" in the NIV (*katakalyptō*) occurs three times in verses 6-7, and related cognate words occur in verses 5 and 13. These words most often refer to a covering of some kind. For example, the angels who saw the glory of Yahweh in the temple *covered* their faces (Isaiah 6:2). Judah thought Tamar, his daughter-in-law, was a harlot because she *covered* her face (Genesis 38:15). Since the word almost universally means "to cover" or "to hide," the text is probably referring to a hair covering of some kind.⁵

(2) Philo (30 B.C. - A.D. 45) uses the same words Paul does in 1 Corinthians 11:5, "head uncovered" (*akatakalyptō tē kephalē*), and it is clear that Philo is speaking of a head covering being removed because the priest had just removed her kerchief (*Special Laws*, 3:60). *Akatakalyptos* also means "uncovered" in Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* II,29, and in Polybius 15,27.2 (second century B.C.). Moreover, it is simply a negative adjective based on the verb *katakalyptō*, which commonly means "cover, veil." (3) Esther 6:12 (LXX) employs the same expression found in verse four, *kata kephalēs*, of Haman, who hurried home mourning, covering his head in shame. He probably used part of his garment to do this. (4) A similar expression occurs in Plutarch (46-120 A.D.), where it is specifically stated that the head is covered with part of the toga (*himation*).⁶

Verse 15 seems to create a difficulty if Paul is speaking of a head covering. Verse

15 says that her “long hair is given to her for a covering.” But if her hair is given to her for a covering, then a woman would not need to wear another covering over her hair. However, it is improbable that the only covering that Paul requires is a woman’s hair, for we have already seen that the words for covering that Paul uses in verses 4-6 and verse 13 point to a veil or a shawl. Indeed, if all Paul has been requiring is long hair, then his explanation of the situation in verses 4-6 is awkward and even misleading. Verse 15 can be explained in such a way that Paul is not rejecting his earlier call for a shawl. The word *for* (*anti*) in verse 15 probably indicates not substitution but equivalence.⁷ In other words, Paul is not saying that a woman has been given long hair *instead of* a covering.

Rather, he is saying that a woman has been given long hair as a covering. His point seems to be that a woman’s long hair is an indication that she needs to wear a covering.⁸

To sum up: the custom recommended here is a head covering of some kind, probably a shawl. The importance of identifying this custom can be exaggerated, unless one believes that the custom of the day should be applied to our culture. The major point of the text is clear: women are to adorn themselves in a certain way. The precise kind of head covering Paul had in mind is no longer clear. What is more important, and we turn to this next, is: Why does Paul want the women to adorn themselves in a certain way?

The Function of 11:3 in the Argument and the Meaning of Head

Probably the most crucial question in this passage is what Paul means by the word *head* (*kephalē*) in verse 3: “Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.” Two answers are being suggested today: *source* and *authority*.⁹ The meaning of this word has been extensively debated in the literature, and we will not cover all the ground again. Instead, three reasons will be given to defend *authority* as the best understanding of the word *head*.

(1) Even if we were to grant that the word *head* can mean “source” in a few instances, Wayne Grudem has shown that the meaning “authority” is indisputable in a number of passages, while the meaning “source” is never certainly attested. Grudem is correct in saying that those who oppose the meaning “authority” demand more examples of this meaning than they would with almost any other word. Usually,

three or four clear examples are of great value, and Grudem provides a number that are decisive.

(2) Even if it were demonstrated that *head* does mean “source” in a few passages, it never bears that meaning in the Septuagint, and that is the relevant piece of literature with which Paul would have been most familiar. The use of *head* in the Septuagint is minimized by the Mickelsens because Paul was writing to Greeks who did not know the Old Testament well.¹⁰ But this is an unconvincing argument. Paul appeals to the Old Testament either allusively or by quotation often when writing to Gentile converts. Most evangelicals agree that the Greek Old Testament is the most important source for Paul’s theology, and of course this would apply to his use of words as well.

(3) A crucial usage, of course, is in Paul’s own writings. It is precisely here that the evidence for “source” is weakest. Compare, for example, a passage on the same basic topic, men and women, in Ephesians 5:22ff. Paul says that “the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church” (verse 23). In what meaningful sense can one say that a husband is the source of his wife? Wives do not exist by virtue of their husband’s existence. Wives do not derive their life from their husbands. The meaning “source” here makes Paul’s statement hard to comprehend since it is difficult to see how husbands are the source of their wives. Some have said that Paul is speaking of Adam as the source of Eve. But what is the evidence for this? Paul clearly speaks of husbands and wives in general in verses 22 and 24, and it would be strained and unusual to see a sudden reference to Adam and Eve in 5:23. Further support for *head* meaning “authority” is found in 5:22 and 5:24, for there Paul calls on women *to submit* to their husbands, which accords nicely with the notion that *head* denotes authority.

Paul uses the word *head* with the meaning “authority” in Ephesians 1:22 as well. Beginning with 1:20ff, he says that God raised Christ from the dead, seated Him at His right hand far above all other authorities and powers, subjected all things under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church. The entire context focuses on the enthronement of Christ and His exaltation. The focus on the exaltation of Christ in the context suggests that the meaning of *head* is “authority.”

Such an interpretation is confirmed by a parallel passage in Colossians 2:10. There Christ is said to be “the head over every power and authority.” Here *head* must mean “authority,” not “source,” because the same rulers and authorities are also spoken of in Colossians 2:15, and there they clearly refer to the demonic powers that were publicly humiliated and led in a triumphal procession through Jesus’ death and resurrection. Paul is not saying to the Colossians in 2:10 that Jesus is “the source” of these demonic powers; his point is that Jesus is sovereign over them, that He rules

over them.

The texts that are sometimes used to argue that Paul could use the word *head* to mean “source” are Colossians 1:18; 2:19; Ephesians 4:15. In each case, the asserted meaning is possible but doubtful, since the meaning “source” for this word is not clearly found in the Septuagint, elsewhere in Paul, or in the rest of the New Testament. In Colossians 1:18, Christ is said to be the head over the church, and the concept of authority accords well with the context (Colossians 1:15-20). Colossians 2:19 and Ephesians 4:15 could be translated as “source,” but Paul is probably saying in these two passages that the Sovereign of the church is also the One who sustains and strengthens the church.

Now we return to 1 Corinthians 11:3. If our interpretation is correct, then Paul is saying that Christ is the authority over every man, man is the authority over woman, and God is the authority over Christ. Since Paul appeals to the relation between members of the Trinity, it is clear that he does not view the relations described here as merely cultural, or the result of the fall.

C. Kroeger objects that to make God the head over Christ is to fall into the christological heresy of making Christ subordinate to God.¹¹ But this would only be a heresy if one asserted that there was an ontological difference (a difference in nature or being) between Father and Son. The point is not that the Son is essentially inferior to the Father. Rather, the Son willingly submits Himself to the Father’s authority. The difference between the members of the Trinity is a functional one, not an essential one.

Such an interpretation is confirmed by 1 Corinthians 15:28: “When [Christ has subjected all things to Himself], then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.” Paul did not see such subjection of the Son to the Father as heretical because the Son was not essentially inferior to the Father. Instead, He will subject Himself voluntarily to the Father’s authority. The Son has a different function or role from the Father, not an inferior being or essence.

This point is often missed by evangelical feminists. They conclude that a difference in function necessarily involves a difference in essence; i.e., if men are in authority over women, then women must be inferior. The relationship between Christ and the Father shows us that this reasoning is flawed. One can possess a different function and still be equal in essence and worth. Women are equal to men in essence and in being; there is no ontological distinction, and yet they have a different function or role in church and home. Such differences do not logically imply inequality or inferiority, just as Christ’s subjection to the Father does not imply His

inferiority.

In fact, some evangelical feminists recently have made misleading statements regarding the issue of subordinationism in the doctrine of the Trinity. R. C. and C. Kroeger define subordinationism as “A doctrine that assigns an inferiority of being, status, *or role* to the Son or Holy Spirit within the Trinity” (italics mine).¹² They also say, “Some apply a doctrine of subordination of woman to man on the basis of a similar relationship within the Trinity (1 Corinthians 11:3).”¹³ G. Bilezikian says, “Nowhere in the Bible is there a reference to a chain of command within the Trinity. Such ‘subordinationist’ theories were propounded during the fourth century and were rejected as heretical.”¹⁴

Such statements reflect a serious misunderstanding of both the doctrine of the Trinity and the nature of subordinationism. The Kroegers’ definition of subordinationism fails to make the historic and crucial distinction between essence and role. What the church condemned was a subordinationism that predicated a difference of essence or being among Father, Son, and Spirit. The distinct role of the Son does not imply that He is essentially inferior to the Father. The addition of the word *inferiority* before the word *role* in the Kroegers’ definition is especially distorting because a distinct role does not logically imply inferiority. That the Kroegers are inconsistent regarding the definition of subordinationism is evident in that elsewhere in their article they define it correctly: “The Nicene fathers ascribed to the Son and Spirit an equality of being or essence, but a subordination of order.”¹⁵ What the Nicene fathers called a subordination of order is another way of saying that they saw a subordination in role, or a subordination in the economic Trinity. The Nicene fathers rightly saw that this did not imply that the Son and the Spirit were inferior in nature to the Father. The Kroegers’ earlier definition of subordinationism, then, makes sense only if they conclude that the Nicene fathers were heretical.

Bilezikian is even less careful. He says that there is not the slightest evidence in the Bible for “a chain of command within the Trinity.” I would not use the phrase “chain of command,” but that the Son submits to the Father is clear from 1 Corinthians 15:28. It is clear that this subjection of the Son to the Father is *after* His earthly ministry, so how anyone can say that there is no hint of a difference of order or role within the Trinity is difficult to see. Whenever Scripture says that God sent the Son into the world (e.g., John 3:17), we see subordination in role: the Father commands and sends; the Son obeys and comes into the world to die for our sins.

The notion that there is a subordination in function or in the economic Trinity but an equality of essence is also part of the historic heritage of evangelical theology. John Calvin says of Tertullian’s understanding of the Trinity, “Nor am I displeased with Tertullian’s definition, provided it be taken in the right sense, that there is a kind

of distribution or economy in God which has no effect on the unity of essence.”¹⁶ What Calvin means by “distribution or economy” is a difference of role, and thus he concludes that a different role does not rule out equality of being or essence.

Charles Hodge says about the Nicene Creed:

The creeds are nothing more than a well-ordered arrangement of the facts of Scripture which concern the doctrine of the Trinity. They assert the distinct personality of the Father, Son and Spirit; their mutual relation as expressed by those terms; their absolute unity as to substance or essence, and their consequent perfect equality; *and the subordination of the Son to the Father*, and of the Spirit to the Father and the Son, *as the mode of subsistence and operation*. These are Scriptural facts, to which the creeds in question add nothing; and it is in this sense they have been accepted by the Church universal.¹⁷

The distinction between being and role is also reflected in Louis Berkhof. He says, “There can be no subordination as to essential being of the one person of the Godhead to the other, and therefore no difference in personal dignity. . . . The only subordination of which we can speak, *is a subordination in respect to order and relationship*.”¹⁸

To sum up, both Bilezikian and the Kroegers have wrongly defined subordinationism, thereby misleading readers with regard to the historic and evangelical doctrine of the Trinity.

Another argument used for the translation “source” in 1 Corinthians 11:3 is that Paul says woman came from man in verse 11:8, and this obviously suggests the idea of source. Surely this understanding of verse 8 is correct, but verse 8 does not explicate the meaning of *head* in verse 3. Instead, Paul uses this argument from source to prove that woman is the glory of man.

The order of Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 11:3 has caused some question. If Paul is teaching hierarchy here, why does he not write (1) “the head of Christ is God,” (2) “the head of every man is Christ,” and (3) “the head of the woman is man”? Instead, Paul places “the head of Christ is God” as the last statement in the verse. Some suggest that this rules out any hierarchical understanding. But we have already seen that the clear meaning of *head* is “authority,” and thus a hierarchy is definitely established. Why, then, does Paul place “the head of Christ is God” last? I think Paul added the headship of God over Christ right after asserting the headship of man over woman in order to teach that the authority of man over woman does not imply the inferiority of women or the superiority of men. Some Corinthians may have concluded that the headship of man over woman diminished woman’s worth. Paul anticipates this objection and adds that God is the head over Christ. And even though God (i.e., the Father) is the head over Christ, He is not essentially greater than Christ. So too, even though women are under men’s authority, they are not

essentially inferior. Paul follows this same pattern in 11:7-12. In 11:7-10, he says women were created for man's glory and sake. But in 11:11-12, he shows that this does not involve the inferiority of women.

The Relation of 11:4-6 to 11:3

We have spent considerable time on 11:3 because it is fundamental to the whole passage. Verses 4-6 flow from the theological principle enunciated in 11:3. Since Christ is the authority over men, and since men are the authority over women, it follows that no man should wear a head covering when he prays and prophesies, while a woman should.

Paul objects to men wearing head coverings in verse 4 because such adornment would be disgraceful. Why? Because that is what women wore (11:5-6), and thus a man who wore such a head covering would be shamefully depicting himself as a woman. Conversely, if women do not wear head coverings, their failure to be adorned properly would be shameful (11:5) because they would be dressing like men. That the shame involved is due to appearing like a man is confirmed by Paul's explanation in 11:5b-6. A woman's failure to wear a head covering is analogous to her having her hair cut short or shaved. Every woman in the culture of that day would have been ashamed of appearing in public with her head shaved or her hair cut short, because then she would have looked like a man.

Paul explicitly says in 11:15 that a woman's "long hair" is her "glory." And if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him (11:14). If we compare verse 14 with verse 15, it is clear that for a man to wear long hair is a dishonor to him because such long hair is the particular glory of a woman, i.e., because if a man wears long hair, he looks like a woman. If we examine verses 5 and 6 in light of verses 14-15, we see that for a woman to wear her hair short or to shave her hair is contrary to what brings her glory, namely, long hair. Indeed, to keep her hair short is to wear it the way a man does (cf. 11:14). Thus, we can conclude that Paul wants women to wear head coverings while praying and prophesying because to do otherwise would be to confuse the sexes and give the shameful impression that women are behaving like men.

On whom or what is the man or woman bringing shame if he or she is not adorned properly? In verse 4, Paul says that the man who has a head covering "dishonors his head." In verse 5 he says that the woman without a head covering "dishonors her head." What does he mean by the word *head* in these verses? The word clearly refers to authority in 11:3, as we have seen above. It refers to one's physical head in verses 4 (first use), 5 (first use), 7, and 10. Two interpretations are possible in our context, and they are not necessarily incompatible.

On the one hand, to disgrace one's head may mean that one disgraces oneself. Three arguments can be used to defend this interpretation. (1) The word *head* can simply refer to one's self. In Acts 18:6, Paul says to the resistant Jews in Corinth, "Your blood be on your own heads!" He clearly means that the responsibility for rejecting the gospel message lies only with themselves. (2) The parallel with verses 14 and 15 suggests that *head* means "oneself." In verse 14, Paul says "if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to *him*" (my italics). Now this thought in verse 14 is remarkably close to the idea that a man who wears a head covering "dishonors his head" (11:4). In the same way, if a woman's wearing long hair "is *her* glory" (verse 15, my italics), then the disgrace and shame described in verses 5 and 6 must refer to the disgrace she brings on herself. (3) Verses 4-6 forge a close relationship between one's physical head and disgracing the head. It is legitimate to infer that those who do not adorn their physical heads in a proper way bring shame on their heads, i.e., their own selves.

On the other hand, dishonoring the head in verses 4 and 5 may refer to the head described above in verse 3. Thus, a man who wears a head covering brings dishonor on his head, Christ. The woman who fails to wear a head covering brings dishonor on her head, man. Three arguments support this interpretation. (1) Verses 4-6 are an inference or conclusion drawn from the fundamental proposition in verse 3. Why does Paul want women to wear head coverings? Because such head coverings reflect the role relationship intended between man and woman. Since man is the head of woman, woman ought to adorn herself with a head covering. Failure to do so is to bring shame on one's head, namely, man. Such an understanding of accords well with the intended connectionSuch an understanding of *head* accords well with the intended connection between verse 3 and verses 4-6. (2) If Paul only wanted to say that one was disgracing oneself, he could have used a reflexive pronoun in verses 4 and 5. By using the word *head* in an obviously metaphorical way, Paul suggests a connection with the metaphorical use of that word in verse 3. (3) Paul says in verse 7 that "woman is the glory of man." He probably means by *glory* that the woman is intended to bring honor to the man. She should honor him because he is the head, i.e., the authority (11:3). This suggests that a woman disgraces her head, i.e., man, by not wearing a head covering (11:5), and man disgraces his head, Christ, by wearing a head covering (11:4).

Paul might have intended both senses here. They are not mutually exclusive. A woman who does not wear a head covering both disgraces herself and brings dishonor on her authority, who is man. A man who wears a head covering dishonors himself and his authority, Jesus Christ. If one does not conform to the role God intended, one brings dishonor on oneself and on one's authority. A child who rebels against a parent brings grief on himself and his parents (Proverbs 10:1; We can conclude, then, that if a woman failed to wear a head covering and so dressed like a

man, she brought shame both on herself and—because her behavior was a symbol of her rebellion against the created order, i.e., the intended relation between man and woman—on the man. Her failure to wear a head covering communicated rebellion and independence to everyone present in worship.¹⁹

We should pause to note here that Paul allows women to pray and prophesy in public assembly, according to 11:5. Some scholars have thought that women's prayer and prophecy were permitted only in private, since Paul says women should keep silent in church (1 Corinthians 14:34). But the praying and prophesying were probably in the public assembly for the following reasons: (1) The context favors the idea these chapters describe public worship. The subsequent topics focus on the Lord's Supper (11:17-34) and spiritual gifts (12:1-14:40), and these relate to public worship. (2) Prophecy was given to edify the community when gathered (1 Corinthians 14:1-5, 29-33a); it was not a private gift to be exercised alone. (3) Even if the meetings were in a home, such meetings would have been considered public assemblies, since many churches met in houses (cf. Romans 16:5; Philemon 2). (4) First Corinthians 14:33b-36 is best understood not to forbid *all* speaking by women in public, but only their speaking in the course of the congregation's judging prophecies (cf. 14:29-33a). Understood in this way, it does not contradict 11:5. It simply prohibits an abuse (women speaking up and judging prophecies in church) that Paul wanted to prevent in the church at Corinth.

So, Paul thinks women should pray and prophesy in public. Yet he wants them to do so with a head covering. I understand the major burden of 11:3-6, then, to be as follows: Women can pray and prophesy in public, but they must do so with a demeanor and attitude that supports male headship because in that culture wearing a head covering communicated a submissive demeanor and feminine adornment.²⁰ Thus, Paul does not forbid women to participate in public worship, yet he does insist that in their participation they should evidence a demeanor that is humble and submissive to male leadership.

The Function of 11:7-10 in the Argument

In verses 7-10, Paul explains further why he wants the women to wear head coverings and why the men should not wear them. A man (verse 7a) should not wear a covering "since he is the image and glory of God." But a woman should wear a covering because she "is the glory of man" (verse 7b). Paul is not denying that women are created in God's image, for he is referring to the creation accounts here and was well aware that Genesis teaches that both men and women are created in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27). The focus here is on the word *glory*, which is used in both parts of the sentence. What does Paul mean when he says that man is the glory of God, while woman is the glory of man? Both the subsequent and preceding

verses give us some clue. We will investigate the succeeding verses first.

In verses 8-9, two reasons are given why women are the glory of men. First, in verse 8, Paul writes that women are the glory of men because “man did not come from woman, but woman from man.” Paul is obviously thinking of Genesis 2:21-23, where woman is made out of man’s rib. What is Paul’s point here? Since woman came from man, she was meant to be his glory, i.e., she should honor him. That “honor” is the meaning of the *glory* is suggested also by verses 14-15. Paul says that long hair is a woman’s “glory” in verse 15. Conversely, he says that “if a man has long hair, it is a *dishonor* to him.” It is clear that these two verses function as a contrast. It is glorious for a woman to have long hair, but dishonorable for a man. From the contrast between the words *dishonor* and *glory*, we can conclude that another way of translating *glory* in verse 15 would be with the word *honor*. Paul’s point is that one should always honor and respect the source from which one came. And woman honors man by wearing a head covering, thereby showing that man is the head, i.e., the authority.

Second, verse 9 explains that woman is man’s glory since man was not created because of woman, but woman because of man. Paul once again alludes to Genesis 2. Woman was created to accompany man (Genesis 2:18) and in order to be a helper for him (2:20). If woman was created for man’s sake, i.e., to help him in the tasks God gave him, then it follows that woman should *honor* man.

The thrust of 11:7b-9 is that women should wear a head covering because she is man’s glory, i.e., she was created to honor him. Now we have already seen that if she does not wear a head covering (11:5-6), she dishonors her head, i.e., she does not honor him and she brings dishonor on herself. Thus, the use of the word *dishonor* in 11:4-6 supports the notion that *glory* in verse 7 has the meaning *honor*. But how do we know that woman was created to bring honor to man? Paul proves this in 11:8-9. Woman was created to bring honor to man because (1) the source of woman is man (this should not be confused with saying that the source of a wife is her husband, a wrong view of Ephesians 5:23 with which we have already dealt), and such an origin indicates a different role in the created order, and (2) woman was created because of man, i.e., in order help him in his tasks.

We ought to note in particular the significance of 11:8-9 in the argument. Evangelical feminists often claim that any role distinctions between males and females are due only to the fall. But their argument fails for two reasons.

First, Paul argues from creation, not from the fall. The distinctions between male and female are part of the created order, and Paul apparently did not think redemption in Christ negated creation. Feminists also often contend that the creation

accounts in Genesis 1-2 do not support any role distinctions between the sexes. They think the creation accounts prove egalitarianism.²¹ Nevertheless, Paul obviously interpreted Genesis 2 as revealing a distinction in roles between men and women. This is clear not only in 1 Corinthians 11, but also in 1 Timothy 2:8-15. The burden of proof lies squarely on the evangelical feminists, for they need to demonstrate clearly that Paul was not appealing to creation in order to justify role distinctions between men and women. Thus far they have not argued their case satisfactorily.

Second, Paul explicitly uses the argument from source in 11:8 to argue for the wearing of coverings by women. Thus, contrary to evangelical feminists, Paul uses an argument from source, which is rooted in the order of creation, to support the idea of a difference in roles between men and women. We have already argued that Paul means “authority” by the word *head* in verse 3, and here Paul even employs an argument from source to defend a distinction between the roles of men and women.

How does verse 10 fit into the structure of the argument? Paul says, “Therefore the woman ought to have a *symbol of* authority on her head, because of the angels” (NASB). The verse is controversial, but it seems to be another argument in favor of women wearing head coverings. The word *therefore* (NASB) (*dia touto*) points back to verses 8-9. We should note the structure of verses 7-10. Paul begins (11:7) by saying that man should not wear a head covering “since he is the image and glory of God.” Woman, though, “is the glory of man.” Then, in verses 8-9, Paul explains why men should not wear head coverings and why women are the glory of men. We have already seen that he grounds the distinction between men and women in creation. Finally, in verse 10 he draws an inference from verses 8-9: that women should wear head coverings. It would be easy to miss the structure of these verses because verses 8-9 function as a parenthesis and support the commands in both verse 7 and verse 10. It might help to show the structure of the verses as follows: (1) Men ought not to wear head coverings (11:7). (2) Support for this command (11:8-9). (3) Therefore, women ought to wear head coverings (11:10). Verses 7 and 10 are substantially parallel. Paul begins the passage by saying that men “ought not” (*oukopheilei*) to wear head coverings (11:7), and he concludes it by saying that women “ought” (*opheilei*) to wear head coverings (verse 10). The reasons given in verses 8-9 support both commands.

But what does Paul mean when he speaks of a woman having authority on her head? English versions often have added a word to the Greek text in order to make the meaning plainer. Thus, the NASB translates verse 10 to say that “the woman ought to have a *symbol of* authority on her head.” The RSV says that a woman should “have a veil on her head,” and the NIV says a woman should have “a sign of authority on her head.” But the Greek text literally says “the woman ought to have

authority on her head.” The words *symbol* (NASB), *veil* (RSV), and *sign* (NIV) are not in the Greek text. All the text says is that a woman should have authority (*exousia*) on her head. The word *authority* has been translated by the English versions in a passive sense so that Paul seems to be saying that a woman should have a sign or symbol of a man’s authority on her head, namely, a head covering or veil.

But M. Hooker has contended that such translations are misguided. She says that the word *authority* nowhere else has a passive meaning; it is always active.²² What she means is that the word must refer to a woman’s own authority over her head: she has the right and authority to prophesy. Thus, according to Hooker, the verse is not saying that a woman must wear a head covering to show her submission to a man’s authority. Instead, wearing a head covering indicates that a woman has the right to prophecy. If Hooker is correct, Paul here is trumpeting the authority of women, not requiring their submission to men.

Hooker’s view, however, should be rejected for seven reasons. (1) As we pointed out above, the structure of the text is such that verses 7 and 10 are parallel. A man should not wear a head covering (11:7), but a woman should (11:10). The *therefore* in verse 10 refers back to verses 8-9, which explain *why* a woman should have a sign of authority: because woman came from man and was created for man. The reasons given in verses 8-9 for wearing a head covering, which is required in verse 10, clearly show that the issue is a woman’s proper role relationship to a man. (2) Hooker’s view focuses on the authority or right, i.e., the *freedom* of a woman to prophesy, but the focus of the verse is not on freedom.

Instead, the text says “the woman ought (*opheilei*) to have authority on her head.” The word *ought* shows that a command is being given here to women as to how they ought to adorn themselves when they prophesy (cf. 11:5); it communicates an obligation, not a freedom.

(3) Understanding Paul as commanding women to wear a head covering as a sign of submitting to male authority fits best with the preceding verses in the passage. Nothing is clearer in verses 3-9 than that Paul wants the woman to wear a head covering because such adornment appropriately distinguishes women from men. Indeed, the focus on male headship over women in verse 3 shows that Paul wants women to wear a head covering in order to show that they are submissive to male headship. If Paul were suddenly focusing on the “right” and “authority” of women, as Hooker thinks, he would be contradicting what he has said in the preceding verses.²³ (4) The qualification given in verse 11 (see explanation below) fits best with a command for women to have a head covering as a symbol of submission to men. Paul begins verse 11 with *However*. In verses 11-12, he guards against the misunderstanding that women are somehow inferior to men. But he would not need

to say this if he had just affirmed women's authority and right to prophesy in such strong terms in verse 10. But since, in verse 10, Paul really concludes his argument as to why women should wear head coverings as a sign of submission to male headship, he senses a need to qualify his point in verses 11-12.

(5) Furthermore, it is not at all strained to see *exousia* in verse 10 as “sign of authority” or “symbol of authority.” The standard lexicon for New Testament literature sees such a symbolic understanding of *exousia* as a viable possibility.²⁴ One can easily see why something worn on the head can become a sign or symbol of something. The dragon, in Revelation 12:3, has seven heads on which are seven crowns. Clearly, these crowns symbolize the dragon's authority and power. When Jesus returns on a white horse (Revelation 19:11-12) “on his head are many crowns,” symbolizing His kingly authority. In an example very similar to 1 Corinthians 11:10, Diodorus of Sicily (1.47.5, written ca. B.C. 60-30) refers to a stone statue that has “three *kingdoms* on its head (*echontō n treis basileias epi tēs kephalēs*),” but it clearly means in the context that the statue has three crowns, which are symbols of governing kingdoms. We can conclude, then, that it is not at all unusual for something on the head to be a symbol of something else.

(6) Hooker, however, says that the word *authority* always refers to a person's own authority, not the authority of someone else. The problem with Hooker's analysis is that *exousia* in most other contexts does not refer to a physical symbol of some authority. It is the particular context of this paragraph, as verses 49 show, that makes it clear that Paul is speaking of a symbol of authority.²⁵ To say there are no other examples of *exousia* being used this way is not decisive, since there are not many other parallel examples of *authority* even being used symbolically. Moreover, the example from Diodorus is also helpful here. The text describes a statue of the mother of King Osymandias, and reads as follows:

There is also another statue of his mother standing alone, a monolith twenty cubits high, and it has three kingdoms on its head, signifying that she was both daughter and wife and mother of a king (1.47.5).

Here the three crowns (which Diodorus calls kingdoms) all represent someone else's authority—the authority of the woman's father (who was a king), husband (who was a king), and son (who was a king). In no case is the woman's own authority symbolized by the crowns she wears. Similarly, the head covering of the woman in 1 Corinthians 11 may well represent the authority of the man to whom she is subject in authority.

(7) Even if *authority* has an active meaning here, it refers to the man's authority, not the woman's, in this context. Paul explicitly says the woman “ought” to have “authority” on her head, and the most sensible explanation is that she ought to wear

a head covering as a symbol of man's authority over her.

In verse 10, Paul also gives a new reason for wearing the coverings: "because of the angels." What does he mean? We don't know for sure. The best solution is probably that the angels are good angels who assist in worship and desire to see the order of creation maintained.²⁶

The Qualification in 11:11-12

First Corinthians 11:3-10 is a sustained argument in favor of male headship and female submission, yet with full participation in worship for women (something Christians today need to remember more often). Verses 11-12 function as a qualification so that the Corinthians will not misunderstand Paul's argument. Woman and man stand in interdependence in the Lord (11:11). Paul proves this statement in verse 12. Man is the source of woman, but all men ever since Adam have come into the world through women. Paul anticipates the problem that could arise if one stressed his argument in verses 3-10 too rigidly. Male and female could almost be construed as different species, and men as more valuable than women. That is not Paul's point at all. There is a profound interdependence and mutuality present in the male-female relationship, and neither sex can boast over the other because the sexes are interdependent. Ultimately "everything comes from God."

Verses 11-12 demonstrate that Paul would utterly reject the notion that women are inferior or lesser human beings. Sad to say, some traditionalists have treated women in this way. Mutuality is also an element of the relationship between men and women. Women are created in the image of God, and men have no greater worth because of their God-given responsibility to lead.

At the opposite extreme, some evangelical feminists have drawn a wrong deduction from verses 11-12. For example, Bilezikian asserts that if Paul sees men and women as equal and both created in God's image, then any role distinctions must be eliminated because they would contradict the affirmation of equality.²⁷ Such a distinctively modern way of thinking has little to do with how Paul thought. The text before us makes it plain that Paul thought role distinctions and equality were not contradictory. People can be equal in essence and yet have different functions. The fairest way to read Paul is to let his own writings strike the balance. Verses 3-10 make it clear that he believed in role distinctions; verses 11-12 show that he did not thereby believe women were inferior or less important. Those who focus only on verses 11-12 effectively shut out verses 3-10. It is a mistake to exclude either teaching; we must hold them together as Paul did.

The Concluding Argument for Head Coverings in 11:13-16

Paul returns in the final paragraph (verses 13-16) to the main burden of the text: women's wearing head coverings. This is another indication that verses 11-12 do not cancel out the commands given in verses 4-9. Here Paul appeals to the Corinthians' own judgment (11:13), confident that "the very nature of things" will instruct them with respect to what is fitting or proper. What is the content of the instruction given by nature? Nature teaches that "if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him," while "if a woman has long hair, it is her glory."

What is the meaning of the word *nature* (*physis*) here? Is Paul simply saying that *human tradition and customs* have made a distinction between the hair length of men and women? The use of the word *practice* (*sunē theia*) in 11:16 could support this interpretation. But Paul's use of *nature* elsewhere and the use of *teach* suggest that he is referring to the natural and instinctive sense of right and wrong that God has planted in us, especially with respect to sexuality. This sense of what is appropriate or fitting has been implanted in human beings from creation.²⁸ Romans 1:26-27 is an illuminating parallel because the same word is used. Women and men involved in a homosexual relationship have exchanged the natural function of sexuality for what is contrary to nature, i.e., they have violated the God-given created order and natural instinct, and therefore are engaging in sexual relations with others of the same sex.

Nature teaches, then, in the sense that the natural instincts and psychological perceptions of masculinity and femininity are manifested in particular cultural situations. Thus, a male instinctively and naturally shrinks away from doing anything that his culture labels as feminine. So, too, females have a natural inclination to dress like women rather than men. Paul's point, then, is that how men and women wear their hair is a significant indication of whether they are abiding by the created order. Of course, what constitutes long hair is often debated—what is appropriately masculine or feminine in hairstyle may vary widely from culture to culture.²⁹

The function of verses 13-15 in the argument is to show that the wearing of a head covering by a woman is in accord with the God-given sense that women and men are different. For a woman to dress like a man is inappropriate because it violates the distinction God has ordained between the sexes. And, according to Paul, if a woman prophesies in church without wearing the symbol of being under male authority—i.e., if she prophesies while dressed like a man—she is in effect negating the distinction between men and women that God has ordained from creation.

In verse 16, Paul concludes his argument by saying, “But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.” Now, some have said that Paul actually rejects the wearing of head coverings by women with these words because the Greek literally says “we have no *such practice*” (*toiautēn sunētheian*), and thus they conclude that the practice of wearing head coverings is renounced here by Paul. But such an understanding is surely wrong. Paul in this verse is addressing the contentious, who, the previous context makes clear, *do not want to wear a head covering*. The practice of certain Corinthian women who *refuse to wear a head covering* is what Paul refers to when he says “we have no such practice.” Thus, he says to the contentious that both the apostolic circle (“we”) and the rest of the churches adhere to the custom of head coverings. The instructions Paul has given reflect his own view of the matter and the practice of the other churches. Those who see this advice as limited only to the Corinthian situation have failed to take this verse seriously enough. Paul perceives his instructions here as binding for *all churches* in the Greco-Roman world. Indeed, the other churches already adhere to the practice Paul recommends here. Such a universal word at the conclusion of the text is a strong indication that the principle that underlies this passage cannot simply be dismissed as cultural.

Significance of This Text for Today’s World

The significance of this text for the twentieth century must be examined briefly. Am I suggesting that women return to wearing coverings or veils? No.³⁰ We must distinguish between the fundamental principle that underlies a text and the application of that principle in a specific culture. The fundamental principle is that the sexes, although equal, are also different. God has ordained that men have the responsibility to lead, while women have a complementary and supportive role. More specifically, if women pray and prophesy in church, they should do so under the authority of male headship. Now, in the first century, failure to wear a covering sent a signal to the congregation that a woman was rejecting the authority of male leadership. Paul was concerned about head coverings only because of the message they sent to people in that culture.

Today, except in certain religious groups, if a woman fails to wear a head covering while praying or prophesying, no one thinks she is in rebellion. Lack of head coverings sends no message at all in our culture. Nevertheless, that does not mean that this text does not apply to our culture. The principle still stands that women should pray and prophesy in a manner that makes it clear that they submit to male leadership. Clearly the attitude and the demeanor with which a woman prays and

prophesies will be one indication of whether she is humble and submissive. The principle enunciated here should be applied in a variety of ways given the diversity of the human situation.

Moreover, both men and women today should dress so that they do not look like the opposite sex. Confusion of the sexes is contrary to the God-given sense that the sexes are distinct. For example, it would be wrong for a twentieth-century American male to wear a dress in public. It would violate his masculinity. Everything within a man would cry out against doing this because it would violate his appropriate sense of what it means to be a man. The point is not that women should not wear jeans or pants, but that in every culture there are certain kinds of adornment which become culturally acceptable norms of dress for men and women.

Finally, we should note that there is a connection forged in this passage between femininity and the proper submission of women to men. The women in Corinth, by prophesying without a head covering, were sending a signal that they were no longer submitting to male authority. Paul sees this problem as severe because the arrogation of male leadership roles by women ultimately dissolves the distinction between men and women. Thus, this text speaks volumes to our culture today, because one of the problems with women taking full leadership is that it inevitably involves a collapsing of the distinctions between the sexes. It is hardly surprising, as the example of the Evangelical Woman's Caucus demonstrates, that one of the next steps is to accept lesbianism.³¹ Paul rightly saw, as he shows in this text, that there is a direct link between women appropriating leadership and the loss of femininity. It is no accident that Paul addresses the issues of feminine adornment and submission to male leadership in the same passage.

In conclusion, we should affirm the participation of women in prayer and prophecy in the church. Their contribution should not be slighted or ignored. Nevertheless, women should participate in these activities with hearts that are submissive to male leadership, and they should dress so that they retain their femininity.

6: “Silent in the Churches”: On the Role of Women in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36¹

D. A. Carson

^{33b}As in all the congregations of the saints, ³⁴women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. ³⁵If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

I. Introduction

The interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36 is by no means easy. The nub of the difficulty is that in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, Paul is quite prepared for women to pray and prophesy, albeit with certain restrictions; but here, a first reading of the text seems to make the silence he enjoins absolute. The solutions that have been advanced are, like devils in certain instances of demon possession, legion. I can do no more than list a few and mention one or two of my hesitations about them before turning to the interpretation I find most contextually and exegetically secure.

The demarcation of the passage to be studied deserves some comment, since the precise link between verse 33a and verse 33b, and therefore between verses 33b and verse 34, is disputed. Do we read, “For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the congregation of the saints”; or “As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches”? The latter is stylistically inelegant, for in Greek the words rendered “congregations” and “churches” by the *NIV* are the same word: i.e., “As in all the churches of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches.” But what some see as stylistic inelegance, others see as powerful emphasis achieved by repetition. Moreover, if verse 33b is linked with what precedes, it is uncertain just what the line of thought is. In the sentence, “For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the congregations of the saints,” what is being compared? God and the congregations of the saints? God’s peaceful order with what is in all the congregations of the saints? The sentence can be salvaged only by understanding an additional phrase, such as: “*and this principle must be operative in your church*, as in all the congregations of the saints.”

On the whole, it seems best to take verse 33b with what follows. But even if someone prefers the other option, little is changed in the interpretation of verses 34-36, since the phrase “in the churches” (in the plural) is found *in verse 34*.

II. The Text-Critical Question

A number of scholars have noted the complexities of the textual evidence supporting the authenticity of these verses and have dismissed verses 34-36, or some part of them, as a late gloss of no relevance in establishing Pauline theology.² Not a few of these writers exercise a similar source-critical skill with all the other passages in the Pauline corpus that seem to restrict women in any way. The authentic Paul, they argue, is the Paul of passages like 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and Galatians 3:27ff. I confess I am always surprised by the amount of energy and ingenuity expended to rescue Paul from himself and conform him to our image. In any case, the view that verses 34-36 contain a major gloss is so much a minority report, especially since all manuscripts include the passage, that until recently most discussions and refutations could afford to be cursory. In short, most were satisfied that, whatever the textual complexities, the evidence that these verses are original and in their original location (and not, as in some manuscripts, with verses 34-35 placed after 14:40), is substantial.³

With the publication of the recent and generally excellent commentary by Fee,⁴ however, the view that verses 34-35 constitute a non-Pauline interpolation has gained wider credence. Before turning to interpretations of the text as it stands, it has become important to think through the reasoning of those who omit it.

The relevant textual evidence is quickly stated. Verses 34-35 appear in all known manuscripts, either in their present location, or, in the case of all Western witnesses, after verse 40 (D F G 88* a b d f g Ambrosiaster Sedulius-Scotus). In addition, Codex Fuldensis (a Latin manuscript written between A.D. 541 and A.D. 546 by order of Bishop Victor of Capua) places the verses after verse 40, but also inserts them in the margin after verse 33. It appears that, despite the uniformity of the Western tradition, Victor, or those who worked at his bidding, became aware of the placement of the verses outside their own tradition and signalled their hesitation in this way.

Thus, although the overwhelming majority of manuscripts support the placing of verses 34-35 after verse 33, one must offer an explanation of the Western textual tradition. Fee's solution is that when the epistle came from Paul's hand the verses were not there, but were added later. His argument is essentially twofold. *First*, he appeals to transcriptional probability. In particular, he refers to Bengel's first principle, perhaps the most important single text-critical principle: the form of the text that best explains the origin of all other forms is most likely the original. As a matter of mere logical possibility, one must opt, Fee says, for one of the following: (1) Paul wrote the words after verse 33 and someone later deliberately transposed them to a position

after verse 40; (2) Paul wrote the words after verse 40 and someone deliberately transposed them to a position after verse 33; (3) Paul did not write the words at all; rather, they were an early marginal gloss (that is, a later editor's addition written in the margin) subsequently inserted into the text at two different places.⁵ Fee judges that good historical reasons are available to support the third option, but none for either of the first two. The gloss itself, quite apart from the location of its insertion, may well have been created toward the end of the first century to achieve a reconciliation between 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14 or to thwart a rising feminist movement (the existence of which some find attested in 1 Timothy 2). This means, of course, that verse 33b must be read with verse 33a (cf. discussion above) and that verse 36 follows immediately (as the letter came from Paul).

If Fee's reconstruction of events is correct, the gloss must have been extraordinarily early to have managed to find its way into every manuscript. This becomes rather unlikely under the assumption that the gloss was inserted at the *end* of the first century, by which time this epistle had been circulating for four decades. It is hard to believe that none of the earliest copies had any influence on the second- and third-century textual traditions to which we have access. Most commentators are rightly reluctant, therefore, to postulate an original omission where no manuscript that has come down to us attests the omission. Moreover, most glosses of substantial size, like this one, seek to explain the text, or clarify the text, or elucidate the text (e.g. John 5:4; Acts 8:37; 1 John 5:7b-8); they do not introduce major problems of flow into the text. The difficulty is so great in this case that we are asked to believe in a glossator who is Biblically informed enough to worry about harmonization with 1 Timothy 2 but who is so thick he cannot see that he is introducing a clash between 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Corinthians 11. In short, unless there are overwhelming reasons for rejecting both of the other two options, this third choice should be dismissed as both weak and speculative. Bengel's first principle is convincing; Fee's application of it is not.

It is not widely argued that Paul originally wrote the disputed words after verse 40. That leaves us with the first option, namely, that Paul wrote verses 34-35 after verse 33, but that someone later deliberately transposed them to follow verse 40. This is the majority view. Fee rejects it on the ground that no historical reason has been advanced to justify such transposition. In particular, he says, "(a) displacements of this kind do not occur elsewhere in the New Testament; and (b) no *adequate* [emphasis his] reason can be found for such a displacement were these words originally in the text after verse 33."⁶

Neither objection is weighty. On the first point, Fee himself concedes, in a footnote,⁷ that the adulterous woman pericope (John 7:53-8:11 in English Bibles) is a

remarkable exception: it found its way into no fewer than five locations in our manuscripts. As for his argument that “no *adequate* reason can be found for such a transposition,” I am doubtful that Fee will find the reason I shall advance “adequate,” but adequacy is in part in the eye of the beholder. Customarily it is suggested that some scribe transposed it to a position after verse 40 because that produces less strain in the flow of the passage than its location after verse 33. Fee does not find this suggestion “adequate” because (1) the position after verse 40 is scarcely an improvement, and if there is no improvement there is no motive for transposition; and (2) judging by the stability of the textual tradition in the Eastern church, it was not common for copyists to mess around with the order of Paul’s epistles. Again, however, a different reading of the evidence is possible. (i) Although a location for verses 34-35 after verse 40 is not without difficulties, it does have, on a superficial reading, one marked advantage over that attested by the majority of the manuscript evidence. The position after verse 33 (again, on a superficial reading) breaks up the flow of the argument. Verses 37-40 are still demonstrably talking about tongues, prophecy, spiritual gifts, authority in the church—the very topics that have dominated chapter 14. True, to put verses 34-35 after verse 40 is still to leave some awkwardness, but at least the awkwardness of breaking up what appears to be a cohesive unit of thought is alleviated. Thus, when verse 40 ends up by insisting that everything be done “in a fitting and orderly way,” it is easy to imagine some copyist thinking that what appear to be regulations governing the conduct of women in the assembly could be subsumed fairly easily under that principle. The role of women is then nicely tucked in between two major topics: spiritual gifts (chapters 12-14) and the resurrection (chapter 15). (ii) As for the stability of the textual tradition in the Eastern church, most textual critics acknowledge that the majority of the most “creative” glosses and emendations occurred early in the transmission of the text. Certainly in the West, by the time of Jerome there were protests about the sloppy quality of many copies and translations (as witness the well-known protest of “Pope” Damasus). All it would take to introduce the transposition was one copyist, presumably early enough to capture the Western tradition, making what he felt was an improvement. That the history of the Eastern textual tradition is remarkably stable is scarcely relevant, since most of that “history” is much later.

If we set aside Fee’s view of the transcriptional probabilities, we must still evaluate his *second* text-critical appeal, namely, intrinsic probability. Fee makes three points:

(1) He strongly argues that one can make the best sense of the structure of Paul’s argument “without these intruding sentences,”⁸ i.e., by omitting these two verses. Of course, appeals to “intrinsic probability” are amongst the weakest, against the principle of *lectio difficilior potior* (“the more difficult reading is preferable,” a principle that, strangely, Fee does not mention): all things being equal, the most difficult

reading has the greatest claim to authenticity, since it can be demonstrated that scribes tended to smooth out perceived rough spots, not invent difficulties. Clearly, on intrinsic grounds inclusion of verses 34-35 after verse 33 is the *lectio difficilior*, the “harder reading.” Methodologically, the only time the *lectio difficilior* should be overthrown by appealing to “intrinsic probability” occurs when the external evidence is strongly against the *lectio difficilior*. Despite Fee’s treatment of the transcriptional probabilities, this is simply not the case.

But what Fee unwittingly accomplishes is to set out one important criterion for an acceptable interpretation of the passage: it must make sense of the *flow* of the passage, or it should be dismissed as unlikely. In other words, while it may be freely admitted that the passage makes sense if verses 34-35 are excised, both the transcriptional probabilities and the principle of *lectio difficilior* argue that these two verses are original; and if so, then the most credible interpretation is the one that shows how a thoughtful reading of the last half of the chapter makes ample sense of the flow of Paul’s thought, *with verses 34-35 included after verse 33*.

(2) Fee sees “even greater difficulty” in “the fact that these verses stand in obvious contradiction to 11:2-16, where it is assumed without reproof that women pray and prophesy in the assembly.”⁹ All sides in the debate understand that this is the nub of the problem. Even so, it may be doubted whether this makes the shorter text “intrinsically” more “probable.” It may instead be further fodder for the *lectio difficilior*. And again, Fee’s concern points the way to another criterion of an adequate interpretation: it must explain how the two passages, 11:2-16 and 14:33b-36, can stand consistently in the same letter, *each within its own context*.

Fee forcefully rejects this approach, because he insists on taking “They are not allowed to speak” as an absolute statement that *cannot* be reconciled with 11:2-16. At the merely formal level, of course, he is right: the statement is absolute. But qualifications to a statement can be present even when they are not part of the syntactical unit in question. The qualifications *may* be part of the larger context or the flow of the argument: in other words, there may be discourse considerations. Consider, for example, 1 John 3:9: “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.” We may agree that the meaning of “God’s seed” could be taken a couple of different ways, and that the *NIV* rendering, just cited, exaggerates the force of the present tense verbs, but after all our caveats are in, this is an extraordinarily strong statement. Even so, responsible exegesis must not only fit it into the flow of 1 John 3 but also take note of 1 John 1:6, 8, 10, where all pretensions to sinless perfection are specifically denied.

So also here: the prohibition in 1 Corinthians 14:34 is strong, but, as we shall see,

the context argues it is not as strong as Fee thinks. Moreover the sanction granted to women to pray and prophesy (in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16) has one or two more curbs on it than Fee thinks. In the last analysis, Fee's judgments based on "intrinsic probability" are in part the result of his insistence on an absolute disjunction between two texts where more sympathetic exegesis sees a way forward. The disjunction he draws is not demanded by the text; it is self-generated.

(3) Finally, Fee joins other scholars who have noted that there are some usages in these two verses that are not typically Pauline— though it must be said that he prejudges this issue by saying, rather more strongly, that they "seem quite foreign to Paul."¹⁰ Of course, many passages that all concede are Pauline contain one or more *hapax legomena* (expressions that occur only once, whether once in the Pauline corpus, or once in the New Testament). In light of this, we ought to be very careful about relegating any passage to the level of redactional addition where part of the argument turns on odd usage. This is not to say that such arguments are never valid: I myself have argued against the authenticity of John 7:53 8:11, in part by appealing to usage. But even there, where the usage arguments are considerably stronger than here (in part because the text is much longer), the usage arguments would not be judged very powerful were it not for the very strong manuscript evidence favoring omission—evidence entirely lacking in this instance.

In any case, the atypical usages in this passage are not all of a piece. Several of the ones commonly listed (but not, thankfully, by Fee) occur in Ephesians, Colossians, or the Pastorals, but so convinced are some scholars that these epistles are deuterio-Pauline that they conclude 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 must be deuterio-Pauline as well. I refer to such items as the verbs *to permit* (*epitrepō*), which occurs in 1 Timothy 2:12, also dealing with women, and *to subordinate [oneself]* (*hypotassō*), which is found in Ephesians and Colossians. Although "churches [*NIV* 'congregations'] of the saints" is not found elsewhere in Paul, neither is it part of the disputed text: it occurs at the end of verse 33—which of course does not bother Conzelmann, since he, without any text-critical warrant, assigns all of verses 33b-36 to a later redactor.¹¹ Fee carefully distances himself from this kind of speculation and suggests that 1:2 offers adequate reason for this form of expression.¹² This rather goes to show that reasons can usually be found to explain unique usages. But when it comes to verses 34-35, Fee magnifies several alleged peculiarities. In particular, he thinks that the use of "the Law" in verse 34 is un-Pauline.¹³ I shall comment on that expression below.

In brief, neither Fee's appeal to transcriptional probability nor his appeal to intrinsic probability is very convincing. With all respect to a brother whose text-critical prowess is far greater than my own, his arguments in this case sound a bit like the

application of a first-class mind to the defense of a remarkably weak position.

III. Unsatisfying Interpretations

If we grant that verses 34-35 are authentic and were included after verse 33 when the epistle left Paul's hand, it is all the more important to weigh the various interpretations that have been offered. The following list is not exhaustive. It is broadly comprehensive, and not in any particular order.

(1) Some continue to see the demand for silence as an absolute rule. This is done in one of two ways. *First*, several seek to escape the tension between 11:21-6 and 14:33b-36 by arguing that only the latter passage has reference to the public assembly; the former deals only with the home or with small group gatherings.¹⁴ In that case, nothing in 1 Corinthians prevents the interpreter's taking the prohibition of chapter 14 absolutely, so far as the church assembly is concerned.

This interpretation does not seem very likely, for: (a) Paul thinks of prophecy primarily as revelation from God delivered through believers *in the context of the church*, where the prophecy may be evaluated (14:23-29). (b) Distinctions between "smaller house groups" and "church" may not have been all that intelligible to the first Christians, who commonly met in private homes. When the "church" in a city was large enough (as certainly in Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, and possibly Corinth) to overflow the largest private accommodation, it must have been rather difficult, once opposition was established, to find a public venue large enough to accommodate *all* the believers of that city; i.e., the house groups in such instances *constituted* the assembly of the church. (c) The language of 11:16 ("If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.") seems to suggest a *church* concern, not merely the concern of private or small-group piety. The "we"/"church of God" parallel either means that Paul has never allowed the practice, and the churches have followed his lead; or that Paul and the church in Ephesus (from which he is writing) constitute the "we" that have not followed the practice, and again the other churches have adopted the same stance. Either way, when Paul adopts the same tone elsewhere (see especially 14:33b, 36), he is talking about conduct *in an assembly*. (d) The immediately succeeding verses (11:17-34) are certainly devoted to an ordinance designed for the assembly. (e) If someone points out that 11:21-6, unlike 14:33b-36, does not include the phrase "in the church," it must also be observed that 11:2-16 does not *restrict* the venue to the private home or small group. (f) Whether the restriction in 11:2-16 requires some kind of hat or a distinctive coiffure, it becomes faintly ridiculous in proportion to the degree of privateness envisaged. If the restriction pertains to every venue *except* the

church assembly, does this mean the Christian wife must postpone her private prayer until she has hurried to her chambers and donned her headpiece? The restriction is coherent only in a public setting. (g) Above all, the universality of the promise of Joel, cited at Pentecost, that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on men and women such that both would prophesy as constituent members of the community of the new covenant, seems somehow less than transparent if the women may display their inheritance only outside the gathered messianic community.

The *second* way in which some understand the prohibition in 14:33b-36 as an absolute rule, thereby requiring creative measures in the exegesis of 11:2-16, is by taking the permission granted in the latter passage to be mere concession: women may indeed pray and prophesy (under the restriction of the head covering, whatever that is); but this is conceded with extreme reluctance to those who cannot manage to submit to the rule of chapter 14.¹⁵ But the praying and prophesying exercised by women in chapter 11 is not cast as a concession. Moreover, the church enjoyed the heritage of Pentecost and the fulfillment of the Joel prophecy, as we have seen, which promised that both men *and women* would have the Spirit poured out on them and that in consequence they would prophesy (Acts 2:16).

(2) Some are willing to leave a contradiction, and say no more.¹⁶ But apart from any bearing this might have on the doctrine of Scripture, it is hard to believe that Paul could contradict himself as boldly as some think he has within the space of a few pages.

(3) Equally unlikely is the view of Kähler, to the effect that the subordination Paul had in mind is not of women to men, but of women to the order of worship he is establishing.¹⁷ But we must ponder why women are singled out. Do not men also have to submit to the ecclesiastical structures Paul is setting forth? Moreover, the verb for “submit” or “subordinate” normally involves subordination of a person or persons to a person or persons, not to an order, procedure, or institution.

(4) To her credit, Fiorenza suggests¹⁸ that the reasoning behind many such judgments is based on theological bias; so she is prepared to let Paul be Paul. Whatever the restriction, she thinks it is placed on wives only. After all, 1 Corinthians 7 displays Paul’s “ascetic preference for the unmarried state”;¹⁹ thus it is “apparent that Paul here is ‘taking over bourgeois moral concepts which denote not absolute but conventional values.’”²⁰ Fiorenza finds Paul’s attitude surprising since we know of missionary *couples* in the New Testament. Paul derives his stance from “the Jewish Hellenistic propaganda tradition” that “places the demand for subordination of wives in the context of the Law.”²¹ Verse 36 betrays the fact that

Paul expects strong response from the church against these restrictions; for indeed, Paul himself recognizes that his argument “sounds preposterous” and “goes against the accepted practice of the missionary churches in the Hellenistic urban centers. He therefore claims for his regulations the authority of the Lord (verse 37).”²²

Here we have Paul not only strapped into a bourgeois mentality but also guilty of the worst sort of religious jingoism: knowing what he says is preposterous and preparing for the backlash by appealing to the Lord’s authority! I confess I cannot help entertaining the suspicion that Fiorenza’s exegesis tells us more of her than it does of Paul.

(5) Another cluster of interpretations argues that the problems behind Paul’s demand for silence are local, probably doctrinal or cultural.²³ These positions are defended with varying degrees of sophistication. The argument that some of the women were too noisy²⁴ cannot be taken very seriously, for we must ask why Paul then bans *all* women from talking. And were there *no* noisy men? Nor is it plausible that the women are silenced because they were uneducated; for again, we must ask why Paul doesn’t silence uneducated *people*, not just women. And since Paul’s rule operates in *all* the churches (verses 33b-34), it would be necessary to hold that *all* first-century Christian women were uneducated—which is palpable nonsense.²⁵

A more sophisticated version of this approach argues that women were exploiting their emancipation, refusing the ruling of verse 29, and falling into various heresies. The “Law” to which Paul appeals in verse 34 is his own prior ruling, alluded to again in verse 37. Moreover, verse 36 makes it clear that the crucial issue at stake was the Word of God: “The Corinthians were claiming to have originated the divine message, with their women giving the lead.”²⁶ The doctrinal error may have been related to 15:12—a claim to have already been raised; and this claim “may well have carried with it—on the part of the women—a tacit denial of their married state on the ground that as ‘risen ones’ they no longer owed marital allegiance.”²⁷

But none of this is convincing, and some of it is misleading. There is *no* evidence that Paul ever uses the word *law* to refer to his own ruling. There is, as we shall see, a much more natural interpretation of that word. Surely the thrust of verse 36 is the charge that the Corinthians were trying to stand apart from the other churches (cf. 14:33b). In other words, verse 36 does not *define* the problem but *describes* the attitude that supports it. And what evidence is there here that the women “gave the lead”? Moreover, the attempt to link this situation with a similar one in 1 Timothy arouses all the same kinds of objections about the exegesis of 1 Timothy.

There is a more foundational objection: These approaches are unbearably sexist. They presuppose that there was a major heresy in which one of the following was

true: (a) *only* women were duped, yet Paul arbitrarily silences *all* the women, regardless of whether they were heretics or not; (b) both some men and some women were duped, but Paul silences only the latter, thus proving to be a chauvinist; or (c) Paul was entirely right in his ruling, because *all* the women and *only* women in *all* of the Pauline churches were duped—which perhaps I may be excused for finding hard to believe. Has that ever happened in the history of the church? The truth of the matter is that this passage raises no question of heresy, but if it did, some explanation would still have to be given for the fact that Paul’s response silences women, not heretics.

(6) Yet another cluster of interpretations attempts to resolve the difficulty by ascribing verses 34-35, or some parts of them, to the position of the Corinthians, perhaps even to a quote from their letter.²⁸ There are many variations to this cluster, but the central purpose of these approaches is to assign the parts that do not seem to cohere with Paul’s thought as enunciated elsewhere to the Corinthian position Paul is setting out to refute. If the law (verse 34) means the Old Testament, one must find some place where women are told to be silent, and (we are told) there isn’t one. Therefore *law* must refer to something else. One common view is that it represents *Torah*, which in the first instance means “teaching,” but was commonly used to cover both Scripture and associated Jewish traditions. So the law, here, refers to Jewish tradition that the Corinthians have unwisely adopted. Verses 34-35 summarize that position. Paul’s horrified response is given in verse 36, and the fact that the word “only” (*monous*) is masculine may suggest that Paul is saying, in effect, “Did the word of God originate with *you men only*?” Moreover, it has been argued that the first word of verse 36 must not be taken here as a comparative particle (“Or”) but as a disjunctive particle, expressing shock and overturning what immediately precedes (“*What!* Did the word of God originate with you men only?”).²⁹

Again, however, the arguments are not as convincing as they first seem. We may conveniently divide a response into four parts:

(a) That the word for “only” is masculine is irrelevant: people considered generically are regularly found in the masculine gender in Greek.³⁰ It is more natural to read verse 36 as addressed to the church, not just to the men in the church.

(b) It is very doubtful that verses 34-35 constitute a quotation, perhaps from the Corinthians’ letter. During the last decade and a half, one notable trend in Corinthian studies has been to postulate that Paul is quoting the Corinthians in more and more places—usually in places where the commentator does not like what Paul is saying! That Paul does quote from the Corinthians’ letter no one disputes. But the instances that are almost universally recognized as quotations (e.g., 6:12; 7:1b; 8:1b) enjoy certain common characteristics: (i) they are short (e.g., “Everything is permissible for

me,” 6:12); (ii) they are usually followed by sustained qualification (e.g., in 6:12 Paul goes on to add “but not everything is beneficial . . . but I will not be mastered by anything”—and then, following one more brief quotation from their letter, he devotes several verses to the principle he is expounding); (iii) Paul’s response is unambiguous, even sharp. The first two criteria utterly fail if we assume verses 34-35 are a quotation from the letter sent by the Corinthians.³¹

(c) Moreover, although Paul uses the word *law* in several ways, he *never* uses it to refer to Jewish tradition, and the full expression found here, “the law says,” occurs only twice elsewhere in Paul (Romans 3:19; 1 Corinthians 9:8), both with reference to the Mosaic law, and the former, judging by the wealth of quotations that immediately precede it, to the Scriptures, to what we would refer to as the Old Testament (cf. verse 21). Fee argues that the usage of “the law” here is probably not Pauline, since no passage is explicitly cited, and it is Paul’s practice to provide a text.³² But the number of passages where this thesis can be tested is small. More importantly, I shall argue below that the reason Paul does not cite a text is that he has already referred to the text he has in mind, specifically when he was earlier dealing with the roles of women. When Fee adds, “Nowhere else does he appeal to the Law in this absolute way as binding on Christian behavior,”³³ he seems to be confusing two issues. It is true that Paul does not make simple appeals *to the Mosaic covenant*, “the law” in that sense, as a basis for Christian conduct. When he appears to do so, there are usually mitigating factors: e.g., in Romans 13:8-10, Christian love is the *fulfillment* of the law, where “fulfillment” must be understood in a salvation-historical sense. But Paul can appeal to *Scripture*, “the law” in that sense, as a basis for Christian conduct, and where he does so, the appeal, as here, is usually correlative (as in 1 Corinthians 9:8 and 14:21). In short, neither the suggestion that “the law says” here refers to extra-biblical oral tradition, nor the view that it is here used in an un-Pauline way, can be reasonably substantiated.

(d) Although it is true that the first word in verse 36 is probably a disjunctive particle, nevertheless the proffered explanation does not follow. Odell-Scott and Manus understand verses 33b-35 as the proposition against which the disjunctive “What!” responds. In other words, Paul allegedly cites the Corinthian view that women must be silent, and then replies with some exasperation, “What! Did the word of God originate with you?” He thereby *dismisses* the content of verses 34-35. Bilezikian wants to render the word by “Nonsense!”³⁴ Kaiser specifically appeals to Thayer’s *Lexicon*, which lists 1 Corinthians 14:36 as an instance of the principle that this disjunctive particle may appear (in Kaiser’s citation of Thayer) “before a sentence contrary to the one preceding [it]. . . .”³⁵ However, Kaiser has not quoted enough of Thayer’s context to convey his meaning accurately. To quote in full, Thayer says that the disjunctive may appear “before a sentence contrary to the one just preceding, to

indicate that if one be denied or refuted the other must stand: Mt. xx.15 (i.e., *or* , if thou wilt not grant this, *is thine eye* etc.).” In other words, Thayer does not say that the disjunctive particle in question is here used to *contradict* the preceding clause, and thus *dismiss* it, but that it is used to introduce a “sentence contrary to the one just preceding,” *not* in order to dismiss the preceding, but in order “to indicate that if one be denied or refuted the other must stand.” To put the matter another way, he is saying that the construction is a form of logical argument that is used to *reinforce* the preceding clause, as Thayer’s example from Matthew 20:15 shows. There, the first part finds the landowner saying to the grumbling workers, “Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money?” As Jesus proceeds, He certainly does *not* want to overturn the principle articulated by this rhetorical question; *of course* the landowner has that right. But since the workers have not accepted this principle, Jesus introduces a “sentence contrary to [this one]” to force the workers to see the preposterous nature of their criticism. To use the language of Thayer (who is quoting the King James Version in italics and inserting ordinary lettering to show the true force of the disjunctive particle), and filling in the words hidden behind his “etc.”: “*or*, if thou wilt not grant this, *is thine eye evil, because I am good?*” In the *NIV* , using the same change of typefaces to make the point, we obtain “*Or* , if you are not willing to admit the truth I am affirming, *are you envious because I am generous ?*” In other words, if the workers “deny or refute” the first clause (which both the landowner and Jesus affirm), then at least they had better face up to the second (to use Thayer’s expression, “to indicate that if [the first] one be denied or refuted the other must stand”).

Thayer then goes on to list several other exemplary passages: Romans 3:29; 1 Corinthians 9:6; 10:22; 11:14 (he points out that there is a textual variant there); 14:36 (the passage at hand). Consider Romans 3:29. In the preceding verse, Paul insists, “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.” The next word, at the beginning of verse 29, is the disjunctive particle in question: “*Or* [is] God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God. . . .” Certainly neither Paul nor Thayer (and presumably not Kaiser) wants to overturn what Paul wrote in verse 28. Rather, using a rhetorical device, Paul goes on to say, in effect, “If you want to deny or refute this truth, then at least face up to this: monotheism itself demands that God is not the God of Jews only, but of all.”

Exactly the same sort of reasoning occurs in the other passages Thayer quotes. He then adds, *as part of the same article in his lexicon*, two extrapolations of this usage of the disjunctive particle : (a) *ο̃̃ agnoiete* , “or don’t you know,” citing Romans 6:3; 7:1 [cf. 6:14]; (b) *ο̃̃ ouk oidate*, “or don’t you know,” citing Romans 11:2; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 16, 19. In each case the flow of the argument demands that the words that succeed the expression *are used to enforce, rather emphatically, what*

some among the readers are in danger of trying to deny or refute: the clause that precedes it. In short, Kaiser has not understood Thayer's point.

Worse yet is Bilezikian's discussion of some of the relevant passages in Paul. For example, he writes: "In [1 Corinthians] 6:1-2, Paul challenges the Corinthians for their propensity to go into litigations against each other before pagan courts, rather than to submit their contentions to fellow believers. He counters this situation with '(nonsense!) do you not know that the saints will judge the world?'"³⁶ Again, however, it is important to listen to the text itself. In verse 1, Paul writes, "If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints?" The verb *dare* in this rhetorical question proves beyond contradiction that in this context the assumed answer is "No!" In other words, *the question itself* is a rhetorical device for forbidding such litigation. Verse 2 then begins with the disjunctive particle: "Or [do] you not know that the saints will judge the world?" Thus, using exactly the same reasoning that Thayer employs, we conclude that verse 2 *reinforces* the truth of verse 1, the truth that Christians should *not* enter into the litigation in question. Bilezikian has simply not understood what is being affirmed under the force of the rhetorical question.

There is even less excuse for this failure in understanding when he turns to 1 Corinthians 6:15-16, for Paul himself inserts, after the rhetorical question but before the disjunctive particle, the words *mē genoito*: "Never" (NIV), "God forbid" (KJV). Once again, verse 16 emphatically reinforces the truth of verse 15, if the rhetorical question is read in any sort of responsible way.

Bilezikian does not even have a rhetorical question to fall back on when he treats 1 Corinthians 6:8-9. To quote him again: "In 6:9, having exposed the misbehavior of brethren who wrong and defraud each other, [Paul] counters with '(nonsense!) do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?'"³⁷ Again, let Paul speak. In verses 7-8, as part of his denunciation of the same Corinthian practices, he writes: "Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers." Paul does not now want to turn around and say that they have *not* been acting this way: clearly, they have been, and the burden of his remark is that they should not be. Equally clearly, however, some Corinthians are slow to accept his denunciation. They would prefer to "deny or refute" (Thayer's terms) Paul's contention. So Paul goes on: "Or [do] you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?" In other words, if you want to buck at what I am writing in verses 7-8, at least you had better swallow what I say now in verse 9—and of course the effect is to reinforce, emphatically so, the burden of verses 7-8.

In every passage he treats on this matter, Bilezikian demonstrates, quite

remarkably, that he does not understand what he has cited. In one instance (1 Corinthians 11:13), he refers to the particle *καὶ* even though no Greek edition known to me includes that particle.³⁸

All scholars make mistakes, I no less than others. But the sheer vehemence that has surrounded the treatment of this particle in recent years attests that we are facing more than an occasional lapse of exegetical judgment. We are facing an ideology that is so certain of itself that in the hands of some, at least, the text is not allowed to speak for itself.³⁹ The brute fact is this: *in every instance in the New Testament where the disjunctive particle in question is used in a construction analogous to the passage at hand, its effect is to reinforce the truth of the clause or verse that precedes it.* Paul's point in 14:36 is that some Corinthians want to "deny or refute" what Paul has been saying in verses 34-35. So he continues, "Or [if you find it so hard to grant this, then consider:] did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?" This is part and parcel of Paul's frequent insistence in this letter that the Corinthian church return to the common practice and perspective of the other churches (1:2; 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:33) and to wholehearted submission to apostolic authority (14:37-38).⁴⁰

(7) There is in addition a variety of interpretations that cut more or less independent swathes. For instance, Ellis⁴¹ sees the restriction applied to wives only, in the light of the distinctions in roles he thinks Paul does expect to be maintained in the Christian home. Perhaps these women were even questioning their own husbands' prophecies, provoking some very embarrassing situations. But in much of the ancient world, marriage meant an *improvement* to women in freedom and social status. Even if these verses deal primarily with the *married* woman, I suspect both Paul and his readers would assume the *a fortiori* argument: if married women are enjoined to be silent, then how much more the single ones? Besides, does Ellis really think that Christian women enjoyed full freedom and perfect egalitarianism in function in the church as long as they were single, and then from the day of their marriage onward became silent for fear of offending the husbands to whom they were to submit? These considerations effectively dismiss those interpretations that admit that Paul insists on certain role distinctions between the sexes but limit such distinctions to the home, denying that they have any bearing on the church.

All of these interpretations share another quite decisive weakness. They do not adequately explain why these words should be found here, in this context, dealing with prophecy and tongues. After all, Paul has not yet abandoned the subject (as is clear from verses 37-40). If we accept the text as it stands, we must ask why Paul seems to interrupt the flow of his thought to add this little unrelated section into his chapter.

IV. An Interpretation Constrained by the Context

Another interpretation has been set out by various writers and meets the objections put to it. The view has been ably defended elsewhere;⁴² I can merely sketch it here. Paul has just been requiring that the church in Corinth carefully weigh the prophecies presented to it. Women, of course, may participate in such prophesying; that was established in chapter 11. Paul's point here, however, is that they may *not* participate in the oral weighing of such prophecies. That is not permitted in any of the churches. In that connection, they are not allowed to speak—“as the law says.” Apparently in sympathy with the view that makes this appeal to “law” a feature of the *Corinthian* position, Evans suggests that to take this as *Paul's* appeal to law sounds “strangely unlike” him.⁴³ That is a rather strange assessment, since Paul in this chapter has already appealed once to “the law” (cf. 14:28), by which he means the Old Testament Scriptures. By this clause, Paul is probably not referring to Genesis 3:16, as many suggest,⁴⁴ but to the creation order in Genesis 2:20b-24,⁴⁵ for it is to that Scripture that Paul explicitly turns on two other occasions when he discusses female roles (1 Corinthians 11:8, 9; 2 Timothy 2:13). The passage from Genesis 2 does not enjoin silence, of course, but it does suggest that because man was made first and woman was made for man, some kind of pattern has been laid down regarding the roles the two play. Paul understands from this creation order that woman is to be subject to man—or at least that wife is to be subject to husband. In the context of the Corinthian weighing of prophecies, such submission could not be preserved if the wives participated: the first husband who uttered a prophecy would precipitate the problem.

More broadly, a strong case can be made for the view that Paul refused to permit any woman to enjoy a church-recognized teaching authority over men (1 Timothy 2:11ff.),⁴⁶ and the careful weighing of prophecies falls under that magisterial function. This does not mean that women should not learn: let them ask their husbands about various aspects of these prophecies, once they return home. Why should the Corinthians buck not only the practice of all the churches (verse 33b) but also the Scriptures themselves (verse 36)? Are they so enamored with the revelations that they have received that they dare to pit them against the authentic deposit found in Scripture and in the apostolic tradition? And if they feel they are merely interpreting that tradition under the promptings of the Spirit, are they not troubled to see that all the churches have translated the same texts, and the same Gospel, into quite different ecclesiastical practices? Are you the only people the word of God has reached (cf. verse 36b)?⁴⁷

Several final observations on this interpretation may prove helpful. *First*, this interpretation fits the flow of chapter 14. Although the focus in the second part of the

chapter is still on tongues and prophecy, it is still more closely related to the order the church must maintain in the enjoyment of those grace gifts. Verses 33b-36 fall happily under the description. The immediately preceding verses deal with the evaluation of prophets; these verses (verses 33b-36) further refine that discussion. The general topic of 1 Corinthians 12-14 has not been abandoned, as the closing verses of chapter 14 demonstrate. There is no other interpretation of these disputed verses that so neatly fits the flow of the argument.

Second, this interpretation makes sense not only of the flow but also of the structure of the passage. Chapter 14 is dominated by a discussion of the relative places of tongues and prophecy. Most of the chapter does not here concern us. Verses 26 and following, however, clearly deal with practical guidelines for the ordering of these two gifts in the assembly. Verse 26 is fairly general. Verses 27-28 deal with practical constraints on tongues speakers. In verse 29, Paul turns to prophecy and writes, "Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said." The two parts of this verse are then separately expanded upon: the first part ("Two or three prophets should speak") is treated in verses 30-33a, where constraints are imposed on the *uttering* of prophecies; the second part ("and the others should weigh carefully what is said") is treated in verses 33b-36, where constraints are imposed on the *evaluation* of prophecies.⁴⁸

Third, the major objection that has been set against it is that it seems inconsistent for Paul to permit women to prophesy and then to forbid them to weigh prophecies. But the objection carries little weight *provided* that such prophecy does not have the same authority status that the great writing prophets of the Old Testament enjoyed (whether or not such authority was immediately recognized). Elsewhere I have argued at length that "prophecy" in the New Testament is an extraordinarily broad category, extending all the way from the product of the pagan Muse (Titus 1:12) to Old Testament canonical prophecy. In common church life, it was recognized to be Spirit-prompted utterance, but with no guarantee of divine authority in every detail, and therefore not only in need of evaluation (1 Corinthians 14:29) but necessarily inferior in authority to the deposit of truth represented by the Apostle Paul (14:37-38).⁴⁹ In certain respects, then, it is perfectly proper for Paul to elevate teaching above prophecy, especially if the teaching is considered part of the non-negotiable apostolic deposit that serves in part as one of the touchstones enabling the congregation to weigh the prophecies that are granted to the church, and especially if the prophecies themselves, unlike the apostolic deposit, are subject to ecclesiastical appraisal. It does not mean, of course, that the utterances of any particular teacher need not be verified; I am not saying that prophecy must be evaluated, but teaching need not be. The New Testament includes too many passages that encourage the church to take responsibility for evaluating teachers

and teaching (1 Timothy 1:3; 6:3-5; Titus 1:9-14; Hebrews 13:9; 2 Peter 2:1, etc.). But it *does* mean that prophecy cannot escape such evaluation, and it presupposes that there is a deposit of apostolic teaching, a given content, that is non-negotiable and that can serve as the criterion both of further teaching and of prophecy.

Fourth, this is not all that the Bible has to say about relationships between men and women in Christ. I have said nothing, for instance, about the command for men to love their wives even as Christ loved the church—an exquisitely high standard characterized by unqualified self-giving. Nor have I listed the many things Paul expects Christian women to do. Above all, I have not devoted space to the fact that in a Greek *ekklēsia*, i.e., a public meeting, women were not allowed to speak at all.⁵⁰ By contrast, women in the Christian *ekklēsia*, borne along by the Spirit, were *encouraged* to do so. In that sense, Paul was not trapped by the social customs of Corinth: the gospel, in his view, truly freed women from certain cultural restrictions. But that does not mean that *all* distinctions in roles are thereby abolished. I would be prepared to argue, on broader New Testament grounds, that the distinctive roles that remain are in Paul's view part and parcel of living in this created order, in the tension between the "already" and the "not yet"—in the period between the bestowal of the eschatological Spirit and the consummation of all things, when there is neither marriage nor giving in marriage.

And *fifth*, if this interpretation is correct, and there are some role distinctions between men and women to be observed, it is essential to recognize that this teaching is for our good, not for our enslavement. That is a theme I would dearly love to enlarge upon; but I shall pass it by.

7: Role Distinctions in the Church: Galatians 3:28

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

²⁶You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:26-29)

Introduction

Never could the Apostle Paul have envisioned the place of Galatians 3:28 in contemporary evangelical literature. The issues of sexual equality and societal roles in modern society, however, have done what Paul could not have imagined.

In fact, the text has taken on a large and, for some, a crucial place in the discussion of the roles of the sexes in the Church of Jesus Christ. While traditionally commentators have discussed Paul's words in the context of the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith, that has become a secondary matter. One can understand this to some extent, since the vigorous debate over sex roles has, in effect, lifted it from its exegetical underpinnings and set it as a lonely text, a kind of proof text, in the midst of swirling theological debate. This is not without justification, but it also is not without peril. I am referring to the human tendency to forget sound hermeneutics and find things that are not really in the text. Listen to some of the comments about the text from both sides of the debate. Ronald and Beverly Allen call Galatians 3:28 "the feminist *Credo* of equality."¹ In a recent book, Mary Hayter refers to the text as "a crux" and "the locus classicus" for those who believe Scripture does not discriminate between male and female.² George Knight, a long-time defender of the historic orthodox interpretation of the text, nevertheless refers to Paul's statement as containing "momentous words."³

Paul King Jewett, professor of systematic theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, in a well-written, careful, and scholarly book, begins his discussion of the text by entitling it, "The Magna Carta of Humanity."⁴ Jewett does not believe that Paul fully implemented his "magnificent affirmation," but at least he made a beginning in carrying it out by advancing beyond the rabbis and associating with women in his work.⁵ In this Paul Jewett is not as bold as Robert Jewett, who speaks of the text as providing grounds for a Pauline breakthrough. He entitles a paper regarding the text, "The Sexual Liberation of the Apostle Paul."⁶

Both sides of the debate have admitted that Galatians 3:28 has not always been handled well. Klyne R. Snodgrass, in his significant article, has said, “This text, like some others, has become a hermeneutical skeleton key by which we may go through any door we choose. More often than not, Galatians 3:28 has become a piece of plastic that people have molded to their preconceived ideas.”⁷ James B. Hurley, holding a different view of the text, agrees, contending that much of the debate has arisen over “an abuse of Galatians 3:28.”⁸

A fresh attempt to resolve some of the questions may arise from an overly ambitious expectation, but I believe it is a worthy aim. My method will be simple. After a brief survey of ancient interpretations, the apostle’s argument in Galatians 3:26-29 will be summarized. The remainder of the paper will be devoted to the more important interpretations of the phrase “male nor female” (NIV).

I. Some Ancient Interpretations of Galatians 3:28

The following comments represent no claim to completeness or profundity, being merely a survey of some of the ways in which Galatians 3:28 was interpreted or handled in the ancient Christian world. As a matter of fact, the text did not loom large in that world and, while acknowledging my limited knowledge of that time, I have not yet found one extensive treatment of the text. I can only conclude that the early church regarded Galatians 3:28 as a text that was pellucidly clear.

Ignatius (d. 98-117), the Bishop of Antioch, wrote from Troas a letter to the Philadelphians on his way to martyrdom in Rome during Trajan’s reign. There is no allusion to Galatians 3:28 in the shorter version of the letter, generally regarded as genuine. In the longer recension, however, there is an allusion to it. After exhorting wives to be “subject to your husbands in the fear of God” (cf. Ephesians 5:22), there occur the words, “Masters, be gentle towards your servants, as holy Job has taught you; for there is one nature, and one family of mankind. For ‘in Christ there is neither bond nor free.’”⁹ The new relation to Christ has its application to everyday life.

Justin Martyr (c. 100-165), Christian apologist, in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, likens his conversion to the symbolic picture of the high priest Joshua in Zechariah 3:1-10. He writes, in a text thought by some to be an allusion to Galatians 3:28, “Even so we, who through the name of Jesus have believed as one man in God the Maker of all,” but Justin offers no expansion of the words, “as one man.”¹⁰

Clement of Alexandria (c. 155-c. 220), the first known Christian scholar, in his *Protrepticos*, or *Exhortation to the Heathen*, xi, speaking of the great benefits

conferred on man by Christ's coming, refers to Galatians 3:28 as support for the unity of those who have received wisdom in Christ. There is a new man, in whom there is neither barbarian, nor Jew, nor Greek, nor male, nor female. The status of believers in Christ is the leading idea.^{[11](#)}

Hippolytus (d. 236), an elder and teacher of the Church in Rome, in *The Refutation of All Heresies*, refers to the text in discussion of the claims of the Naassenes, who had used it in support of their claims of an everlasting substance above, which is hermaphrodite, possessing both male and female natures.^{[12](#)}

Gregory of Nyssa (330-c. 395), the Cappadocian father and bishop of Nyssa, in "On Virginity," alludes to the text to show that both male and female are candidates for marriage to the true wisdom, Christ, in spiritual virginity, or disengagedness of heart from the worldly to the spiritual.^{[13](#)}

John Chrysostom (c. 344/354-407), bishop of Constantinople, in his commentary on Galatians, discusses the text in some detail, asserting that the apostle ardently desires to convey the depth of our union with Christ. We "have all one form and one mold, even Christ's," he says. "He that was a Greek, or Jew, or bond-man yesterday, carries about with him the form, not of an Angel or Archangel, but of the Lord of all, yea displays in his own person the Christ."^{[14](#)} He makes no reference to the clause "male nor female," evidently not finding that as pertinent as the two other antitheses.

Surprisingly, Augustine (354-430), the Bishop of Hippo, the greatest of the Latin fathers, rarely alluded to Galatians 3:28 in his writings. In his Second Discourse on Psalm Twenty-six there is one allusion. Speaking of waiting on the Lord, he writes, "He who has lost endurance has become weak and womanish. Let both men and women take heed of this, for man and woman are one in the one Man. He is no longer man or woman who lives in Christ."^{[15](#)} The allusion is clear, and it is plain that he has in mind a oneness, a unity, of status in Christ. He says nothing of how this status relates to function in the church.

Martin Luther (1483-1546), the great German Reformer, in his important commentary on Galatians, devotes three pages to Galatians 3:28. He reminds the woman to "obey her husband," and warns that, "if the woman would be the man," that would be nothing but "confusion." All the faithful have "the same Christ" that all the saints had. Clearly, Luther sees the text as meaning that all believers have the same status in Christ, but in other spheres, such as the family, a submission within the equality all have in Christ is Biblical.^{[16](#)}

John Calvin (1509-1564), Biblical theologian and commentator that he was, alludes or refers to Galatians 3:28 many times. In his commentary on Galatians he

stresses the unity of believers in the one Christ. In his *Institutes* he, while again acknowledging the liberty believers have in Christ, nevertheless points out that the liberty of all in Christ has its limits, for “the same apostle who bids us stand and not submit to the ‘yoke of bondage’ [Galatians 5:1] elsewhere forbids slaves to be anxious about their state [1 Corinthians 7:21], unless it be that spiritual freedom can perfectly well exist along with civil bondage.”¹⁷ In other words, the master teacher from Geneva taught that freedom truly exists within limits and restrictions of a different order.

From this brief survey it appears that none of the major teachers in the history of the church thought Galatians 3:28 abolished the male-female role distinction in marriage or the church.

II. The Pauline Argument in Galatians 3:26-29

The General Context

The Epistle to the Galatians, most likely the first of Paul’s letters, centers the attention of the reader on two dominant themes: (1) the justification of the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ apart from legal works, and (2) the ministry of the Holy Spirit as the indwelling energizer of the spiritual life in Christ.

The close affinity of Galatians with Romans is universally acknowledged.

“The Epistle to the Galatians,” Bishop Lightfoot said many years ago, “stands in relation to the Roman letter as the rough model to the finished statue; or rather, if I may press the metaphor without misapprehension, it is the first study of a single figure, which is worked into a group in the later writing.”¹⁸ One is written out of first indignant reaction to heresy, while the other is written calmly and at leisure.¹⁹ That is probably ultimately the source of the remark of my old New Testament teacher, Professor Everett Harrison, “Romans tells us what the gospel is; Galatians tells us what it is *not*.”²⁰

Commentators on the letter have generally agreed that it falls into three sections. The opening two chapters are largely personal, containing a defense of his gospel and apostleship. The following section, also of two chapters, contains the exposition, in strongly argumentative form, of the heart of his gospel, the doctrine of justification by faith alone apart from legal works. The letter’s final two chapters conclude with a

hortatory appeal to practice the principles and responsibilities of the Christian life through the energy of the indwelling Spirit of God.

The Immediate Context

Galatians 3:28 falls within Paul's exposition of the purpose of the law, that is, to be a slave-guardian on the path toward maturity and unrestricted enjoyment of sonship (cf. 3:24; 4:1-7).²¹ With the sonship has come a glorious freedom before God releasing all the faithful, whether Gentiles, slaves, or women, from life under the Old Covenant's bondage. The saints, enriched by the enjoyment of Abrahamic promises, are clothed with Christ in garments of freedom, family membership with heirship. This Paul now develops, negating any claim by the Judaizers that the Old Covenant life is a better life.

The Exegetical Analysis Verse twenty-six, beginning

Verse twenty-six, beginning with its explanatory "for" (see *NASB*; *NIV* leaves this out) justifies the new status. The apostle writes, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (*NASB*). The children have attained their majority and are sons, freemen of God, through a faith that has brought them into union with Christ.²² The second person plural of the subject, "you are," with the modifying adjective, "all," underlines the participation of the Galatians in the new status. The universal privilege of sonship in the present age through union with Christ is Paul's point, and it sets the tone of the context for interpreting verse twenty-eight. Paul's emphasis is on spiritual status in Christ, "the spiritual privilege of being the sons of God."²³

In verse twenty-seven Paul continues his exposition, explaining how the relation of sonship came into being. He writes, "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (*NASB*). "For" declares that through baptism, a unifying incorporation into Him, the Galatians have put on Christ (cf. Romans 6:3-5; 1 Corinthians 12:13).

The discussion of the relation of faith and baptism, raised here because of the juxtaposition of faith with baptism, as well as the fact that union with Christ is traced to both, cannot be handled here due to the limitations of space. The discussions of Calvin,²⁴ Ridderbos,²⁵ Fung,²⁶ Betz,²⁷ Bruce,²⁸ and Dunn²⁹ provide a wide range of views. I would only echo Bruce's point that the apostle, who had learned so clearly

and pointedly in his conversion experience the insufficiency of trust in the Old Covenant rite of circumcision, could never have ascribed a saving efficacy, a conveyance of grace by the performance of the rite, to water baptism, the New Covenant ordinance.³⁰ “It is absurd to say,” Calvin comments, in harmony with Bruce, “that the grace of the Holy Spirit should be so bound to the external sign.”³¹

If the apostle were thinking of the reality lying behind water baptism, that is, the baptism of the Holy Spirit by which believers are through faith united to Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:13), then the text makes good sense. In Calvin’s terms, he would be using the sign to signify the sense connected with the truth that the sign signifies, that is, the spiritual reality behind the sign. That, he contends, is the sense he uses when speaking of believers.

The final words, “have put on Christ,” represent a metaphor probably derived from Hebrew tradition (cf. Isaiah 61:10; 64:6; Zechariah 3:3-4) and may have come to be associated with the taking off of one’s clothes before baptism and the putting of them on again afterwards.³² If the apostle were thinking of a Roman metaphor, he may have had in mind the Roman custom by which a youth, on attaining manhood, removed the crimson-bordered toga *praetexta*, the garment of childhood, and put on the toga *virilis*, the garment of manhood. At that time the young man would take his place in the family councils, taking on the responsibilities of maturity and enjoying the freedom that went with his new position. Since the apostle has just said that the Galatians have attained the position of adult sonship and will add heirship in a moment (v. 29), that “pagan” custom (Bruce’s word) should not be dismissed lightly.

Verse twenty-eight points to a second issue of the universal sonship of believers: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (NASB). The human distinctions of race, social rank, and sex are in some sense nullified in Christ. The crucial question is: In what sense? Betz contends, “There can be no doubt that Paul’s statements have social and political implications of even a revolutionary dimension.”³³ When a New Testament exegete uses the expression, “There can be no doubt,” it often is a flag to the exegetical community that there is very good reason to doubt the statement. Let us see if that is true here.

The three antitheses are chosen with a view to fundamental distinctions in ancient society. In fact, as often noted, the apostle seems to have in mind the morning prayer of Jewish men, which can be traced back as far as about A.D. 150, in which the men thanked God that they were not born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman. Apparently the Jewish men intended no belittling of Gentiles, slaves, or women, so both Bruce and Snodgrass explain. Those classes were simply limited in certain

spiritual privileges open to Jewish males.³⁴ In fact, similar formulas existed among the Gentiles.³⁵

The three distinctions, important for Jewish life, are declared by Paul to be invalid in Christ. The first distinction, that between Jew and Greek, should be understood in a religious sense primarily, centering in the Abrahamic Covenant's rite of circumcision. Without circumcision a Gentile could not inherit the promises, being spiritually depraved and lost, without God in the world (cf. Ephesians 2:11-13), but now by the blood of the Messiah the Gentiles have been brought nigh by sovereign pardoning grace and have become heirs of the Abrahamic promises. It is, of course, quite clear from the apostle's literature that the national distinction between Israel and the Gentiles still exists both in the world (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:32) and in the believing community (cf. Romans 9:11; 36; Galatians 6:16). In Christ, however, both are heirs of the promised blessings, as Paul has indicated already (cf. 3:14) and will underline shortly (verse 29).

The second antithesis touches the inferiority of slaves, so marked in the ancient world and in Israelitish society. For Paul a Christian slave, too, inherits the promises equally, being "the Lord's freedman" (1 Corinthians 7:22). The Epistle to Philemon provides a vivid illustration of this (Philemon 8-20; cf. Colossians 4:9), and also in principle provides just grounds for the abolition of slavery itself. Yet here again, the distinction of slave and freedman still existed within the church (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:17-24). In fact, the vast majority of the New Testament commentators have taken the position that the apostle, while affirming the irrelevancy of the institution of slavery for status and relationship within the church, nevertheless did not feel it necessary to raise the issue of its retention in the society of the time (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:21-24; Colossians 3:22-25). It is difficult to see the "revolutionary dimension" of Paul's statement here.

The third antithesis, "there is not male and female" (Greek text; see *NASB* margin) contains a slight change of construction, probably due to influence from Genesis 1:27.³⁶ The distinction in sex also has no relevance to the status of believers in Christ Jesus. The reason Paul gives, introduced by the "for" of the last clause, is that Jew and Greek, slave and freedman, male and female are "one person in Christ Jesus" (*NEB*; cf. verse 29).

Concerning this last antithesis, Bruce comments, "It is not their distinctiveness, but their inequality of religious role, that is abolished 'in Christ Jesus.'"³⁷ Professor Bruce complains that Paul's other bans of discrimination on racial and social grounds have been accepted "*au pied de la lettre*" (literally), or *litteratim ac verbatim*, to use a Latin phrase, while this one has met with restrictions, since people have related it only to "the common access of men and women to baptism, with its introduction to their new

existence ‘in Christ.’”³⁸ He insists that the denial of discrimination holds good for the new existence “‘in Christ’ in its entirety,” although he admits that circumcision involved a form of discrimination against women that was removed in its demotion from the position of religious law. Other inequities among Jewish and particularly among Gentile women existed.

Bruce argues that, if leadership may be given to Gentiles and to slaves in the church fellowship, then why not to women? Can superiority and inferiority of status have place in the society of which our Lord said, “whoever wants to be first must be slave of all” (cf. Mark 10:44)?³⁹ Certainly Paul welcomed the service of women in the Gentile mission (cf. Philippians 4:3, etc.) and permitted, many believe, their exercise of prayer and prophecy in church gatherings. Does this mean that the apostle affirmed women in the church offices and permitted their teaching in the church meetings? Professor Bruce does appear to admit that other Pauline passages may provide restrictions on female activities, but he contends that such passages “are to be understood in relation to Gal. 3:28, and not *vice-versa*.”⁴⁰ We are reserving a fuller discussion of the questions surrounding the third antithesis for the third division of this paper, but perhaps three points ought to be noted here. First, the antitheses are not parallel, for the distinction between male and female is a distinction arising out of creation, a distinction still maintained in family and church life in the New Testament. Second, it must also be remembered that in this context Paul is not speaking of relationships in the family and church, but of standing before God in righteousness by faith. And, third, the apostle in his later letters, such as 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy, does set forth just such restrictions as Bruce mentions.

Verse 29, “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise,” forms a triumphant conclusion to the apostle’s argument. Christ’s people are God’s sons, baptized by the Spirit into spiritual union with Him, the Son, Abraham’s Seed. And if believers belong to Abraham’s Seed, then they are heirs to the unconditional covenantal promises in their Representative. Thus, heirship is grounded in faith apart from the works of the Law. Those who would seek to be justified by the works of the Law are rejected. What a telling refutation of the Judaizers and their doctrine of justification and heirship by legal works! The full and complete equality that all possess in Christ is a magnificent thing to behold, and the reference to the discussion over male/female relationships must not be missed. The richness of the oneness, without any denial at all of role distinctions, is the preeminent thrust of the section we have been considering. Justified by faith in Christ, both male and female are “sons of God” (verse 26), both are “in Christ Jesus” (verse 26), united to Him in eternal union through the baptism of the Holy Spirit (verse 27), both have clothed themselves with Christ and are one in Him (verse 28). We belong to Christ and, as if that were not enough, the apostle

adds that we all, both male and female, are the patriarch's believing offspring and heirs of the stunning promises made to him (verse 29). The context contains no denial at all of role distinctions and, in fact, to inject the feminist agenda at this point dims the splendor of these grand truths.

III. Modern Interpretations of Galatians 3:28

A. The Feminist Argument To interact with modern interpretations

To interact with modern interpretations of Galatians 3:28 has been made a daunting task by the plethora of written materials, books, and articles, both popular and scholarly, that has emerged in recent years. To limit my comments, I will concentrate attention on the position of Paul King Jewett and Klyne R. Snodgrass, scholars who have given two extensive and widely accepted statements of the meaning of Galatians 3:28 from the perspective that would see no limitation on women's roles in the church.

Jewett's basic position in his well-written, thoughtful, and scholarly work, *Man as Male and Female: A Study in Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View*, is that the Bible is basically contradictory on the question of the relation of men and women in Christ and the church. The Biblical narratives and Jesus' attitude to women are incompatible with female subordination, but Paul, following rabbinic exegesis, teaches subordination in certain New Testament passages, such as 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2.⁴¹ The apostle manifests a bit of an "uneasy conscience" in his exegesis of the Old Testament, but he still affirms female subordination.⁴²

To some extent the apostle redeems himself, for he is the author of a brilliant piece of Biblical insight in his remarkable statement of Galatians 3:28. That is really the last word on the subject of female equality, and Jesus Himself neither said nor did anything beyond Paul's word here.⁴³ Paul, however, did not implement his Christian insight thoroughly, which has left us with the problem of the man/woman question. The church must press on to the full implementation of his Galatians 3:28 insight, abandoning, of course, his shortcomings in his other epistles.

What can we say in response to Jewett? First, Jewett acknowledges

Critique: that Paul, in the three pairs of antitheses—Jew/Greek, bond/free, male/female—“thinks preeminently *coram Deo*,” that is, of men before God.⁴⁴ Further, he later admits that this should be, “beyond all doubt,” the principal concern of the church. Historic orthodoxy would certainly agree with this, and I am grateful for his clear enunciation of the point.

On the first antithesis, that of Jew/Greek, Jewett states that Paul saw the “social implications” of the text clearly enough. He illustrates this from Paul’s withstanding of Peter in Antioch over Peter’s actions when the men came from James in Jerusalem, and Peter returned to the teaching of Judaism about eating with the Gentiles (cf. Galatians 2:11-14). Jewett’s point is that Paul did not say, as the men from Jerusalem must have said, “Jews and Greeks are one in Christ, but in other respects, such as in the table fellowship traditions, they are different and must follow the discriminatory traditions. We may enjoy spiritual fellowship with the Gentiles, but the social traditions still obtain.”

This is not quite the point of the apostle. As he goes on to say, he does not rebuke Peter because he has failed to see the “social implications” of the oneness in Christ, but because he had seen them and was now returning to “the weak and worthless elemental things” (cf. 4:9). As Paul saw it, Peter’s actions were a clear attack on the doctrine of justification by faith alone. To observe the Jewish food laws was simply a step along the way to circumcision as necessary to salvation, a step along the way to the view that, if Gentile believers were not able to have table fellowship with Jewish believers as *Gentile believers*, then their Christianity was second class.⁴⁵

We may grant Jewett’s claim that the essence of the gospel’s proclamation of oneness or equality in Christ demanded a walk in harmony with that position. We may legitimately ask, however, if distinction of roles of believers within that equality necessarily violates that equality, especially since the apostle later in some detail sets out the distinctions of roles, offices, and gifts within the family (cf. Ephesians 5:22-6:9; Colossians 3:18-4:1) and the church (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 12:1-31; 1 Timothy 2:9-15) with no suggestion of a loss of equality in Christ.

Jewett finds Paul’s vision not so clear in the second antithesis, slave/free. While Philemon contains a hint that he would have had Onesimus freed by his master, the apostle does not confront Philemon with a demand for freedom. Paul is relegated by Jewett to the ignominious attitude of the churchmen in the time of the Civil War who played the wimp and did not fight for abolition.

In the antithesis of male/female, the apostle was still more cautious. Jewett contends that Paul spoke of women as being subordinate and unequal. However, for a former rabbi he did in a remarkable way act out the truth of no male and female.

He greeted women by name (cf. Romans 16:6, 12, 15), and he named Priscilla before her husband (cf. Romans 16:3), after having commended Phoebe as a servant of the church at Cenchraea (16:1-2).⁴⁶

Jewett's contention that these things constitute a remarkable acting out of the truth of male/female oneness is overdrawn. Sufficiently explanatory of all of this is the fact that all believers have become one in Christ Jesus, sharing equally the redemption that Christ has won by His atoning sacrifice. In other words, the implications of redemption, the joint blessings of covenantal union with our Lord, account for Paul's actions. As Jewett says, "How many rabbis had ever said that a man should love his wife as *Yahweh loved Israel*?"⁴⁷ The response of prominent women to Paul's preaching in Thessalonica and Berea may have included appreciation of "the profound worth which they perceived they had, as *persons*, to the Savior he preached,"⁴⁸ but it is more likely that they responded first and foremost because they sensed their sin and rejoiced in redemption by sovereign grace.

One final question interests me. Professor Jewett lays great stress on the fact that males and females must learn to live in partnership rather than in any form of hierarchy. He does not, however, spell out in detail what this means specifically and how sexual egalitarianism will work. Does this mean that he is willing to leave this to each body of Christians to decide for themselves? Does Scripture then leave us with no clear, normative guidance beyond the principle of Galatians 3:28?⁴⁹

The position of Klyne Snodgrass, professor of Biblical literature at North Park Theological Seminary, is not dissimilar to Jewett's, although his approach to the questions is different.

Snodgrass affirms "the unity and equality that all persons experience in Christ," and surprisingly he admits that equality and hierarchy are "not necessarily antithetical ideas."⁵⁰ But this concession turns out to rest on an unusual definition of hierarchy.⁵¹

Snodgrass also appeals, like Jewett, to Galatians 2:11-14 and contends that Galatians 3:28 has "social implications." To Snodgrass, the social implications of Galatians lead to the ministry of women as they did in the New Testament. This, as he indicates later, means "ecclesiastical equality," a term, however, which he does not carefully define.⁵²

With refreshing candor, Snodgrass admits that Galatians 3:28 does not answer all our questions about the role of women in society. He sees 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 as strong challenges to his views on *ecclesiastical* equality, as statements "necessitated by specific problems in Corinth and Ephesus." They are

texts “less direct in their application.”⁵³

Snodgrass contends that the prophesying of women in 1 Corinthians 11:5 cannot be separated from “authoritative teaching and preaching.”⁵⁴ This view explains aspects of his stand for “ecclesiastical equality,” but unfortunately it cannot stand the test of Biblical exegesis.⁵⁵

Critique: We might mention incidentally that Snodgrass deplores the “ironhanded”⁵⁶ view of traditionalists regarding Scripture, namely, that Scripture cannot contradict Scripture, but surely commitment to the non-contradictory unity of Scripture cannot legitimately be called “ironhandedness.” It is the view of our Lord and His apostles. It would seem to be more perilous to me to pick and choose subjectively among competing texts by less reliable norms.

First, Snodgrass considers five passages parallel to Galatians 3:26-28 in the Pauline corpus: 1 Corinthians 7:17-27; 11:11-12; 12:13; Colossians 3:9-11; and Romans 10:12-13, to be “of major significance” for his position.⁵⁷ Only one of the five, however, mentions explicitly the male/female antithesis. Perhaps Paul did not give it the “explosive” force that Snodgrass sees in it. The other two antitheses seem of more importance for him, and Snodgrass calls the Jew/Gentile issue *the* (italics his) issue dominating Paul’s concerns throughout his ministry.

Second, Snodgrass thinks that hierarchy arises only from the time of Genesis 3, but a more thoughtful exegesis locates the principle earlier, just as 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, Ephesians 5, and 1 Timothy 2 indicate.⁵⁸ What Genesis 3 sets forth is the effect of the fall on an already determined relationship (see Genesis 2:7, 18-25 and the apostle’s use of the passage in his letters).

Third, Snodgrass stresses the conflict between Paul and Peter in Antioch as indicating how far-reaching the social implications of his statement in Galatians are (cf. Galatians 2:11-14). We have dealt with this in the critique of Jewett’s claims.

Fourth, Snodgrass tends to think that, because women performed certain legitimate forms of ministry in the New Testament, such as ministering to our Lord and to Paul in personal ways and ministering to the church in Christian service, as every reader of the Bible acknowledges, the church must grant women, who have full equality in Christ, the office of elder, the oversight of the body, and the freedom to teach the gathered church. That does not follow. Christian service is the responsibility of all believers, but that does not prove that the office of elder is open to all. Christian teaching is a sovereign gift of the Spirit that not all have (cf. Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:6, 11, 29; 1 Peter 4:10-11).⁵⁹

In other words, and to conclude this section, one must not try to answer all questions of Christian office and ministry from Galatians 3:28, as Snodgrass acknowledges in one place.⁶⁰

“It seems precarious,” Fung wisely declares, “to appeal to this verse in support of any view of the role of women in the Church, for two reasons: (a) Paul’s statement is not concerned with the role relationships of men and women within the Body of Christ but rather with their common initiation into it through (faith and) baptism; (b) the male/female distinction, unlike the other two, has its roots in creation, so that the parallelism between the male/female pair and the other pairs may not be unduly pressed.”⁶¹ I find that eminently Biblical and reasonable.

B. The Historic Orthodox Argument

Historic orthodoxy, as noted in the brief survey of the Fathers’ views, has contended that Galatians 3:28 affirms the full equality of males and females “*in Christ*,” as Paul says. All are equal in Christ, the church, and family, but the phrase, “in Christ,” refers to the mystical and universal, the representative and covenantal union of all believers in the Lord. In the context of Galatians, the apostle simply affirms that every believer in Christ inherits fully the Abrahamic promises by grace apart from legal works.

The phrase, “in the church,” when the subject of office and function is in view, refers to the visible body of believers. In the visible body, equality coexists with divinely mandated leadership and submission, just as it does in the family (cf. Ephesians 5:22-6:9). This is not to lead to abuse, offense, or exploitation, for all of us are essential and equally important in our positions and functions within the body, as Paul points out (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12-30). The existence of elders in the church, appointed by the Holy Spirit to rule in the body, does not destroy our equality in Christ (cf. Acts 20:28; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24).

The ultimate and telling proof that equality and submission may coexist in glorious harmony is found in the mediatorial mission of the Son of God, “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God” (Nicaea), who completed it in the true liberation of submission to His Father (cf. John 8:21-47; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; cf. 11:3).

There is little need to multiply footnotes to document that this has been the view of historic orthodoxy to the present and, in fact, is still the majority view, although presently under vigorous attack. The very fact that its opponents call the view of

historic orthodoxy “the traditional view” acknowledges its historical primacy.

There arises at this point, however, a matter worthy of serious consideration: If the Christian church has held this view for centuries with Bible in hand, then we may presume that there exists some good reason for that fact. The Lord Jesus Christ promised the church the gift of the permanently indwelling Spirit to provide understanding of the Scriptures (cf. John 16:12-15; Psalm 36:9). We have reason to believe that His promise has been kept, and that the church has received that light in understanding the Word of God. Widespread agreement in such understanding by orthodox believers should not be abandoned without the most careful consideration of objections, both exegetical and theological.

To treat the church’s historical understanding of Scripture lightly is to forget that it is the believing body that, through the centuries, carries on the theological enterprise with the Word in hand and accompanied by the enlightening Spirit. Thus, the largest part of any theologian’s work comes from reverent consideration and response to the Christian theological tradition. The creeds of the church, the results of serious spiritual and theological strife, are more important than the views of individuals. We should begin our discussions with the assumption that *the church is probably right*, unless exegetical and theological study compel us otherwise. “The proclamation of new discoveries,” Abraham Kuyper, the famed founder of the Free University of Amsterdam, wrote, “is not always a proof of devotion to the truth, it is sometimes a tribute to self-esteem.”⁶²

Conclusion

There is no reason to claim that Galatians 3:28 supports an egalitarianism of function in the church. It does plainly teach an egalitarianism of privilege in the covenantal union of believers in Christ. The Abrahamic promises, in their flowering by the Redeemer’s saving work, belong universally to the family of God. Questions of roles and functions in that body can only be answered by a consideration of other and later New Testament teaching.

8: Husbands and Wives as Analogues of Christ and the Church: Ephesians 5:21-33 and Colossians 3:18-19

George W. Knight III

The longest statement in the New Testament on the relationship of husbands and wives is Ephesians 5:21-33. The parallel account, Colossians 3:18-19, succinctly states the main points of Paul's teaching. We shall use the Ephesians account as the basis for this chapter and relate the Colossians material to it.

Before we inquire into the particular truths the apostle articulates in Ephesians 5:22-33, we should determine the flow of his presentation. Paul ties his previous discussion to his treatment of husbands and wives with a summary pre-view: "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (verse 21).¹ Then he addresses the respective parties: wives (verses 22-24) and husbands (verses 25-31). He asks wives to submit to their husbands as their heads as the church submits to Christ as her head. He asks husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church. Paul compares the relationship of husband and wife to that between Christ and the church (notice the comparatives "as" and "just as" in verses 22, 23, 24, 25).

Paul not only compares marriage to the relationship between Christ and His church but also expands on the latter. Thus, some verses focus almost exclusively on Christ and the church (e.g., verses 26, 27). After these instructions and comparisons, Paul cites Genesis 2:24 in verse 31 and makes a final reference to the relationship of Christ and His church in verse 32. He concludes by summarizing his instructions in verse 33 with two key concepts: a husband is to love his wife and a wife is to respect her husband.

This passage abounds with instructions for marriage. The key ideas appear in the flow of the argument: submission to one another in the fear of the Lord (verse 21); submission by the wife to her husband as her head, as the church submits to Christ its head (verses 22-24); love by the husband for his wife, as Christ loves the church (verses 25-30); the appeal to Genesis 2:24 (verse 31); and the concluding summary (verse 33) with its emphasis on the husband's love and the wife's respect.

We will examine each of these in turn to ascertain its particular importance both in isolation and in its contribution to the whole passage. Limitations of space and the focus of our study demand that details about Christ and the church outside the comparison with marriage be omitted from consideration here.

Submit to One Another in the Fear of Christ

Verse 21 provides a transition from the verses that precede to those that follow. Even though the verb “submit to” is appropriately rendered as an imperative, as are others that precede it (“speak,” verse 19; “sing and make music,” verse 19), it (like them) is a participle that concludes the string of exhortations begun by Paul in verse 18 with the true imperative “be filled with the Spirit.” “Submit to one another” thus concludes the list of things that should characterize Spirit-filled living by the redeemed. Furthermore, in a couple of important manuscripts, no verb appears in verse 22, so that “submit to” from verse 21 has to be understood as functioning in verse 22 as well. In other important manuscripts, the verb appears in verse 22 as well.² Both readings tie the two verses together, since the same verb is either understood or repeated. Hence verse 21 needs to be considered in its transitional role.

Three ideas are so inherent to the thought of this verse that we must consider them in order properly understand this verse and its relevance for the passage as a whole. They are (1) the meaning of “submit to one another,” (2) the significance of the qualifier “out of reverence for Christ,” and (3) how this call for submission to one another relates to the specific instructions to wives and husbands.

What is Meant by “Submit to One Another”?

In the admonition “submit to one another,”³ the verb (*hupotassō*) has as its basic meaning “to subject or subordinate.” Here Paul’s use of the middle voice focuses on what one does to oneself: one submits oneself to others. The Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich-Danker *Greek-English Lexicon* rightly describes this as “submission in the sense of voluntary yielding in love” (p. 848, section 1bb). This voluntary yielding to others is a characteristic of the Christian community and is urged elsewhere in the New Testament. Compare, e.g., “In humility consider others [*allēlous*, the same word as in Ephesians] better than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3).⁴ This admonition is based on the example of Jesus (Philippians 2:5), who insisted on a servant mentality in imitation of Him: “. . . whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Matthew 20:26-28; cf. Mark 10:43-45; cf. also Luke 22:26, 27).

Furthermore, the Apostle Peter, like the Apostle Paul, both urges particular people (younger men) to submit to particular people (elders) and all to submit to one another: “Young men . . . be submissive to (*hupotagē te*) those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another (*allēlō n* again) . . .” (1 Peter 5:4-5). Similarly, Paul urges masters to “Treat your slaves *in the same way*” (*ta auta*,

Ephesians 6:9) as their slaves were to treat them, i.e., “with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart” (verse 5). This implies reciprocity between masters and slaves. The exhortation to Christians in Ephesians 5:21 is thus, like these other passages, a general exhortation to mutual submission to “one another.”

Submission in Reverence for Christ

The motivation for submission to one another is to be “reverence (*phobō*) for Christ” (5:21). Reverence, or fear (*phobos*), here is not dread, because Scripture elsewhere teaches that God’s love in us casts out such fear (1 John 4:18; cf. also Romans 8:15). Rather, it is respectful reverence for Christ that recognizes who has asked this of us and that He will hold us accountable for our actions (cf., for this sense in Paul, 2 Corinthians 5:11; 7:1). This statement reminds us that—because in our sinful rebellion we would not obey our Lord—we will only submit to others when Christ has made us subject to Himself, and then we *will* submit to one another because He insists that we do so. Paul makes this point elsewhere when, in writing about interpersonal relationships—including those of men and women—he says forcefully, “What I am writing to you is the Lord’s command” (1 Corinthians 14:37). Thus verse 21, explicitly insisting that believers submit to one another, sets the tone for the entire section.

How Verse 21 Is a Transition

But then the question naturally arises, how is the content of verse 21 related to verses 22-33? At least two answers have been given. First, one might answer that this verse is a general statement of the specifics spelled out for wives, children, and servants. That is, certain ways in which Christians are to submit to others are then specified.⁵ It is argued that the key word *submit* is picked up with reference to wives in verses 22 and 24 and for children and servants by the concept of obedience (6:1, 5). Furthermore, this would seem to parallel Peter’s approach when he urges Christians, “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men . . .” (1 Peter 2:13) and spells this out in terms of the submission servants (2:18ff.) and wives are to give (3:1ff.). Even if the following answer is more adequate, this suggestion need not be rejected so long as it does not exclude the more comprehensive understanding.

Second, one might answer that the relationship of verse 21 to verses 22-23 is that verse 21 states a general and comprehensive principle before Paul moves to the specific roles of husbands and wives, parents and children, and masters and slaves, so that the specific is considered in the light of the general. On this view, Paul reminds all in the congregation of their need for mutual submission in the Body of Christ before writing of the specific duties each has in his particular situation. This

seems to do more justice to the explicit reciprocal pronoun used, “one another” (*allē l ō n*). Furthermore, it is in line with the contextual understanding found elsewhere in Paul and Peter where a similar exhortation is given (Philippians 2:3, “let each of you regard one another . . .” [NASB]; 1 Peter 5:5, “all of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another” [NASB]).⁶

First Peter 5:5 is particularly instructive, because there Peter urges “all of you” to be humble toward one another immediately after urging the younger ones to be subject to their elders. Thus Peter calls on the elders among “all of you” to be humble toward younger men at the same time as he calls on younger men to submit to those same elders. Just as Peter expresses both ideas in one verse (1 Peter 5:5), so also Paul expresses the general note of mutual submission in verse 21, followed by the specific submission of wives to husbands, for example, in verses 22ff. So Paul wants to remind all Christians, men and women, of their duty to be submissive to one another before reminding wives of their particular responsibility to their husbands in marriage. This puts particular, unidirectional submission in the context of general, mutual submission and relates specific duties, roles, and responsibilities to the general Christian concept of mutual submission.

It is sometimes urged that mutual submission alone is in view in the section on wives and husbands, and that therefore wives are not being called to a unique or distinct submission to their husbands.⁷ Since, however, verse 21 is a transition verse to the entirety of the section on household responsibilities, consistency would demand that the sections on children and parents and on servants and masters also speak only of mutual submissiveness and not of different roles. Since this is self-evidently not so for the section on children and parents, on the one hand, and masters and servants, on the other, the implication is that distinguishable roles and specific submission are also taught in the section on husbands and wives. Of course, it could be argued that the command given husbands to love their wives is but another way of calling them to mutual submission. But even if that were so, Paul still calls the husband “the head” of the wife and therefore the one to whom she should submit in everything (verses 22-24). Thus this section cannot be teaching only mutual submission rather than the specific submission of wives to husbands in the overall context of mutual submission. The mutual submission to which all are called and that defines the larger context and sets the tone does not, therefore, rule out the specific and different roles and relationships to which husbands and wives are called in the verses addressed to them.

Submission and Headship

In the main portion of the section addressed to wives and husbands (verses 22-30) and the concluding summary (verse 33), Paul delineates his teaching along three lines: (1) the role each has (submission, headship), (2) the attitude with which each fulfills his or her role (love, respect), and (3) the analogy of marriage to the relationship of Christ and His church.

The Roles of Wives and Husbands

Paul commands wives to “be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord” (verse 22, *NASB*). The operative verb “be subject to” or “submit to” (*hupotassō*) reappears in verse 24, where Paul writes that wives should submit “to their husbands in everything” “as the church submits to Christ.” This is the essence of the apostle’s teaching to wives, since in Colossians 3:18 it is the entirety of his charge: “Wives, submit (*hupotassō*) to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.”⁸ Furthermore, this particular exhortation to the wife to submit to her husband is the universal teaching of the New Testament. Every passage that deals with the relationship of the wife to her husband tells her to “submit to” him, using this same verb (*hupotassō*): Ephesians 5:22; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1; Titus 2:4f.⁹ Sampley summarizes the matter when he says concerning the household instructions for wives that the form “reduced to its barest details would include: Wives, be submissive to (possibly ‘your own’) husbands.”¹⁰

The meaning of *hupotassō*, used consistently in the charge to wives, is the same as its meaning in verse 21, that is, “submission in the sense of voluntary yielding in love.”¹¹ This is no abandonment of the great New Testament truth also taught by the Apostle Paul that “there is neither . . . male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Rather, it is an appeal to one who is equal by creation and redemption to submit to the authority God has ordained. Her equality is evident in the verb form always used in this admonition and in the fact that it is wives who are addressed, not husbands. (The New Testament never commands husbands to subordinate their wives, i.e., to force them to submit.) The voice of the verb is not active but middle/passive, with the meaning either of subjecting oneself (middle) or of allowing oneself to be in subjection (passive), with the middle voice most likely here. Thus the admonition is similar to the request in Hebrews that Christians (who are equal in creation and redemption to one another and therefore also equal to elders) are to “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority” (Hebrews 13:17) and Peter’s instruction that young men “be submissive (*hupotagēte*) to those who are older” (1 Peter 5:5). Just as certain men can be given authority in the church, implying no superiority for them or inferiority for those subject to them, so also wives

may be asked to subject themselves to their husbands without any suggestion of inferiority/superiority. The Apostle Peter makes this clear when he insists that husbands, to whom he has asked wives to submit (1 Peter 3:1ff.), “treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life” (1 Peter 3:7).

The Nature of Wives’ Submission

The submission wives are to render is delineated by four key concepts: (1) “to your own husbands” (in the Greek text, left out of the *NIV*; see *NASB*), (2) “as to the Lord” (both of these first two concepts appear in verse 22; for the second cf. also Colossians 3:18, “as is fitting in the Lord”), (3) “for the husband is the head of the wife” (verse 23), and (4) “as the church submits to Christ” (verse 24).¹² Paul does not ask every woman to submit to every man, but rather asks wives to submit to their own (*idiois*) husbands. Paul is not insisting that every relationship between a woman and a man is one of submission and headship, but that where leadership is an ingredient of the situation, as in marriage, the woman should submit to that leadership (headship) of the man. Similarly, for example, in the family of God, the church, where leadership is involved, Paul insists that women not take on that role but submit to the leadership of men (cf. 1 Timothy 2:11, 12; 1 Corinthians 14:34ff. and the chapters in this volume dealing with these passages). Here specifically he commands each wife to submit to the headship of her own husband.

The Nature of Husbands’ Headship

Paul gives the basis for his charge to wives in verse 23: “For (“because,” *hoti*) the husband is the head (*kephalē*) of the wife.” It has been assumed already that this word *head* (*kephalē*) implies authority. Not all agree. Some say that it means “source.” I refer the reader to the chapter by Wayne Grudem on this subject as well as the standard Greek lexicons for the data. Suffice it to say here that Paul indicates the significance of “head” (*kephalē*) by saying that “the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is head of the church” (verse 23). It is evident that Christ is the head of the church as the authority over it because the following verse speaks of the church as submitting to Christ. The two concepts mutually explain one another: the church submits to Christ’s authority because He is the head or authority over it.

This reference to Christ as head follows two previous references to Him as head where the note of authority is equally present. In the first, Ephesians 1:22, Paul writes that Christ is head over “everything” and that God has “*placed all things under* (*hupotassō*) his feet.” In the second, Ephesians 4:15, Christ is designated the head of the church, His body, and it is His authority and power that cause the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. It is virtually certain that in comparing the

headship of the husband over the wife to the headship of Christ over the church, the apostle is using the term *kephalē* for the husband as he does for Christ, namely, as one who has authority and is the leader.

When we ask how that headship was established, we are aided by Paul's treatment of this question in 1 Corinthians 11:1ff., where he explicitly relates the headship of a man over a woman to that of Christ over every man and of God over Christ. In this context, Paul refers to Genesis 2:21-24 and states that the order of creation of man and woman and the fact that woman was created to help the man (and not vice versa) demonstrate that God had established man as the head over the woman by this divine action and its inherent intent (1 Corinthians 11:8-9). Paul thus affirms that male headship is a divine appointment. This understanding certainly informs his use of the same term *kephalē* in Ephesians and is therefore the basis on which he commands the wife to submit to the husband as her head. It is evident in Ephesians 5 itself that Paul has Genesis 2 and its principles in mind, because he quotes Genesis 2:24 at Ephesians 5:31. What he has explicitly said in 1 Corinthians 11:8, 9 informs his statement in Ephesians 5:23, and his quotation of Genesis 2:24 in Ephesians 5:31 demonstrates that the principles of Genesis 2 inform his statements in Ephesians.

The Extent of Wives' Submission

Paul concludes this section to wives, verses 22-24, by indicating that wives should submit to their husbands "in everything" (*en panti*). The phrase is all-encompassing: submission must encompass all aspects of life. This removes the misunderstanding that some may have had, or others may still have, that Paul is speaking simply about submission in sex or some other narrow realm. Since by God's decree marriage partners are "one flesh," God wants them to function together under one head, not as two autonomous individuals living together. Since Paul is concerned about that unity, we should be concerned about it too.

Paul does not feel it necessary to add to the phrase *in everything* that all disobedience to God is excepted (cf. Acts 5:29, "We must obey God rather than men!"; cf. also Acts 4:19, 20).¹³ This goes without saying. Nor does he mean by this to stifle the wife's thinking and acting. Rather, he wants that thinking and acting to be shared with her husband (as his is to be shared with her) and for her to be willing to submit to his leadership "in everything." The wife should not act unilaterally. Just as the church should willingly submit to Christ in all things and, if it does so, will not find that stifling, demeaning, or stultifying of growth and freedom, so also wives should willingly submit to their husbands in all things and, if they do so, will not find that stifling, demeaning, or stultifying.

But does this mean husbands can rule their wives insensitively? Of course not! Paul rules out elsewhere the idea that anyone in authority should “lord it over” those he leads (2 Corinthians 1:24), just as Peter insists that the elders to whom young men submit must not lord it over those under them (1 Peter 5:3). Paul takes this for granted here. He handles the question of the use (or misuse) of the husband’s authority shortly in his words to the husband. To that we will turn momentarily. The important thing for the wife to know is that she should submit to her husband “in everything,” that is, that her submission is coextensive with all aspects of their relationship.

With the words *submit to* and *head*, the apostle states the basic roles of wives and husbands, respectively. God established those roles at creation, and they have as their analogue the roles of Christ and His church. Thus Paul can urge this special relationship of wife and husband because God in creation established it and Christ in His redeeming love to the church models and substantiates it for the redeemed community. W. J. Larkin puts this consideration adeptly when he says that “the instruction for conduct in marriage in Ephesians 5:22-33 becomes unquestionably binding when seen as a reflection of Christ’s relation to the church.”¹⁴

Instructions to husbands and wives in the New Testament always focus first on wives and their responsibility to submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22-24; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1ff.). Both Peter and Paul reaffirm the role relationship God established by creation before they deal with how men and women should conduct themselves in that relationship. *The divinely instituted form must come first, before one talks about how to live within it.* This is a permanently significant lesson.

Furthermore, Paul always addresses those under authority before those in authority: wives before husbands, children before parents, servants before masters (Ephesians 5:22-6:9; Colossians 3:18-4:1). The rationale for the first two of these relationships¹⁵ would seem to be that the divinely instituted relationship is best preserved when the divine order inherent in it is made plain by urging compliance on those under authority first, before addressing those in authority. The apostle may then command those in authority to exercise their authority with loving concern that does not run roughshod over those under authority, tempting them to challenge the divinely established relationship. Having established the divinely given character of the institution and the divinely given roles, the apostle now spells out the attitudes with which those in that institution should fulfill their respective roles.

The Attitudes of Love and Respect

On this backdrop Paul addresses husbands: “Husbands, love your wives . . .” (Ephesians 5:25; Colossians 3:19). The key word, *love*, appears six times in

Ephesians 5:25-33. It denotes the husband's duty to his wife. Interestingly enough his role, headship, was stated in the section addressed to his wife (verse 23), not in the section addressed to him. Paul does not say to husbands, "Be head over your wife!" Instead he commands them, twice, to love their wives (verses 25 and 28): "Husbands, love your wives," and, "husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies." The command is explicated by reference to the analogy of Christ's love for the church (verses 25ff.) and by the way one loves one's own body (verse 28): by nourishing and cherishing it (verse 29). In the comparison made with Christ's love for the church, Paul emphasizes the self-giving character of that love (verse 25) and its concern to benefit the other so that life together will be wonderful (verses 26, 27).

Loving as Christ Loved

Paul's direct command to husbands is to "love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her . . ." (verse 25). This is clearly how the apostle demands that the husband exercise his leadership in everything as the head over his wife. He is to love her "just as" (*kathōs*) Christ loved the church. Just as the church, in submitting to Christ, was the model for the wife in submitting to her husband as her head (verses 23, 24), so now Christ, in His love for the Church, is the model for the husband in loving his wife. The character and description of that love are stated in the words "and gave himself up for her" (verse 25). In these few key words are contained the description of what the love of a husband for his wife should be.

First, the loving husband gives of himself. In his leadership role as head, he seeks to lead by giving of himself to his wife in ways analogous to how Christ gave Himself to His bride. Christ's giving of Himself was personal and sacrificial. This great principle of self-giving sets the tone and points toward the many ways in which this love can be manifested and realized.

Second, Christ's giving of Himself was for the benefit of His bride—He gave Himself up "for her." Just so, the husband's self-giving should be for his wife's benefit. In short, we may speak of this love as a giving of oneself for the benefit of the other.

Paul specifies the intended result of Christ's giving up of Himself for the church in verses 26 and 27: "to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." Here we see two forces at work. First, Paul writes of Christ's redeeming work for us. Paul always delights in explicating this, and so he seizes on this opportunity to develop these ideas. Yet the uniqueness of the redemptive work of Christ means that these aspects cannot be imitated precisely by the husband. Nonetheless, second, Paul uses the imagery of

marriage to tell of Christ and the church: Christ serves her “to present her to himself as a radiant church” (verse 27). Is it not likely, therefore, that he intended to teach that the husband’s love, like Christ’s, was to be beneficial to the wife, just as Christ’s love was to the church?¹⁶ Just as Christ works to present His church to Himself as a glorious bride in a glorious marriage, should not the husband work to make his wife glorious and their marriage glorious?

The Implications of Being One Flesh

The apostle continues with his insistence on the husband’s loving his wife by restating the charge in verse 28. This time he states it in terms of a husband’s loving his wife as he loves his own body and thus as he loves himself. Thus he not only introduces a new dimension to that love but also intertwines it again with the imagery of Christ’s love for the church, His beloved, His body.

The new element is that the husband “who loves his wife loves himself”(verse 28b). Many commentators have suggested that this reflects the command to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Leviticus 19:18; compare the reflexive “himself” in Ephesians 5:33).¹⁷ More importantly, Paul first states the command by speaking of husbands’ loving “their own bodies” (verse 28a). This use of “bodies” instead of “themselves” may have come about by the influence of Genesis 2:24, quoted in verse 31, which speaks of the couple as “one flesh.” The analogy of Christ and the church may also have influenced the choice of words, since it is *body* (*sōma*) rather than *flesh* that Paul has already used in Ephesians to denote the church (1:23; 2:16; 4:4, 12, 16, and, most importantly, in the beginning of this account in 5:23) and that he reiterates shortly (5:30). Thus the command to “love their wives as their own bodies” reflects the love of Christ for the church, His body (verse 30). At the same time, the word *body* provides a link to the one-flesh concept of Genesis 2:24, a verse Paul quotes in verse 31.

Paul does all this while applying the general commandment of Leviticus 19:18, “love your neighbor as yourself,” in a very direct way to the love the husband should have for his nearest and dearest neighbor, his wife. In so doing, Paul ties together the creation ordinance about marriage (Genesis 2:24), the great commandment about loving one’s neighbor (Leviticus 19:18), and the sublime pattern of Christ’s love for His bride, the church. No greater combination could be conceived of than the combination of God’s sanctions in creation, commandment, and redemption.

Having joined these concepts together, the apostle shows how this love is to be expressed by reminding the husband that he “feeds and cares” for his own flesh (verse 29). With these two verbs, *ektrephei* and *thalpei*, Paul uses the emotionally evocative language of nurturing care to communicate what it means to love one’s

wife. The word *thalpō* literally means “to keep warm” and, figuratively, “to cherish” and “to comfort.” Paul’s only other use of this verb is in 1 Thessalonians 2:7, where, in powerful imagery, he speaks of his love for the Thessalonians: “we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares (*thalpō*) for her own children” (NASB). He develops his thought in the next verse by saying: “Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart¹⁸ to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear [beloved]¹⁹ to us” (1 Thessalonians 2:8, NASB). In Thessalonians we see again the same elements we find in Ephesians, although in a different but similar setting. The one “cherished” is the one to whom one gives not only the highest good, the gospel, but also one’s very own life because that one is “beloved.” Ephesians says that because a husband loves his wife, he will give his life for her good and will express his love by nourishing and cherishing her, the beloved. The terms *feed* and *care* communicate these truths with a delightful fragrance that must be worked out and applied in the numerous, variegated, nitty-gritty situations of life.

The Tenderness of Godly Headship

Paul also addresses the danger of husbands’ being overbearing toward their wives, or “harsh with them” (Colossians 3:19). Paul alludes to that attitude in Ephesians in his remark that “no one ever hated his own body” (Ephesians 5:29), and in the Colossians account (where he does not develop the concept of love as he does in Ephesians) he explicitly demands as a corollary to the command, “Husbands, love your wives,” the parallel command, “do not be harsh with them.”

In so doing Paul emphasizes that the headship of the husband over his wife must not be negative, oppressive, or reactionary. Instead, it must be a headship of love in which the husband gives of himself for his wife’s good, nourishing and cherishing the beloved one who, as his equal, voluntarily submits to his headship. Paul has thus given two great truths with respect to the husband: first, that he is the head of his wife, and second, that he must exercise his headship in love.

Submitting as the Church Submits

Similarly, Paul has given two great truths with respect to the wife’s role and how she should carry it out. The introductory verses of this section, with which we have already dealt in part, insisted that her role is to submit (as an equal) to her husband as her head (verses 22-24). We have left aside for the time being Paul’s instructions about how this should be done, except to note the helpful analogy of the church’s submission to Christ. Now we need to return to this matter.

The key phrases in this portion of Paul’s instructions to wives are “as to the Lord”

(Ephesians 5:22), “as is fitting in the Lord” (Colossians 3:18), “in everything” (Ephesians 5:24, which we considered above under the role itself), and “the wife must respect her husband” (Ephesians 5:33).

Because the headship of the husband is established by God, the husband who fulfills that role does so as a servant of God, and the leadership given to him in this role expresses God’s authority in the marriage. Hence Paul finds it appropriate to appeal to the wife to submit to her husband “as to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22). “As” (*hō s*) indicates the manner of her submission. She should submit to her husband as she submits to the Lord. The comparative “as to the Lord” conjures up what should and does characterize the godly submission a Christian renders to the Lord Jesus. This one qualification says it all, even though Paul goes on to explicate it in the verses that follow. (In view of Paul’s calling for submission “as to the Lord,” we gain a better appreciation of Peter’s commendation of Sarah’s calling Abraham “lord” and, particularly, of the fact that, as evidence of her submission to her husband, Sarah “obeyed Abraham” [1 Peter 3:6.]

The phrase “in everything” (Ephesians 5:24)²⁰ denotes the comprehensiveness of her submission. In view of the previous use of the word *Lord* with specific reference to Christ (verse 20), “the Lord” in view in Ephesians 5:22 is undoubtedly Jesus Christ, a fact reinforced by Paul’s writing next of Christ’s Lordship over the church and the church’s submission to His headship as the model for how the woman is to submit to her husband.

The words in Colossians 3:18, “Wives, submit to your husbands,” are qualified by the words “as is fitting in the Lord” (the Greek for “in the Lord” is *en kurio*²¹). Here again “as” (*hō s*) is used. Therefore to say that such submission “is fitting”²² “as . . . in the Lord” means that it is appropriate to being under the Lordship of Christ²³ or, to paraphrase, of being a Christian.²⁴ The apostle thus asserts that such submission is proper for Christian wives because it is what our Lord expects. The best illustration of this is another passage commanding this submission, Titus 2:4, 5. There also wives are urged to “be subject to their husbands” ²⁵ (verse 5). Paul insists that this exhortation is “in accord with sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1). Thus the submission of wives to their husbands is not some concession to contemporary mores but is that which abides by scriptural teachings of Christianity (including the doctrine that in Christ there is neither male nor female, which Paul taught in Galatians 3:28).

To return to Colossians 3:18, to “submit to your husbands” is “fitting” or appropriate to the standing wives have “in the Lord.” To put it theologically, redemption in Christ undergirds and commends the wife’s submission to her husband according to God’s design at creation rather than, as some feminists claim, overturning a submission

rooted only in the fall. Since Paul warns husbands against sinful abuse of their headship through harshness (Colossians 3:10), perhaps this admonition to wives to submit “as is fitting in the Lord” is not only an encouragement to them to render voluntary submission but also a warning lest they presume that their standing in the Lord justifies their acting as if there were no distinguishable roles for wives and husbands “in the Lord.”²⁶

Showing Respect for the Husband's Headship

The last exhortation to wives about how they should submit to their husbands is found in Ephesians 5:33: “. . . the wife must respect her husband.” The key word here is the verb *respect* (so rendered by a number of modern English translations, e.g., RSV, NASB, NIV, NEB).²⁷ This rendering of the Greek *phobeō* is proper. Paul uses *respect* here in the sense of treating the husband's leadership with dutiful regard and deference. The Greek verb is used similarly in an analogous situation where one human is urged to render respect (or reverence) to another (Leviticus 19:3, LXX: “Let every one of you reverence his father and his mother”). There, as here in Ephesians, the respect called for is primarily to the role the person occupies and not to the particular merits of the person.

Probably Paul chose *phobeō* in his final charge to wives to correlate his exhortation to them with his exhortation to all Christians, “Submit to one another out of reverence (*phobō*) for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21). By using a concept he had previously used of the Lord Jesus Christ, he also correlates this concluding exhortation to wives with his initial one (verse 22), which said that they should be subject to their own husbands “as to the Lord.”

The respect asked of a wife recognizes the God-given character of the headship of her husband and thus treats him with dutiful regard and deference. Just as husbands have been asked to display their headship through likeness to Christ's headship over His church, that is, through a love that cherishes and nourishes (verse 25, 28, 29), so now wives are asked to render their submission in a way that is most like that of the submission of the church to Christ, that is, a truly respectful submission because it is rendered voluntarily from the heart. A wife's respecting her husband and his headship therefore implies that her submission involves not only what she does but also her attitude in doing it. As with the husband, so with the wife, it is the heart's attitude of grateful acceptance of the role God assigns to each and the determination to fulfill the particular role with all the graciousness God gives that Paul is urging on both wives and husbands in this last verse of his instruction.

The Analogy of Christ and the Church

Before concluding this discussion, we need to call attention to one more remarkable aspect of this passage. After quoting Genesis 2:24, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh” (Ephesians 5:31), Paul gives an interpretation that shows God’s purpose in marriage: “*This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church*” (verse 32).

Unbeknownst to the people of Moses’ day (it was a “mystery”), marriage was *designed by God* from the beginning to be a picture or parable of the relationship between Christ and the church. Back when God was planning what marriage would be like, He planned it for this great purpose: it would give a beautiful earthly picture of the relationship that would someday come about between Christ and His church. This was not known to people for many generations, and that is why Paul can call it a “mystery.” But now in the New Testament age Paul reveals this mystery, and it is amazing.

This means that when Paul wanted to tell the Ephesians about marriage, he did not just hunt around for a helpful analogy and suddenly think that “Christ and the church” might be a good teaching illustration. No, it was much more fundamental than that: Paul saw that *when God designed the original marriage He already had Christ and the church in mind*. This is one of God’s great purposes in marriage: to picture the relationship between Christ and His redeemed people forever!

But if this is so, then the order Paul is speaking of here (submission and love) is not accidental or temporary or culturally determined: it is part of the *essence of marriage*, part of God’s original plan for a perfect, sinless, harmonious marriage. This is a powerful argument for the fact that Christlike, loving headship and churchlike, willing submission are rooted in creation and in God’s eternal purposes, not just in the passing trends of culture.

Wives, Children, and Slaves?

It is argued sometimes that this list of duties and responsibilities simply reflects the cultural approach to these matters found in the New Testament period and that the apostle is simply asking for conformity to the practices of the day so that the gospel itself will not be hurt by Christians’ violating contemporary mores. The argument is then pressed by saying that if we today do not maintain slavery on the basis of Ephesians 6:5-9, we should also not argue from this passage about the differentiating roles of wives and husbands, because we now know (better than the first-century Christians, and Paul) that they are on a par. That is, the existence of slavery and slaves’ submission to their masters and the submission of wives to their husbands stand or fall together.²⁸

Space does not permit a full response to this argument here,²⁹ but certain remarks are necessary. It is true that these three relationships (husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves) are dealt with here as a kind of unit. They are treated one after another as different relationships within the larger household moving from the most central (husbands and wives) to the next most crucial (parents and children) to the extended relationship that might exist in some households (masters and slaves). But if the argument advanced above is true, then it cuts all the way across the board. Not only would the teaching about husbands and wives cease to be normative and fall away with slavery, but so would the teaching about parents and children, which is positioned between the other two relationships! The argument would have this effect by insisting that these three are on a complete par. But that aspect of the argument is flawed. It assumes that these relationships treated one after another in this section are thereby placed on the same level and are presumably handled by Paul with the same kind of considerations. Further reflection on these different relationships shows that this is not so.

Take, for example, parents and children. Paul appeals to the Fifth Commandment, “Honor your father and mother” (Exodus 20:12, cited in Ephesians 6:2) to substantiate his command, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Ephesians 6:1). Thus Paul reaches back to a permanent moral command from God (given in a time and place much earlier than and quite different from that of Ephesians) as the linchpin for his instruction to children. Thus the demise of slavery does not sweep this permanent moral command for children away, for the two relationships are *not* inseparably connected as to their essence, but only exist side-by-side because slavery fit into the larger household setting of that day.

The inherent differences are seen also by noticing that no permanent moral command or any other moral absolute with reference to slavery is used in Paul’s instructions to slaves. He simply gives them instructions on how to carry out appropriate work duties and relationships with appropriate Christian attitudes as they find themselves in the then existing institution of slavery. This is analogous to the way Moses is represented by Jesus as having given instruction about what a man must do when he divorces his wife (“because of your hardness of heart”) without thereby indicating (as some then and there implied to Jesus) that Moses approved of or encouraged divorce (see Matthew 19:7-8). Furthermore, Paul elsewhere indicates that a slave could properly become free (1 Corinthians 7:21) and therefore he does not treat slavery as a divinely ordained institution as he does that of parents and children—and as he does that of husbands and wives. For both the existence of the marriage relationship and the roles required of each one in it are in the Ephesians passage (and elsewhere) related by Paul to the creation account and God’s decisive actions and instructions in that most basic and foundational event. Thus there is a

great divide between husband and wives, and parents and children on one side of this list of household relationships, and masters and slaves on the other side.

So we see that the appeal to the fact that slavery is handled alongside the relationships of husbands and wives and parents and children and that therefore they must be regarded in the same way is an error which is popularly referred to “as comparing apples with oranges” and also as the error of “guilt by association.” Each relationship must be evaluated in terms of the degree of absoluteness and permanence the apostle intended for it. It certainly is evident that he was both treating marriage as a permanent and absolute institution ordained by God and teaching respectively a specific role for the wife and a specific role for the husband as a divinely prescribed duty for each.

Conclusion

The instruction about wives and husbands found in Ephesians and Colossians, expressed in the key terms “be subject” for wives and “head” for husbands, teaches distinctive roles for wives and husbands. That instruction may be summarized both as a divinely mandated leadership role for husbands in the marriage relationship and a divinely mandated submission to that leadership for wives. The fact that Paul appeals to the creation activity of God with reference to husbands and wives in Ephesians and that in 1 Corinthians 11 he grounds the headship of men in that creation activity of God shows that the apostle regards these roles and the pattern of the role relationship itself as divinely given. His instruction also demands that the respective roles be expressed and fulfilled according to the analogue of the relationship between Christ the head and the church his body. Thus the roles should reflect the actions and attitudes appropriate to that wonderful relationship between Christ and His church. Husbands must therefore exercise their headship with a “love” that “nourishes and cherishes” and that puts aside all “bitterness.” Wives must voluntarily submit themselves to their husbands “as to the Lord” with “all respect” because this is in accord with their standing “in the Lord.”

The apostle has expressed in Ephesians (5:21-33) and Colossians (3:18-19) the same pattern as that which is found elsewhere in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 11:1-3, 8-9; Titus 2:4-5; 1 Timothy 2:11-14; 1 Peter 3:1-7). And he has also demanded, as was done similarly by the Apostle Peter (1 Peter 3:1-7), that the respective roles be carried out with all the graciousness that the redeeming grace of Christ has brought to each and continues to accomplish in each in their respective roles as a wife and as a husband. In short, as analogues of Christ and His church, the husband is asked to exercise, with love, a headship over his wife and the wife is

asked to submit, with respect, to her husband.

9: What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men?: 1 Timothy 2:11-15

Douglas Moo

The New Testament makes it plain that Christian women, like men, have been given spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:7-11). Women, like men, are to use these gifts to minister to the body of Christ (1 Peter 4:10); their ministries are indispensable to the life and growth of the church (1 Corinthians 12:12-26). There are many examples in the New Testament of just such ministries on the part of gifted Christian women (see Chapter 5 in this volume). To be true to the New Testament, then, the contemporary church needs to honor those varied ministries of women and to encourage women to pursue them.

But does the New Testament place any restrictions on the ministry of women? From the earliest days of the apostolic church, most orthodox Christians have thought so. One important reason they have thought so is the teaching of 1 Timothy 2:8-15:

⁸I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing. ⁹I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, ¹⁰but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. ¹¹A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. ¹²I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. ¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve.¹⁴And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. ¹⁵But women will be kept safe through childbirth, if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

Has the church been right to think that this passage imposes certain permanent restrictions on the ministry of women? Certainly this is what the passage, as translated above, seems to say. Women are not to teach or to have authority over men. They are not to do so because of the order in which God created man and woman and because of how man and woman fell into sin. However, many in our day think this passage does not require the contemporary church to limit the ministry of women. Others think it may limit only certain women from certain ministries in certain circumstances.

Many people refuse to apply this passage to the church today because they question whether it has authority over us. For example, non-evangelical New Testament scholars generally believe that all three pastoral epistles (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus) were written by an unknown person in Paul's name long after he was dead. While this unknown author admired Paul and wanted to use his authority, he also contradicted Paul. In such cases, if anyone is to be able to speak to the

church today with authority, it is the “true Paul,” not the “pseudoPaul” of the pastoral epistles. And the “true Paul” taught that in Christ there is neither male nor female (Galatians 3:28).

We are not, however, concerned here with those who hold this view, or others like it.¹ For such a viewpoint can only be refuted at a basic critical and theological level. We would want to show why Paul should be considered the author of the pastoral epistles; how the teaching of these epistles, although different in tone and emphasis from other letters of Paul, is nevertheless compatible with their teaching; and, most basically, why Christians should accept whatever Scripture says as holding unquestioned authority for the church today.

Yet there are many sincere Christians who agree with everything we have just said but still do not think that 1 Timothy 2:8-15 puts any general restriction on the ministry of women in the contemporary church. Are they right? Has the position of the Christian church on this issue for twenty centuries been the product of cultural conditioning from which we finally are able to free ourselves?

We do not think so. We think 1 Timothy 2:8-15 imposes two restrictions on the ministry of women: they are not to teach Christian doctrine to men and they are not to exercise authority directly over men in the church. These restrictions are permanent, authoritative for the church in all times and places and circumstances as long as men and women are descended from Adam and Eve. In this essay, we will attempt to justify these conclusions. In doing so, we will be concerned particularly to show why the arguments for alternative interpretations are not convincing.

The Setting

Paul writes this first letter to his disciple and coworker Timothy to remind him “how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God” (1 Timothy 3:15). Paul must send this reminder because the church at Ephesus, where Timothy has been left to continue the work of ministry, is beset by false teaching (see 1:3). Certain people from within the church have departed from the true teaching of the gospel, have become quarrelsome and argumentative, and are propagating doctrines that are erroneous. Many interpretations of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 rely heavily on the nature of this false teaching at Ephesus in explaining what Paul means in these verses. There is nothing wrong with this in principle; good exegesis always takes into consideration the larger context in which a text appears. However, Paul tells us remarkably little about the specifics of this false teaching, presumably because he knows that Timothy is well acquainted with the problem.

This means that we cannot be at all sure about the precise nature of this false teaching and, particularly, about its impact on the women in the church—witness the many, often contradictory, scholarly reconstructions of this false teaching.² But this means that we must be very careful about allowing any specific reconstruction—tentative and uncertain as it must be—to play too large a role in our exegesis.

We will, then, take a cautious approach to this matter. In our exegesis, we will use only those aspects of the false teaching that may be clearly inferred from the pastoral epistles and related New Testament passages to shed light on the text. Some of the aspects specifically relevant to 1 Timothy 2:11-15 are:

1. The false teachers sowed dissension and were preoccupied with trivialities (1 Timothy 1:4-6; 6:4-5; cf. 2 Timothy 2:14, 16-17, 23-24; Titus 1:10; 3:9-11).
2. The false teachers stressed asceticism as a means of spirituality. They taught abstinence from certain foods, from marriage, and probably sex generally (1 Timothy 4:1-3). In keeping with these ascetic tendencies, they may also have stressed physical training as a means of spirituality (4:8).
3. The false teachers had persuaded many women to follow them in their doctrines (1 Timothy 5:15; 2 Timothy 3:6-7).
4. The false teachers were encouraging women to discard what we might call traditional female roles in favor of a more egalitarian approach to the role relationships of men and women. This is not stated explicitly as a plank in the false teachers' platform anywhere in the pastoral epistles. Nevertheless, it is an inference with a high degree of probability for the following reasons:

First, an encouragement to abstain from marriage, which we know was part of the false teachers' program, is likely to include a more general denigration of traditional female roles. Second, the counsel in 1 Timothy 5:14 to young widows "to marry, to have children, to manage their homes"—i.e., to occupy themselves in traditional female roles—is issued because some "have . . . turned away to follow Satan" (verse 15). Since Paul labels the false teaching as demonic (1 Timothy 4:1), it is likely that this turning away to follow Satan means following the false teachers and that they were teaching the opposite of what Paul commands in 5:14.

Third, the false teaching that is besetting the church at Ephesus sounds very similar to the general problem that seems to lurk behind 1 Corinthians. In both situations, the problem arose from within the church, involved the denial of a future, physical resurrection in favor of a present, "spiritual" resurrection (see 2 Timothy 2:18; 1 Corinthians 15, coupled with 4:8), and led to incorrect attitudes toward

marriage and sex (1 Corinthians 7; 1 Timothy 4:3), toward food (1 Corinthians 8:1-13; 1 Timothy 4:3, although the specific issues are a bit different), and, most importantly, to a tendency on the part of the women to disregard their appropriate roles, especially vis-a-vis their husbands (see 1 Corinthians 11:21-36; 14:33b-36; 1 Timothy 2:9-15; 5:13-14; Titus 2:3-5).

While we cannot be sure about this, there is good reason to think that the problem in both situations was rooted in a false belief that Christians were already in the full form of God's kingdom and that they had accordingly been spiritually taken "out of" the world so that aspects of this creation, like sex, food, and male/female distinctions, were no longer relevant to them.³ It may well be that these beliefs arose from an unbalanced emphasis on Paul's own teaching that Christians were "raised with Christ" (Ephesians 2:6; Colossians 2:12; 3:1) and that in Christ there is neither "male nor female" (Galatians 3:28). What Paul would be doing in both 1 Corinthians and the pastoral epistles is seeking to right the balance by reasserting the importance of the created order and the ongoing significance of those role distinctions between men and women that he saw rooted in creation. Whether this specific interpretation of the data of 1 Corinthians and the pastorals is correct or not, the similarity between the battery of problems in the two situations strongly suggests that in Ephesus, as in Corinth, a tendency to remove role distinctions between men and women was part of the false teaching.⁴ Very likely, then, Paul's teaching about the roles of men and women in church ministry in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is occasioned by the need to counter the false teachers on this point.

Appropriate Behavior for Christian Women—Verses 5-11

In order to understand 1 Timothy 2:11-15, we need to back up and begin with verse 8, where Paul requests that "men everywhere . . . lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing." The word *everywhere* would be translated better "in every place" (*en panti topō*). Paul is probably referring to the various "places" (house-churches) in which Christians at Ephesus met for worship. With the word *likewise* (*hō sautō s*, verse 9), Paul connects this verse with his admonitions regarding the deportment of Christian women. This may suggest that Paul wants the reader to carry over from verse 8 both the verb *want* (*boulomai*) and the verb *pray*; hence: "Likewise, [I want] women [to pray], in modest dress. . . ." But it is more likely that we should carry over only the verb *want*, making verse 9 an independent exhortation directed to women: "Likewise, I want women to dress modestly . . ." (see the *NIV*). This reading is to be preferred both because of syntax—since both *pray* (verse 8) and *adorn* (verse 9) are infinitives, it is natural to think they both depend on the verb *want*—and context—at

the end of verse 8 Paul's focus has shifted to appropriate behavior ("without anger or disputing"), and he does not come back to the topic of prayer.

This caution about anger and quarreling during prayer is almost surely occasioned by the impact of the false teaching on the church, for one of the most obvious results of that false teaching was divisiveness and discord (see 1 Timothy 6:4-5). The exhortation of verses 9-10, in which Paul encourages Christian women to "dress modestly, with decency and propriety," with "good deeds" rather than with elaborate hair styles and ostentatious clothes, might also be directed against the impact of the false teaching in Ephesus. For ostentatious dress, in the ancient world, sometimes could signal a woman's loose morals and independence from her husband. These connections are clear in a passage from the intertestamental Jewish book,⁵ *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, Reuben 5: "Women are evil, my children, and by reason of their lacking authority or power over man, they scheme treacherously how they might entice him to themselves by means of their looks. . . . They contrive in their hearts against men, then by decking themselves out they lead men's minds astray. . . . Accordingly, my children, flee from sexual promiscuity, and order your wives and your daughters not to adorn their heads and their appearances so as to deceive men's sound minds."⁶ The problem addressed in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is of the same general nature, in which the Christian women were adopting a style of dress (or hairstyle) that implicitly proclaimed their independence from their husbands. And, as we have seen, the situation at Ephesus is very similar to that at Corinth some years earlier.

Having reminded Timothy that Christian women are to adorn themselves with "good deeds," Paul now warns them about certain activities that do not fall into this category. In verse 11, he commands them to "learn in quietness and full submission." That Paul wants Christian women to learn is an important point, for such a practice was not generally encouraged by the Jews. But this does not mean that Paul's desire for women to learn is the main point being made here. For it is not the *fact* that they are to learn, but the *manner* in which they are to learn that concerns Paul: "in quietness" and "with full submission." The situation may be compared to my saying to my wife: "Please have the children watch TV quietly and without fighting." My wife or I might or might not already have given permission for the children to watch television, but in this sentence, the stress falls not on the command to watch it, but on the manner in which it is to be done.

How, then, were the women to learn? First, Paul says, "in quietness." The word Paul uses (*hēsuchia*) can mean "silence," in an absolute sense, or "quietness," in the sense of "peacableness" (a cognate word, *hēsuchion*, is used in 1 Timothy 2:2: ". . . that we may live peaceful and *quiet* lives . . .").⁷ Although the point is much the same

in either case, there is good reason to think that the word should be translated “silence” in this context, since its opposite is “teaching.” Clearly, Paul is concerned that the women accept the teaching of the church “peaceably”—without criticism and without dispute. Certainly, as Aida Besancon Spencer argues, Paul is encouraging the women at Ephesus to be “wise learners.”⁸ But the encouragement does not come in a vacuum—almost certainly it is necessary because at least *some* women were *not* learning “in quietness.” These women had probably picked up the disputatious habits of the false teachers, and Paul must therefore warn them to accept without criticism the teaching of the properly appointed church leaders. But there is probably more to the problem than this. There is good reason to think that the underlying issue in verse 11 is not just submission to the teaching of the church but the submission of women to their husbands and, perhaps, to the male leadership of the church. This is suggested by Paul’s use of the word *submission* (*hypotagē*). Submission is the appropriate response of Christians to those who are in authority over them (e.g., to government [Titus 3:1] and, for those who were slaves, to masters [Titus 2:9; the intention of Ephesians 5:21 is debated—see Chapter 8 of this volume]). The word (or its related verb) is a consistent feature in passages dealing with the appropriate response of wives to husbands (see Ephesians 5:24; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:1, 5; perhaps 1 Corinthians 14:34). The facts that this verse is directed only to women and that verses 12-14 (and perhaps also 9-10) focus on the relationship of men to women incline us to think that the submission in view here is also this submission of women to male leadership. (Reasons for thinking that this submission in this context is not just to husbands but to male leaders in the church generally are given below.) In light of our suggestions about the nature of the false teaching at Ephesus, we may surmise that women at Ephesus were expressing their “liberation” from their husbands, or from other men in the church, by criticizing and speaking out against male leaders. (The basic issue may, then, be roughly the same as in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36.) This tendency Paul encourages Timothy to counter by enforcing the principle of submission of the women to the appropriate male leadership.

Spencer further argues that the very fact that women were to learn implies that they should eventually teach, since many ancient texts emphasize that the purpose of learning is to prepare one to teach.⁹ But two replies may be made to this reasoning. First, we can grant the point without damage to our interpretation of the text, since we think Paul is only prohibiting women from teaching *men*. For women to be prepared to teach other women (see Titus 2:3-4), they would naturally need to learn and learn well. But, second, can we really conclude that learning must lead to teaching? Certainly if we mean by *teaching* an officially recognized activity of expositing and applying a section of Scripture, this is not the case. Neither do the texts cited by Spencer prove this. All Jewish men were encouraged to study the law;

did they all become rabbis? Similarly, all Christians are encouraged to study the Scriptures; but Paul expressly limits “teaching” to a restricted number who have the gift of teaching (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:28-30). Of course, if we define *teach* in a broader sense—the communication of Christian truth through private conversation, family devotions, etc.—we may conclude that all Christians do indeed “teach.”

But this is not the kind of teaching Paul is talking about in this context. Neither does it seem to be what Spencer means, for her point is that this verse validates women as teachers even in positions of authority in the church. It is manifest, then, that the encouragement to women to learn gives no reason to think that they were also to be engaged in expositing and applying Biblical truth to men.

Prohibitions on the Ministry of Women—Verse 12

The phrase *full submission* is the hinge between the command in verse 11—“A woman should learn in quietness and full submission”—and the prohibitions in verse 12—“I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man.” The word that connects these verses is a particle (*de*) that usually has a mild adversative (“but”) force. But, as so often with this word, its mild adversative force arises from the transition from one point to another rather than from a contrast in content.¹⁰ In this case, the transition is from one activity that women are to carry out in submission (learning) to two others that are prohibited in order to maintain their submission (teaching and having authority). We may, therefore, paraphrase the transition in this way: “Let the women learn . . . with full submission; *but* [*de*] ‘full submission’ means also that I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man.”

Verse 12 is the focus of discussion in this passage, for it is here that Paul prohibits the women at Ephesus from engaging in certain ministries with reference to men. There are six distinguishable issues that must be decided at the exegetical level: (1) the significance of the verb *permit* (*epitrepō*), which is in the present tense; (2) the meaning of *teach* (*didaskēin*); (3) whether the word *man* (*andros*) is the object of the verb *teach*; (4) the meaning of the verb translated in the NIV “to have authority” (*authentein*); (5) the syntactical and logical relationship between the two words *teach* and *have authority* (they are connected by *oude*, “neither”); and (6) whether the Greek words *gynē* and *anēr* mean, respectively, “woman” and “man” or “wife” and “husband.”

A. The Word *Permit*

Paul’s use of the word *permit*—instead of, for instance, an imperative—and his

putting it in the present tense are often taken as indications that Paul views the injunction that follows as limited and temporary.¹¹ The fact is, however, that nothing definite can be concluded from this word. No doubt Paul viewed his own teaching as authoritative for the churches to whom he wrote. Paul's "advice" to Timothy is the word of an apostle, accredited by God, and included in the inspired Scriptures. As far as the present tense of the verb goes, this allows us to conclude only that Paul was *at the time of writing* insisting on these prohibitions. Whether he means these prohibitions to be in force *only* at the time of writing, because of a specific situation, or—as in Romans 12:1: "I urge [present tense] you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices . . ."—to be applied to any church at any time cannot be known from the verb *permit*, but must be decided by the context in which it occurs.¹² It certainly is *not* correct to say that the present tense in and of itself shows that the command is temporary; it does not.

B. The Meaning of *Teach*

In prohibiting women from teaching, what exactly is Paul prohibiting? And is he restricting them from all teaching or only from teaching *men*? The word *teach* and its cognate nouns *teaching* (*didaskalia*) and *teacher* (*didaskalos*) are used in the New Testament mainly to denote the careful transmission of the tradition concerning Jesus Christ and the authoritative proclamation of God's will to believers in light of that tradition (see especially 1 Timothy 4:11: "Command and *teach* these things;" 2 Timothy 2:2; Acts 2:42; Romans 12:7). While the word can be used more broadly to describe the general ministry of edification that takes place in various ways (e.g., through teaching, singing, praying, reading Scripture [Colossians 3:16]), the activity usually designated by *teach* is plainly restricted to certain individuals who have the gift of teaching (see 1 Corinthians 12:28-30; Ephesians 4:11). This makes it clear that not all Christians engaged in teaching.¹³ In the pastoral epistles, teaching always has this restricted sense of authoritative doctrinal instruction. As Paul's own life draws to a close, and in response to the false teaching, Paul is deeply concerned to insure that sound, healthful teaching be maintained in the churches. One of Timothy's main tasks is to teach (1 Timothy 4:11-16; 2 Timothy 4:2) and to prepare others to carry on this vital ministry (2 Timothy 2:2). While perhaps not restricted to the elder-overseer, "teaching" in this sense was an important activity of these people (see 1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9).

At this point the question of application cannot be evaded. What functions in the modern church would be considered teaching in this sense? Some have suggested that we have no modern parallel to it since, as the argument goes, the New Testament canon replaces the first-century teacher as the locus of authority.¹⁴ However, it does seem right to claim that we have teaching that is substantially the

same as what Paul had in mind here as he advised the first-century church. The addition of an authoritative, written norm is unlikely to have significantly altered the nature of Christian teaching. Certainly the Jewish activity of teaching that probably serves as a model for the early Christian teaching was all along much dependent on the transmission and application of a body of truth, the Old Testament Scriptures, and the developing Jewish tradition.¹⁵ Before the New Testament Scriptures, early Christian teachers also had authoritative Christian traditions on which to base their ministries, and the implication of passages such as 2 Timothy 2:2 is that teaching, in the sense depicted in the New Testament, would continue to be very important for the church. Moreover, the Scriptures should be regarded as replacing the apostles, who wrote Scripture, not the teachers who expounded and applied it. Certainly, any authority that the teacher has is derived, inherent in the Christian truth being proclaimed rather than in the person of the teacher. But the *activity* of teaching, precisely because it does come to God's people with the authority of God and His Word, is authoritative.

In light of these considerations, we argue that the teaching prohibited to women here includes what we would call preaching (note 2 Timothy 4:2: "Preach the word . . . with careful instruction" [teaching, *didachē*]), and the teaching of Bible and doctrine in the church, in colleges, and in seminaries. Other activities—leading Bible studies, for instance—may be included, depending on how they are done. Still others—evangelistic witnessing, counseling, teaching subjects other than Bible or doctrine—are not, in our opinion, teaching in the sense Paul intends here.

C. Is Every Kind of Teaching Prohibited, Or Only Teaching of Men?

Is Paul prohibiting women from all teaching? We do not think so. The word *man* (*andros*), which is plainly the object of the verb *have authority* (*authentein*), should be construed as the object of the verb *teach* also. This construction is grammatically unobjectionable,¹⁶ and it alone suits the context, in which Paul bases the prohibitions of verse 12 on the created differences between men and women (verse 13). Indeed, as we have argued, this male/female differentiation pervades this passage and comes to direct expression in the word that immediately precedes verse 12, *submission*. Paul's position in the pastoral epistles is, then, consistent: he allows women to teach other women (Titus 2:3-4),¹⁷ but prohibits them to teach men.

D. The Meaning of *Have Authority*

The verb translated in the *NIV* “have authority” (*authentein*) has generated a great deal of discussion. We will confine ourselves to three points that we think are most important. First, the frequent appeal to etymology—the roots that make up the word—in explaining this word is understandable, given the limited number of relevant occurrences, but must always remain a precarious basis for conclusions. Not only is the etymology of the word debated, but also the usage of words often departs, in unpredictable ways, from their etymological meaning (e.g., the word *butterfly*). Second, the occurrences of this word—the verb—that are closest in time and nature to 1 Timothy mean “have authority over” or “dominate” (in the neutral sense of “have dominion over,” not in the negative sense “lord it over”).¹⁸ Third, the objection that, had Paul wanted to say “exercise authority,” he would have used the word *exousiazō*¹⁹ does not bear up under scrutiny. Paul’s three other uses of that verb hardly put it in the category of his standard vocabulary, and the vocabulary of the pastoral epistles is well known to be distinct from Paul’s vocabulary elsewhere. For these reasons, we think the translation “have authority over” is the best English rendering of this word.

Again, we must ask the question of application. What kind of modern church practice would Paul be prohibiting to women in saying they are not to have authority over a man? First, we must, of course, recognize that it is not a question of a woman (in the New Testament or in our day) exercising ultimate authority over a man; God and the Scriptures stand over any Christian in a way no minister or human authority ever could. But, within these spheres of authority, we may nevertheless speak legitimately of a governing or ruling function exercised *under* God by some Christians over others (see 1 Thessalonians 5:12; Hebrews 13:17). In the pastoral epistles, this governing activity is ascribed to the elders (see 1 Timothy 3:5; 5:17). Clearly, then, Paul’s prohibition of women’s having authority over a man would exclude a woman from becoming an elder in the way this office is described in the pastoral epistles. By extension, then, women would be debarred from occupying whatever position in a given local church would be equivalent to the pastoral epistles’ governing elder (many churches, for instance, call these people deacons). This would be the case even if a woman’s husband were to give her permission to occupy such a position, for Paul’s concern is not with a woman’s acting independently of her husband or usurping *his* authority but with the woman’s exercising authority in the church over *any man*.

On the other hand, we do not think Paul’s prohibition should restrict women from voting, with other men and women, in a congregational meeting, for, while the congregation as a whole can be said to be the final authority, this is not the same

thing as the exercise of authority ascribed, e.g., to the elders. Nor do we think Paul would intend to prohibit women from most church administrative activities. But what about women teaching or having authority over men in other activities in society generally (for example, in government, business, or education)? While this broader issue is addressed in another essay in this volume (see pages 50-52, 88-89, and 388-393), it is appropriate to note here that Paul's concern in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is specifically the role of men and women in activities *within the Christian community*, and we question whether the prohibitions in this text can rightly be applied outside that framework.

E. Are Teaching and Having Authority Two Activities or One?

Thus far we have spoken of Paul's prohibiting women from two specific activities: "teaching" men and "having authority over" men. It has been argued, however, that the two verbs should be taken together, in a grammatical relationship called hendiadys, such that only one activity is prohibited: teaching in an authoritative (*authentēin*) way.²⁰ If the meaning of *authentēin* is "exercise authority," this interpretation would not materially change the first prohibition identified above—for the teaching Paul has in mind here has, as we have argued, some authority in itself—but it would eliminate entirely the second prohibition (against having authority over a man). We do not, however, think this interpretation is likely. While the word in question, *oude* ("and not," "neither," "nor"), certainly usually joins "two closely related items,"²¹ it does not usually join together words that restate the same thing or that are mutually interpreting, and sometimes it joins opposites (e.g., Gentile and Jew, slave and free; Galatians 3:28).²² Although teaching in Paul's sense here is authoritative in and of itself, not all exercising of authority in the church is through teaching, and Paul treats the two tasks as distinct elsewhere in 1 Timothy when discussing the work of elders in the church (3:2, 4-5; 5:17). That teaching and having authority are "closely related" is, of course, true, as it is true that both ministries often are carried out by the same individuals, but here and elsewhere they are nonetheless distinct, and in 1 Timothy 2:12, Paul prohibits women from conducting either activity, whether jointly or in isolation, in relation to men.

F. Are Only Husbands and Wives in View?

The final item on our list of exegetically significant issues in verse 12 is the

relationship intended by the words *gynē* and *aner*. The difficulty arises from the fact that these words are used to describe both the marital relationship (wife/husband) and the larger gender relationship (woman/man). If, as many think,²³ Paul is here using the words in the former sense, then what he is prohibiting is not the teaching or exercising of authority of women in general over men in general, but only of wives over their own husbands. However, the wording and the context both favor the broader reference. If Paul had wanted to confine his prohibition in verse 12 to wives in relationship to their husbands, we would have expected him to use a definite article or possessive pronoun with *man*: “I am not permitting a woman to teach or to exercise authority over *her* man.” (Paul readily made a similar distinction elsewhere in writing of male/female relationships. Women, he said, are to submit to “their own [*idiois*] husbands” [Ephesians 5:22, *NASB*; cf. Colossians 3:18.] And the context (verses 8-9) clearly addresses men and women generally as members of the church, not (as in Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-19) as husbands and wives, as members of family units; it is not only husbands who are to lift holy hands in prayer, but all the men, and not only wives who are to dress modestly, but all the women (verses 9-10). Therefore, the prohibitions of verse 12 are applicable to all women in the church in their relationships with all men in the church.

The Basis of the Instruction: Creation and the Fall— Verses 13-14

In verse 12 Paul prohibits women in the church at Ephesus from teaching men and having authority over them. But we now face the crucial question: Does this prohibition apply to the Christian church today?

We cannot simply assume that it does. The New Testament contains many injunctions that are intended only for a specific situation, and when the situation changes, the injunction may change its form or lose its validity. For instance, most Christians agree that we are no longer required to “Greet one another with a holy kiss” (1 Corinthians 16:20); forms of greeting have changed, and in our day, to obey this injunction, we may, as J. B. Phillips puts it, “shake hands all round as a sign of Christian love.”

On the other hand, it is not a matter simply of identifying a local or temporary circumstance to which a text is directed and concluding that the text is therefore limited in its application. Almost the entire New Testament is written to specific circumstances—correcting certain false teachings, answering specific questions, seeking to unify specific church factions, etc.—but this does not necessarily mean

that what is written applies *only* to those circumstances. For instance, Paul develops his doctrine of justification by faith in Galatians in response to specific, Judaizing teachers for a specific group of first-century Christians. But the specific nature of these circumstances in no way limits the applicability of his teaching. We might say that the circumstances give rise to his teaching but do not limit it. This point is particularly important, because some studies of 1 Timothy 2:12 imply that if one can identify local or temporary circumstances against which the passage is written then one can conclude that the text has only limited application. This is manifestly not true. Therefore, the question to be asked of 1 Timothy 2:12 is, Can we identify circumstances that limit its application to certain times and places?

Many think so, and the suggestions about local circumstances that have been proposed are legion. Lacking space to deal with all of them, we will focus on the two that are both the most popular in recent literature and that we think have the best claim to be accepted: that Paul is addressing only women who have succumbed to the false teaching at Ephesus, and that he is requiring only conformity to existing cultural conceptions of the woman's role.

The first suggestion emphasizes that 1 Timothy is directed throughout to the false teaching at Ephesus and that 1 Timothy 2:9-15 must, therefore be interpreted against this background. While we think the claim that "the whole of 1 Timothy . . . is dominated by this singular concern [that is, the false teaching]"²⁴ is exaggerated, we may grant the point without being any further along on the issue at hand. In fact, it is likely that the false teaching does give rise to Paul's instruction in 2:9-15;²⁵ but the crucial question is, How does it affect his instructions? As we have suggested above, we think Paul is correcting the erroneous views of the place of women vis-a-vis men taught by the false teachers (although our conclusions do not depend on this) and that verse 12 restates Paul's customary position on this issue in response to the false teaching. In other words, it was Paul's position in every church that women should not teach or have authority over men. He must give explicit teaching on the subject here simply because it has surfaced as a problem in this church. Yet this would be his position in any church, whether or not some false teaching required him to write about it. We think this reading of the situation is well-grounded in the actual evidence of 1 Timothy and that any other reading must import ideas that are not plainly present.

But the advocates of the view we are now examining go further, insisting that verse 12 is directed only against women who had fallen prey to the false teaching. Paul's purpose, then, is not to debar all women at all times from teaching or "domineering over" men, but to prohibit women who have succumbed to false teaching from teaching and propagating these doctrines. In our day, we obey Paul's injunction by preventing women who are ill-trained and under the influence of false teaching from

teaching such doctrine.²⁶

What are the reasons for accepting this specific interpretation of the situation Paul addresses? The advocates of this view, which has become by far the most popular approach among those who do not think that 1 Timothy 2:12 has general application, point particularly to verse 14. Here, they argue, Paul cites Eve as typical of what the women at Ephesus were doing: teaching false doctrine and doing so without adequate preparation. Eve taught the man to eat of the tree, bringing the ruin of falling into transgression; the women at Ephesus must not repeat her mistake by propagating false teaching and bringing ruin to the church.

But this argument falls completely short of being convincing. Paul's reference to Eve in verse 14 is difficult, but there are two emphases in the verse that must be factored into any adequate interpretation: the focus on the relationship between man and woman ("*Adam* was not the one deceived; it was *the woman* . . .") and the focus on deception. This latter point suggests that Eve stands not as a "type" of Ephesian women who were *teaching* false doctrine, but as a type of Ephesian women who were *being deceived by* false doctrine—hence the need to warn them about learning "in quietness and full submission" (verse 11). Paul says nothing here about Eve's teaching of Adam, which, had this been his point, he could easily have done. Moreover, there is no evidence in the pastoral epistles that the women were teaching these false doctrines.²⁷ If the issue, then, is deception, it may be that Paul wants to imply that all women are, like Eve, more susceptible to being deceived than are men, and that this is why they should not be teaching men! While this interpretation is not impossible, we think it unlikely. For one thing, there is nothing in the Genesis accounts or in Scripture elsewhere to suggest that Eve's deception is representative of women in general. But second, and more important, this interpretation does not mesh with the context. Paul, as we have seen, is concerned to prohibit women from teaching *men*; the focus is on the role relationship of men and women. But a statement about the nature of women *per se* would move the discussion away from this central issue, and it would have a serious and strange implication. After all, does Paul care only that the women not teach *men* false doctrines? Does he not care that they not teach them to other women? More likely, then, verse 14, in conjunction with verse 13, is intended to remind the women at Ephesus that Eve was deceived by the serpent in the Garden (Genesis 3:13) precisely in taking the initiative over the man whom God had given to be with her and to care for her. In the same way, if the women at the church at Ephesus proclaim their independence from the men of the church, refusing to learn "in quietness and full submission" (verse 11), seeking roles that have been given to men in the church (verse 12), they will make the same mistake Eve made and bring similar disaster on themselves and the church.²⁸ This explanation of the function of verse 14 in the paragraph fits what we know to be the

general insubordination of some of the women at Ephesus and explains Paul's emphasis in the verse better than any other alternative.

There is a more serious problem with the viewpoint according to which verse 12 may be applied only to women who are seeking to teach falsely: verse 13. It is telling that most of the advocates of this general approach pass over verse 13 very quickly, explaining it as simply an "introduction" to verse 14,²⁹ or ignoring it entirely. Yet this verse provides the first reason ("for" [*gar*]³⁰) for the prohibitions in verse 12. Paul emphasizes that man was created "first, then" Eve; the temporal sequence is strongly marked (*protos*, "first," and *eita*, "then"). What is the point of this statement? Both the logic of this passage and the parallel in 1 Corinthians 11:3-10 make this clear: for Paul, the man's priority in the order of creation is indicative of the headship that man is to have over woman. The woman's being created after man, as his helper, shows the position of submission that God intended as inherent in the woman's relation to the man, a submission that is violated if a woman teaches doctrine or exercises authority over a man. Some accuse Paul, or the "unknown author" of the pastorals, of using the Genesis accounts of creation unfairly for these purposes.³¹ But Paul's interpretation can be shown to be a fair extrapolation from Genesis 2 (see Chapter 3 of this volume).³² This is an extremely important indicator of how Paul understood the prohibitions in verse 12. For by rooting these prohibitions in the circumstances of creation rather than in the circumstances of the fall, Paul shows that he does not consider these restrictions to be the product of the curse and presumably, therefore, to be phased out by redemption.³³ And by citing creation rather than a local situation or cultural circumstance as his basis for the prohibitions, Paul makes it clear that, while these local or cultural issues may have provided the *context* of the issue, they do not provide the *reason* for his advice. His *reason* for the prohibitions of verse 12 is the created role relationship of man and woman, and we may justly conclude that these prohibitions are applicable as long as this reason remains true.

It is sometimes said in opposition to this line of reasoning that even an appeal to creation does not demand that the prohibition involved be permanent.³⁴ This may be granted, in the sense that New Testament authors will sometimes appeal to creation, or to the Old Testament generally, to establish a principle on which a specific form of behavior is demanded. In these cases, while the principle always remains in effect, the specific form of behavior will not. This seems to be the situation, for instance, in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, where the appeal to creation grounds the headship of man, a theological principle, which is in turn applied to the specific issue of women's head coverings.³⁵ But the difference between this and 1 Timothy 2:12-13 is simply this: in 1 Timothy 2:12-18, the principle cannot be separated from the form of behavior. In other words, for a woman to teach a man or to have authority over a man is, by

definition, to void the principle for which Paul quotes the creation account. Granted this and granted the complete absence of explicit temporal or cultural references in the whole paragraph, the prohibitions of verse 12 can be ignored only by dismissing the theological principle itself.

This last point also calls into question the other main attempt to confine the teaching of verse 12 to a local or limited situation. On this view, Paul wants the women to refrain from teaching or exercising authority over men because such activities would have been considered offensive to the great majority of people in Ephesus.³⁶ Now, the concern about Christians avoiding behavior that would bring the gospel into ill repute is mentioned in the pastoral epistles (see 1 Timothy 6:1; Titus 2:5), and, as we have seen, the false teachers were propagating an anti-traditional view of the role of women. But, in reacting against such false teaching in 2:9-18, we must ask a crucial question: does Paul restrict women's activities *only* because such activities would be offensive in that culture? Certainly it is clear that Paul requires many forms of behavior in the pastoral epistles that are both in keeping with the culture of the day *and* are part of God's eternal will for His people. That the behavior required in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 falls into this category is clear from (1) the lack of any reference in this context to a concern for cultural accommodation, and (2) the appeal to the order of creation—a manifestly trans-cultural consideration—as the explicit basis for the behavior.

A further variant of this last interpretation holds that Paul does require submission of women to men as a permanent fixture of Christian life and that the Old Testament references in verses 12-14 ground this general demand only. The principle of submission would have been violated in the first century if women had taught men or exercised authority over them, but it would not be in our day because of our different conceptions of what constitutes submission.³⁷ However, not only is the requirement of submission a little further away (verse 11) than we might expect if verses 13-14 give the basis for it, but we must question whether changing conceptions of men's and women's roles affect the nature of the activities Paul prohibits here. However a society might view these matters, the person who teaches in the sense Paul has in mind here and, obviously, the person who exercises authority over someone else is by definition in a position of authority with respect to that other person. For any woman in any culture to engage in these activities with respect to men means that she is violating the Biblical principle of submission.

Women's Role in a Positive Light—Verse 15

Before concluding, we must say something about the notoriously difficult verse 15. While we do not think that the interpretation of this verse is decisive for the meaning of the verses that precede it, the verse does conclude the paragraph and may shed

some light on the whole.

One view of verse 15 holds that Paul is promising that women will be kept physically safe during childbirth, and this interpretation appears to be reflected in the *NIV* rendering: “women will be kept safe through childbirth. . . .” However, this is an unusual meaning for *save* (*sō zō*), which elsewhere always refers to salvation, in the theological sense, in Paul, and does not fit well with the qualifications that follow: “if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.” A second interpretation links this verse closely with the material about Eve that immediately precedes. Just as the curse that came upon Eve is mentioned in verse 14, so verse 15 alludes to the salvation that Eve (and other women) experience “through *the* childbirth,” that is, the birth of the “seed” promised to the woman in Genesis 3.³⁸ This interpretation does more justice to Paul’s language and to the context, but we must question whether a reference to the birth of Christ is naturally denoted by the word *childbirth*, or *bearing of children* (*teknogonia*), even when it is preceded by the article. The verbal form of this word (infinitive) is used in 1 Timothy 5:14 (albeit without the article) to denote bearing or raising children generally, and this is the meaning we would expect it to have in 2:15 also.

Another interpretation of verse 15 that depends on the reference to Eve in verse 14 is that the “bearing of children” is the trial, or hindrance through (*dia*) which women will experience salvation.³⁹ However, we must question whether childbearing can be considered a hindrance to the salvation of women. We think it is preferable to view verse 15 as designating the circumstances⁴⁰ in which Christian women will experience (work out; cf. Philippians 2:12) their salvation—in maintaining as priorities those key roles that Paul, in keeping with Scripture elsewhere, highlights: being faithful, helpful wives, raising children to love and reverence God, managing the household (cf. 1 Timothy 5:14; Titus 2:3-5).⁴¹ This is not to say, of course, that women cannot be saved unless they bear children. The women with whom Paul is concerned in this paragraph are all almost certainly married, so that he can mention one central role—bearing and raising children—as a way of designating appropriate female roles generally. Probably Paul makes this point because the false teachers were claiming that women could *really* experience what God had for them only if they abandoned the home and became actively involved in teaching and leadership roles in the church. If this interpretation is correct, then verse 15 fits perfectly with the emphasis we have seen in this text throughout. Against the attempt of the false teachers to get the women in Ephesus to adopt “libertarian,” unbiblical attitudes and behavior, Paul reaffirms the Biblical model of the Christian woman adorned with good works rather than with outward, seductive trappings, learning quietly and submissively, refraining from taking positions of authority over men, giving attention to those roles to which God has especially called women.

Conclusion

We want to make a final, very important point about all attempts to limit the application of 1 Timothy 2:12. The interpreter of Scripture may validly question whether any given command or teaching is to be applied beyond the situation for which it was first given. But the criteria used to answer that question must be carefully formulated. It is surely not enough simply to suggest local or cultural factors that may restrict the application of a text, for with such a methodology any teaching in Scripture could be dismissed. In the case of 1 Timothy 2:12, none of the factors that we have considered above, nor any of the many others that have been proposed (women were not educated enough to teach; Jews would have been offended by it; etc.) is stated, or even hinted at, in the text. Is it not a dangerous procedure to import such factors without clear warrant in the text? To be sure, there are commands of Scripture that we do not consider applicable today without any explicit restriction in the context; 1 Corinthians 16:20 (“greet one another with a holy kiss”), cited earlier, is an example. And we obey Titus 2:9-10 today in principle rather than literally. But the difference between such texts and 1 Timothy 2:12 is twofold. The activities involved in 1 Timothy 2:12 are, by definition, transcultural in the sense that they are permanent ministries of the Christian church, and the prohibitions of 1 Timothy 2:12 are grounded in theology. When we add to these factors the fact that the New Testament teaching on these matters is consistent (see other essays in this volume), we are justified in requiring very good reasons *from the text itself* to limit the application of this text in any way. We find no such reasons. Therefore, we must conclude that the restrictions imposed by Paul in 1 Timothy 2:12 are valid for Christians in all places and all times.

10: Wives Like Sarah, and the Husbands Who Honor Them: 1 Peter 3:1-7¹

Wayne Grudem

¹Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, ²when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. ³Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. ⁴Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. ⁵For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, ⁶like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

⁷Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. [1 Peter 3:1-7, NIV]

This is a magnificent text for understanding God's plan for an ideal marriage. In a few verses Peter describes the complementary responsibilities of husbands and wives and guards against common abuses.

I. Directions to Wives

A. What Submission Does Not Mean

Because there is much misunderstanding today about what the Bible means when it says that wives are to "be submissive" to their husbands, this text is very helpful for correcting wrong understandings and practices. While Peter tells wives to "be submissive" to their husbands, the text also gives several indications of what such submission does not mean.

1. Submission does not mean putting a husband in the place of Christ.

The whole context assumes that allegiance to Christ takes priority over all human allegiance. The larger section begins, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men" (1 Peter 2:13), and affirms that the Christian life above all means that we should look to Christ and "follow in his steps" (2:21).

2. Submission does not mean giving up independent thought.

Peter speaks directly to wives, not to the husbands so that they can tell their wives what he says. Peter assumes that they will hear, ponder, understand, and respond to God's Word themselves. Moreover, Peter knows that some wives have chosen Christ even though their husbands have not, and this was good for them to do. They have thought the matter through and departed from their husbands' way of thinking on this issue of supreme importance in life.

3. Submission does not mean a wife should give up efforts to influence and guide her husband.

The Christian wife should try to influence her husband to become a Christian.

Peter helps her to do this; he does not tell her not to.

4. Submission does not mean a wife should give in to every demand of her husband.

If he should say, "Stop being a Christian, be like me," she will have to humbly say, "I cannot. My conscience must answer to a higher authority." If he should tell her to steal, or lie, or do something else contrary to the clear moral teachings of Scripture, she must refuse, thereby following Peter's command to maintain good conduct among the Gentiles (1 Peter 2:12). Moreover, the word *hagnos*, "chaste" (RSV, NASB; the NIV has "purity") means "pure, free from moral defilement," and serves as another reminder that the submission Peter commands must never go so far as to include obedience to demands to do something that is morally wrong.

This is consistent with other parts of Scripture where God's people have disobeyed some human authority and have been approved by God for so doing. Consider, for example, the Hebrew midwives in Egypt (Exodus 1:17), Esther before King Xerxes (Esther 4:16), Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3:13-18), the prophet Daniel (Daniel 6:10-14), the apostles (Acts 4:18-20; 5:27-29), and Moses' parents (Hebrews 11:23). The principle to be drawn from all these passages is to obey *except when it would be sin to obey*, which is consistent with Peter's general statement that it is "for the Lord's sake" (2:13) that all our submission to lesser authority is to be given.

5. Submission is not based on lesser intelligence or competence.

In fact, where there is a Christian wife with a non-Christian husband, she is shown to have greater spiritual insight than he does—she has seen the truth of Christianity, and he has not.

6. Submission does not mean being fearful or timid.

Peter tells wives to “not give way to fear” (verse 6). Thus the reference to the wife as “the weaker partner” (verse 7) cannot be due to any inherent lack of inner strength or courage in the face of danger or threat.

7. Submission is not inconsistent with equality in Christ.

We must remember that submission in regard to authority is often consistent with equality in importance, dignity, and honor—Jesus was subject both to His parents and to God the Father, and Christians who are highly honored in God’s sight are still commanded to be subject to unbelieving government authorities and masters. Thus the command to wives to be subject to their husbands should never be taken to imply inferior personhood or spirituality, or lesser importance. Indeed, Peter affirms just the opposite: wives are “heirs with you of the gracious gift of life” (verse 7).

It is important to note the relationship between this passage and Galatians 3:28-29:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise.

This text is often played off against submission as if the “neither . . . male nor female” in Galatians 3:28 ruled out any commands for submission within marriage. But 1 Peter 3:1-7 shows that the apostolic pattern of thought in Scripture did not feel any tension between a call for wives to submit to their husbands (verse 1) and a clear declaration that husbands and wives are joint heirs of the grace of life (verse 7). This is Peter’s way of saying, “There is neither male nor female . . . you are all one in Christ Jesus,” and the context shows that it is not inconsistent with female submission and male headship in marriage. Submission in role and equality in dignity and importance stand side-by-side in apostolic thought. In fact, the parallel between Galatians 3:28-29 and 1 Peter 3:1-7 is even closer when we see the theme of being “Abraham’s seed, heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29) compared to the theme of being daughters of Sarah in 1 Peter 3:6. ²

A wife’s submission to her husband therefore is more like the submission of Christ to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:28), the submission of one to another who is equal in importance and essence.

B. What Submission Does Mean

1. *Submission is an inner quality of gentleness that affirms the leadership of the husband.*

“Be submissive to your husbands” means that a wife will willingly submit to her husband’s authority and leadership in the marriage. It means making a choice to affirm her husband as leader within the limits of obedience to Christ. It includes a demeanor that honors him as leader even when she dissents. Of course, it is an attitude that goes much deeper than mere obedience,³ but the idea of willing obedience to a husband’s authority is certainly part of this submission, as is clear from verses 5-6. There Peter illustrates being “submissive to their own husbands” with the example of Sarah, “who obeyed Abraham,” thus showing that obeying (*hypakouō*) is the means by which Sarah was being submissive (*hupotassō*, the same word used in verse 1). Moreover, this submission is a respectful affirmation, for Peter recalls that Sarah obeyed Abraham “and called him master” (verse 6).

Further understanding of the nature of this submission is gained from Peter’s description of the beauty that accompanies it, the beauty of “a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight” (verse 4). The adjective *gentle* (*praus*) only occurs three other times in the New Testament, twice referring to Christ (Matthew 11:29; 21:5; also 5:5), but its related noun, translated “gentle ness” or “meekness,” is more frequent (Galatians 5:23; 6:1; James 3:13; etc.). It means “not insistent on one’s own rights,” or “not pushy, not selfishly assertive,” “not demanding one’s own way.” Such a gentle and quiet spirit will be beautiful before other human beings, even unbelieving husbands (verses 1-2), but even more important, it “is of great worth in God’s sight.” Why? No doubt because such a spirit is the result of quiet and continual trust in God to supply one’s needs, and God delights in being trusted (cf. 1 Peter 1:5, 7-9, 21; 2:6-7, 23; 5:7).

In describing the things that accompany this submission, Peter focuses on the inward attitudes of the heart. When he says that a wife’s source of beauty should be “the inner self” (verse 4), he is speaking of her inward nature, her true personality. It is not visible in itself, but it is made known quickly through words and actions that reveal inner attitudes. *Unfading* (Greek *aphthartos*) is an adjective that the New Testament uses consistently to speak of heavenly realities, things that are not subject to aging or decay, things that will not fade away with the passing of this present world.⁴ Peter uses this adjective without a noun following it, so the noun he intends must be supplied by the reader from the context. Various suggestions have been made (RSV, “imperishable jewel;” NIV, “unfading beauty;” NASB, “imperishable quality”), but the sense is roughly the same in all of them: a gentle and

quiet spirit is something that has beauty that will last for eternity, in contrast to the fleeting beauty of jewelry or clothing.

2. Submission involves obedience like Sarah's.

There have been several attempts to avoid the conclusion that Christian wives today are to imitate Sarah's obedience to Abraham, which Peter gives here as an example of the "holy women of the past who put their hope in God" (verse 5).

One prominent approach is taken by Gilbert Bilezikian, who attempts to deny the force of Sarah's example of obedience in two ways: (1) He apparently takes Peter's statement as a joke, for he says, "The use of Sarah as an example of obedience shows that Peter was not devoid of a sense of humor. In Genesis, Abraham is shown as obeying Sarah as often as Sarah obeyed Abraham," and he points to Genesis 16:2, 6; 21:11-12.⁵

(2) Bilezikian also denies that Sarah is a model for Christian wives to follow, for "the point of Peter's reference to Sarah is that wives in the new covenant can learn from their spiritual ancestress . . . who lived in the 'dark side' of the old-covenant compromise, when she had to 'obey' her husband. . . . Sarah obeyed Abraham, but Christian wives . . . are never told to 'obey' their husbands neither here nor anywhere else in the Bible."⁶

These statements are very troubling. (1) To say that a straightforward Biblical statement is an example of humor is simply an easy way to avoid the force of a verse whose plain meaning contradicts one's position. But is this the kind of argument that reflects submission to Scripture? As for Abraham's "obeying" Sarah, Genesis 16:2 is a classic example of role reversal leading to *disobedience* to God, for in this verse Abraham gives in to Sarah's urging and has a son by Hagar. In Genesis 16:6, Abraham does not obey Sarah but is clearly the family authority who (again wrongfully) gives in to Sarah's recriminations and allows her to mistreat Hagar and Ishmael. Why does Bilezikian refer to these examples of sin as positive examples of a husband's obeying his wife? To use such a procedure is to contradict the force of these passages.

In Genesis 21:11-12, God tells Abraham, "Listen to whatever Sarah tells you," but this was specifically with regard to casting out Hagar and Ishmael. It was not because of any general principle that husbands should obey their wives, but because of God's specific purpose for Isaac, for the verse continues, ". . . *because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned*" (Genesis 21:12). Abraham did what Sarah asked here not because he was being an example of a husband obeying

his wife but because at this specific point God told him to do what Sarah said. God here used Sarah to convey His will to Abraham, but no pattern of husbands obeying their wives is established here. (Note, for example, that a child can call his or her father to supper without any implication of authority over the father.) In fact, the exceptional intervention of God here suggests that Abraham would not ordinarily accede to such a request from his wife.

(2) Although Sarah was not always a model wife, Peter does not choose to exploit that fact. However, whereas Peter uses Sarah as a *positive example* for Christian wives to imitate, Bilezikian uses her as a *negative example* showing what Christian wives are *not* supposed to do. Peter tells wives to act like the “holy women of the past who put their hope in God” and “were submissive to their own husbands” (verse 5), but Bilezikian says this was on the “dark side” of the “old-covenant compromise” (p. 191). Peter tells wives to act like Sarah, who “obeyed Abraham” (verse 6), but Bilezikian says that this verse does not tell wives to obey their husbands.

Readers should note carefully the result of Bilezikian’s analysis of 1 Peter 3:17, because at several points he ends up denying what the text *does* say and affirming an opposite concept that the text *does not* say. Peter says that wives should be submissive to their husbands, but Bilezikian says that the motivations for a Christian wife’s behavior should “have nothing in common with submission defined as obedience to authority” (p. 190). Peter does not say that husbands should be submissive to their wives, but Bilezikian says that husbands should be submissive to their wives and undergo a “traumatic role reversal” whereby they bestow honor on their wives “much like a servant to his master” (p. 192). Peter says that Sarah obeyed Abraham, but Bilezikian emphasizes his own claim that Abraham obeyed Sarah. Peter says that wives should follow the example of Sarah who obeyed her husband, but Bilezikian says that wives are nowhere told to be obedient to their husbands. We may well wonder if this can any longer be called simply a difference in interpretation of Scripture, or if it isn’t rather a refusal to submit to the authority of Scripture at all, hidden under the smoke screen of “alternative interpretations”—which turn out on closer inspection to have no legitimate basis in the actual data of the text.

3. Submission acknowledges an authority that is not totally mutual.

Although Peter is speaking specifically to wives in this section, many people today object to any kind of submission that is required of wives and not of husbands. In order to avoid the force of any command that would tell wives to be submissive to their husbands’ authority, evangelical feminists frequently talk about “mutual submission” within marriage. The phrase itself is slippery, because it can mean different things. On the one hand, it can mean simply that husbands and wives are to

be thoughtful and considerate toward one another and put each other's interests and preferences before their own. If people use the phrase to apply to such *mutual consideration and deference*, then they are speaking of an idea that is fully consistent with the teachings of the New Testament and that still allows for a unique leadership role for the husband and a unique responsibility for the wife to submit to his authority or leadership. "Mutual submission" would then mean that the husband is to be unselfish in his exercise of leadership in the family and the wife is to be unselfish in her submission to and support of that leadership. Although we might think that this is using the word *submission* in a rather unusual way, we would probably agree that this is a possible sense of "mutual submission." We would then say that there is "mutual submission" in *some* senses in marriage, but not in *all* senses, because the wife still has to submit to her husband's authority and leadership in a way that the husband does not have to—indeed, *should not*—submit to his wife's authority or leadership. He has a unique leadership role in the family that he should not abdicate.

But the standard claim of evangelical feminists today is that "mutual submission" in marriage means something far different. They apply this slippery phrase to all the texts that say wives should submit to their husbands and *deny that any submission to authority is in view*. This is how they avoid the force of Peter's command, "Wives . . . be submissive to your husbands" (verse 1), if they discuss it at all. They say that mutual submission in marriage means that wives are to submit to husbands *and husbands are to submit to wives in exactly the same way*.⁷ According to this view, the husband has no unique authority or leadership responsibility in the marriage. Usually Ephesians 5:21, "*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*," is claimed to support this view.⁸

But in order to make this argument, evangelical feminists must take two steps in the interpretation of Scripture that are simply incorrect and that show their position to be contrary to Scripture. First, they fail to account for the fact that, while wives are told several times in the New Testament to submit to their husbands, the situation is never reversed: husbands are never told to submit to their wives. Why? In fact, it is very significant that the New Testament authors *never* explicitly tell husbands to submit to their wives. The command that a *husband should submit to his wife* would have been highly unusual in that male-dominated culture, and if the New Testament writers had thought Christian marriage required husbands to submit to their wives, they certainly would have had to say so very clearly in their writings—otherwise, no early Christians ever would have known that that was what they should do. It is surprising that evangelical feminists can find this requirement in the New Testament when it is nowhere explicitly stated (with the possible exception of Ephesians 5:21, to which we now turn).

As for Ephesians 5:21, the misunderstanding comes when the verse is read apart from its context, which shows what Paul intends. He goes on to explain that he means that wives are to be subject to the authority of their husbands (verses 22-24), children to parents (6:1-3), and servants to masters (6:4-8). In each case Paul tells those in authority how they are to act, in love and thoughtfulness and fairness (Ephesians 5:25-33; 6:4, 9), but he does not tell them to submit to their wives, children, or servants respectively.⁹

Second, evangelical feminists take another illegitimate step in Bible interpretation when they change the meaning of the word *hupotassō* (“submit to,” “be subject to”), giving it a meaning that it nowhere requires, something like “be thoughtful and considerate; act in love” (toward another), *without any sense of obedience to an authority*.¹⁰ This is not a legitimate meaning for the term, which always implies a relationship of submission to an authority.¹¹ It is used elsewhere in the New Testament of the submission of Jesus to the authority of His parents (Luke 2:51); of demons being subject to the disciples (Luke 10:17—clearly the meaning “act in love, be considerate” cannot fit here); of citizens being subject to governing authorities (Romans 13:1, 5; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13); of the universe being subject to Christ (1 Corinthians 15:27; Ephesians 1:22); of unseen spiritual powers being subject to Christ (1 Peter 3:22); of Christ being subject to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:28); of church members being subject to church leaders (1 Corinthians 16:15-16 [with 1 Clement 42:4]; 1 Peter 5:5); of wives being subject to their husbands (Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:5; cf. Ephesians 5:22-24); of the church being subject to Christ (Ephesians 5:24); of servants being subject to their masters (Titus 2:9; 1 Peter 2:18); and of Christians being subject to God (Hebrews 12:9; James 4:7).

Note that none of these relationships is ever reversed; that is, husbands are never told to be subject to wives, nor government to citizens, masters to servants, disciples to demons, etc. In fact, the term is used outside the New Testament to describe the submission and obedience of soldiers in an army to those of superior rank (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2:566, 578; 5:309; cf. the adverb in 1 Clement 37:2; also Liddell & Scott’s *Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. Jones, p. 1897, which defines *hupotassō* [passive] as “be obedient”).

Now we must recognize that submission to different kinds of authority may take many different forms. Members’ submission to church leaders is far different from soldiers’ submission to a general in the army, and both are far different from the submission of children to parents or of employees to employers. Within a healthy Christian marriage, as we explain elsewhere in this book, there will be large elements of mutual consultation and seeking of wisdom, and most decisions will come by consensus between husband and wife. For a wife to be submissive to her

husband will probably not often involve obeying actual commands or directives¹² (though it will sometimes include this), for a husband may rather give requests and seek advice and discussion about the course of action to be followed (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:8; Philemon 8-9). Nevertheless, a wife's attitude of submission to her husband's authority will be reflected in numerous words and actions each day that reflect deference to his leadership and acknowledgment of his final responsibility—after discussion, whenever possible—to make decisions affecting the whole family.

What does Peter mean by the word *likewise* (*RSV*) in verse 1 (*NASB, NIV*, “in the same way”)? Some have objected to Peter's teaching here, saying that he is viewing wives in the same category as servants and saying that wives should act toward their husbands as servants act toward their masters. But this is to misunderstand Peter's words. The word *likewise* (*homoioō* s) usually means “in a similar way,” but the degree of similarity intended can vary greatly (cf. Luke 10:32, 37; 16:25; 1 Corinthians 7:22; James 2:25). Here the word might mean (a) similar to the example of Christ (2:21-25), or (b) similar to the way in which servants are to be submissive (2:18). A third possibility is (c) that *homoioō* s simply means “also,” introducing a new subject in the same general area of discussion (relationships to authority), without implying similarity of conduct (see Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich/Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. Danker, p. 568, and 1 Peter 3:7; 5:5).

The second option is best here. *Likewise* modifies “be submissive,” and the reader would naturally make the connection with 2:18, the last time Peter used the verb “be submissive” (*hupotassō*): “Slaves, submit yourselves . . . similarly, wives be submissive” (2:18; 3:1). (The form of expression is exactly the same in the Greek text, with the unusual use of a participle to express a command in both cases.) The point of comparison with Christ would be imitation of His patient endurance of suffering, but that is not what Peter commands in this sentence. And *homoioō* s never seems to mean merely “also” when a suitable referent for actual similarity is near at hand (as there is here), for then the idea of comparison can hardly be kept from the reader's mind.

Nevertheless, Peter does not use the stronger term *kathō* s, “even as, in the same way as,” nor does he say “in every way (*kata panta* , Hebrews 4:15) be similar to servants in your submission.” The similarity intended is apparently in motive (“for the Lord's sake,” 2:13), in extent of application (to good or harsh masters [2:18] or husbands¹³ [3:1]), and in attitude (with proper respect, 2:18; 3:2), as well as in the main concept of submission to an authority (2:18; 3:1).¹⁴

C. The Old Testament Examples of Submission

Peter illustrates what he means by submission by referring to the lives of holy women who hoped in God. Although he specifically mentions Sarah in verse 6, the plural “women” refers to godly women generally in the Old Testament. The pattern of their lives was that those who were hoping in God (the present participle suggests continuing in hope over time) used to adorn themselves “in this way,” or “so” (*houtōs*, “thus,” referring to adorning with a gentle and quiet spirit). The word “adorn” (*RSV*; *kosmeō*) is the verb related to the noun “adorning” in verse 3, and its imperfect tense indicates continuing or repeated action over time in the past, “they were repeatedly or continually adorning themselves” in this way.

“They were submissive to their husbands” (verse 5) brings us back to the theme of verses 1-2 and indicates the relationship between such submission and the inward beauty of verses 3-4. Quiet confidence in God produces in a woman the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, but it also enables her to submit to her husband’s authority without fear that it will ultimately be harmful to her well-being or her personhood.

Peter uses Sarah’s submission to Abraham as an example of such submissiveness to a husband. Wives are to be submissive to their husbands (verse 5) as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him her master (or “lord”). Peter does not seem to be referring to any one specific incident here, for the main verb and both participles in verse 5 all indicate a continuing pattern of conduct during one’s life (see above).¹⁵

The example of Sarah’s obedience would be an appropriate encouragement to the wives to whom Peter was writing, for Sarah became the mother of all God’s people in the old covenant (Isaiah 51:2; cf. Galatians 4:22-26), even though there had been many times in which following Abraham had meant trusting God in uncertain, unpleasant, and even dangerous situations (Genesis 12:1, 5, 10-15; 13:1; 20:2-6 [cf. verse 12]; 22:3). Yet Peter says believing women are now her children (or “daughters”), the true members of her spiritual family.¹⁶ To be Sarah’s daughter is to be a joint heir of the promises and the honor given to her and to Abraham.

The condition for being Sarah’s “daughters” is “if you do what is right and do not give way to fear” (verse 6). Both verbs are again present participles indicating a pattern of life continued over time: “If you are doing what is right and not giving way to fear,” then you are (more accurately, “you have become”) Sarah’s daughters. Peter’s insistence on doing what is right is a reminder that no acts of disobedience in Sarah’s life are to be imitated by Christian wives (cf. Genesis 16:2, 6; 18:15; perhaps 20:5); it is her submission to her husband and her trust in God that Peter commends. The condition “if you . . . do not give way to fear” is another way in which faith finds expression. A woman with a gentle and quiet spirit who continues hoping in God will

not be terrified by circumstances or by an unbelieving or disobedient husband (cf. Genesis 20:6).

D. The Rewards of Submission

Peter holds out one reward that wives are ordinarily to expect from this submission to their husbands: the unbelieving husband may be won to Christ.¹⁷ Those who “do not believe the word” are husbands who are unbelievers; the present tense verb (*apeithousin*) suggests a pattern of life characterized by unbelief or rejection not only of the gospel but also of God’s standards in other areas of life. The word does not mean just that they “do not believe the word” (NIV); it has a much stronger sense of active disobedience to the standards of Scripture and even rebellion against them. Note the use of this same word (*apeitheō*) in Acts 14:2; 19:9; Romans 2:8; 10:21; 11:30, 31; 15:31; Hebrews 3:18; 1 Peter 3:20; 4:17.¹⁸ Some of these unbelieving, disobedient husbands (not all) would have been harsh and unkind to their Christian wives, but Peter says that even such husbands can be won for God’s kingdom (note the same word for “won” in 1 Corinthians 9:19, 22 (five times); also Matthew 18:15, and in a commercial sense, Matthew 16:26; 25:20, 22; James 4:13.¹⁹

These unbelieving husbands can be won without a word—that is, not by continually preaching or talking about the gospel, but rather simply by the behavior of their²⁰ wives, their Christian pattern of life. The word *behavior* (*anastrophē*) is frequent in Peter’s writings (eight of the thirteen New Testament occurrences are in 1 and 2 Peter). He uses it to refer to the evil pattern of life of unbelievers (1 Peter 1:18; 2 Peter 2:7) and the good pattern of life of believers that is intended to lead to the salvation of others who observe it. Peter does not exactly say that Christian wives should never talk about the gospel message to their unbelieving husbands (indeed, it is hard to imagine that the Christian wives among Peter’s readers would never have explained to their husbands what it meant to become a Christian), but he does say that the means God will use to win their husbands generally will not be the wives’ words but their behavior. This knowledge should increase prayer both for grace to live rightly and for God’s silent working in the husband’s heart.

Another reward is to be daughters of Sarah (verse 6). As explained above, this certainly means being a member of the people of God, an heir of all the blessings of salvation. But it probably also includes a suggestion of sharing in Sarah’s special dignity and honor, imitating the pattern of submission and trust in God that Sarah exemplified, and similarly receiving God’s special approval as a result.

Finally, the greatest reward will be the combined joy of honoring God and receiving His favor. Dorothy Patterson rightly says of this passage, “Submission primarily honors the Lord who established the relationship.”²¹ Yet in honoring the Lord a Christian wife will also know His special favor. Peter says that the gentle and quiet spirit that accompanies such submissive behavior “is of great worth in God’s sight” (verse 4). God will look on this behavior, which springs from a heart of faith, and will delight in this daughter of Sarah and show her His favor.

E. The Universal Rightness of a Wife’s Submission to Her Husband

When Peter says that unbelieving husbands may be “won over” for Christ “by the behavior of their wives” when they are submissive to their husbands, there is a significant implication for the question of whether such submission is appropriate for all cultures and all times. The attractiveness of a wife’s submissive behavior even to an *unbelieving* husband suggests that God has inscribed on the hearts of all mankind the rightness and beauty of role distinctions in marriage (including male leadership or headship in the family and female acceptance of and responsiveness to that leadership). Someone might object that female submissiveness is attractive to the unbelieving husband only because he is selfishly interested in gaining power for himself or because it fits his culture’s current (and presumably wrong) perception of appropriate male-female relationships, and in either case—this position would argue—such role distinctions are still wrong or still incongruent with God’s *ideal* plan for marriage. A similar objection would be made by those who say that this command was only a missionary strategy for that culture, to make the gospel inoffensive to non-Christians, but that it is not universally binding today.²² In fact, those who make this objection would often say it would be wrong today to require all Christian wives to be subject to their husbands—it would fall short of God’s ideal for marriage.

However, this position is unpersuasive because Peter would not encourage *amorally objectionable* behavior pattern (whether in the culture or in the husband himself) to continue in order to bring someone to faith. It is pure behavior, not behavior that falls short of God’s ideal, that attracts unbelievers to Christ (1 Peter 3:2). And this pure behavior (verse 2), Peter says, especially involves wives being subject to their own husbands. The unbelieving husband sees this behavior and deep within perceives the beauty of it. Within his heart there is a witness that this is right, this is how God intended men and women to relate as husband and wife. He concludes, therefore, that the gospel that his wife believes must be true as well.²³ Perhaps, indeed, he sees his wife’s submission to him in contrast with his own

refusal to submit to God, who is infinitely more worthy of his submission, and is convicted of his own sinfulness by it.

Two other approaches that evade the implication that wives should submit to the authority of their husbands today are represented by Ruth Tucker and Walter Liefeld, who suggest that Peter's directions here are culture-specific and therefore need not apply today. They note that some maintain that "although Sarah is said to have expressed her submission to Abraham by obeying him and calling him 'lord' (or 'master'), that certainly does not mean that submission is expressed in every culture by obedience and calling one's husband 'lord.' Few would insist on the second part of Sarah's submission."²⁴ They also note that another way some argue that these injunctions are not binding on Christians today is to realize that they belong to a form of instruction known as a "household code" that was common in the ancient world and was included by the New Testament authors as a reminder that Christians should act in ways that would not give offense to unbelievers, but that the New Testament does not imply that these "household codes" were to be followed by all Christians in all cultures.²⁵ Although both of these approaches are simply presented as *possible* interpretations on pp. 81, 83, Tucker and Liefeld seem to adopt them as their own in the discussion of exegetical issues in Appendix B (pp. 462, 463).

The problem with the first argument is that it fails to recognize that Peter is requiring a general pattern of behavior (submission that results in obedience) rather than a carbon copy imitation of every word Sarah said (such as calling Abraham "lord" or "master"). The point is that Sarah gave respectful obedience to Abraham even in the words she used to refer to him, and so should Christian wives today be respectful (whatever words may be used from culture to culture to signify that respect). To say instead that submission itself is the general pattern and *obedience to a husband's authority* is the specific form that may vary from culture to culture (as Tucker and Liefeld do on p. 463) is to neglect the fact that submission in the New Testament (expressed by the word *hupotassō*) is always submission to an authority, and, therefore, the idea of obedience to authority seems inherent in this type of submission. Moreover, they neglect that it is not Sarah's specific words but her general obedience itself that Peter refers to when he says that Old Testament women who hoped in God were submissive to their husbands, as Sarah *obeyed* Abraham (verses 5-6). Obedience is one form that submission took for all of those referred to, but the mention of Sarah's words is simply a reminder of a specific example in Sarah's life.

As for the "household codes," there were lists of expected behavior for husbands and wives, parents and children, and servants and masters in the ancient world, but close comparison of ancient lists with those in the New Testament shows very few

exact parallels except that these various groups are named.²⁶ The “form” (if the New Testament authors were even conscious of using such a form) was extensively “Christianized,” so that few similarities remain. And at any rate, what we have in Scripture now is the morally binding authority of God’s own words. If we say that no unique authority or leadership for husbands in marriage was the ideal, but that Peter gave in to cultural expectations and failed to teach that ideal, this would seem to impugn Peter’s courage and integrity, because it implies that Peter was willing (and Paul, too!) to command Christians to follow a sinful, sub-Christian pattern of behavior in their homes—a most unlikely course of action for those accustomed to running against the tide! Moreover, it implies that God would command Christians to follow a sinful pattern of marriage just to attract unbelievers to the gospel—something inconsistent with God’s own pattern of telling His people to use morally righteous means to achieve righteous ends. We may conclude that both of these attempts to avoid the force of Peter’s directions today fail to be persuasive.

Another way that people sometimes have tried to avoid the permanence of these commands is to look at the commands about hair and jewelry and say that those are no longer binding today. This view says that Peter is forbidding the wearing of gold or braiding of hair when he writes, “Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes” (verse 3). This view reasons: (a) these commands are for that culture only, and cannot apply today; (b) therefore the other command in this paragraph, that a wife should be subject to her husband, does not apply today either.

But this view is certainly incorrect, because it misunderstands Peter. In this section Peter emphasizes not external, visible things that perish but unseen spiritual realities that are eternal, just as he has done frequently in the letter to this point (see 1 Peter 1:1 [“strangers”], 4, 7-9, 18-19, 23-25; 2:2, 5, 9, 11). “Let not yours be the outward adorning” (*RSV*) gives the sense of the phrase quite well and prepares the reader for the contrast with “inward adorning” (*RSV*) in verse 4. “Adorning” refers to what one uses to make oneself beautiful to others. The point is that Christian wives should depend for their own attractiveness *not* on outward things like braiding their hair, decorations of gold, and wearing fine clothing, but on inward qualities of life, especially a gentle and quiet spirit (verse 4). Furthermore, although the *RSV* and *NIV* speak of “fine clothing,” the Greek text does not include an adjective modifying *himatiōn*, “clothing,” and the text literally says, “Let not your adorning be the outward adorning of braiding of hair and wearing of gold or putting on of clothing.” It is incorrect, therefore, to say that this text prohibits women from braiding their hair or wearing gold jewelry, for by the same reasoning one would have to prohibit “putting on of clothing.” Peter’s point is not that any of these is forbidden, but that these should not be a woman’s “adorning,” her source of beauty.

In fact, we should rather note that Peter in this very text is *opposing* dominant ideas in that culture. When he rejects the use of hairstyle, jewelry, or clothing as a means of winning the unbelieving husband, Peter writes counterculturally.²⁷ He commends not just any behavior or dress that would be approved by the culture, but a gentle and quiet spirit, which *in God's sight is very precious* (verse 4). Peter goes right to the heart of the Christian faith—hope in God (verse 5) and the gentle and quiet spirit that stems from faith and “is of great worth in God's sight” (verse 4). Peter is functioning from the center of the Christian faith here; he is not merely adapting to culture.

F. The Beauty of Submission

In an age when submission to authority is frequently denigrated and thought to be degrading and dehumanizing, Peter's words remind us that submission to rightful authority is beautiful and right in God's world. It is “for the Lord's sake” (2:13) that Christians are to be subject to God-ordained authorities, whether in civil government (2:13-17), in employment (2:18-20), in the family (3:1-6), or in the church (5:5). Specifically within marriage, the beauty of a wife's submission to her husband is evident to *unbelievers*, who are attracted to Christ through it (verses 1-2). Peter also expects this beauty to be evident to *believing husbands* and to *other people generally*, for this is the beauty that he tells Christian women to make their “adorning”—their source of beauty (verse 4). This is the beauty that adorned women of the Old Testament “who put their hope in God” and “were submissive to their own husbands” (verse 5). This beauty also ought to be seen and felt by the *Christian wife herself*, for it is not accompanied by fear (verse 6), but by reverence, purity (verse 2), moral uprightness (verse 6), quietness of spirit (verse 4), and hope in God (verse 5). Finally, the beauty of this submission is evident to *God*, for the gentle and quiet spirit that accompanies this submission in God's sight is “of great worth” (verse 4).

II. Directions to Husbands

A. What Considerate Leadership Is Not

Peter tells husbands, “Live considerately with your wives” (verse 7, *RSV*; similarly, *NIV*), or, more literally, “Live with your wives in an understanding way” (*NASB*).

This is the husband's counterpart to his wife's submissive attitude, and Peter here warns husbands against some potential abuses of their leadership role within the marriage. Because this section is the counterpart to Peter's command to wives to be submissive to their husband's leadership, we can speak of "considerate leadership" as a summary of the husband's responsibility.

1. Considerate leadership does not mean harsh or domineering use of authority.

Peter tells husbands to "be considerate" to their wives and says they should "treat them with respect as the weaker partner" (verse 7).²⁸ Peter does not specify how he understands the woman to be the "weaker partner," but the context would make it appropriate for him to have in mind any kind of weakness that husbands would need to be cautioned not to take advantage of. This would certainly include physical strength (most men, if they tried, could overpower their wives physically). But the context also shows that women are weaker in terms of authority in the marriage (verses 1, 5, 6), and Peter therefore tells husbands that, instead of misusing their authority for selfish ends, they should use it to treat their wives with respect. Yet there may also be a third sense of weakness that would fit the context (because it is something husbands should not take advantage of), namely, a greater emotional sensitivity (perhaps hinted at in Peter's admonition to godly wives, "do not give way to fear," verse 6). While this is something that is also a great strength, it nonetheless means that wives are often more likely to be hurt deeply by conflict within a marriage or by inconsiderate behavior. Knowing this, Christian husbands should not be "harsh" (Colossians 3:19) or fill their marriage relationship with criticism and conflict, but should rather be positive and affirming, living together in an understanding way and bestowing honor on their wives.

The word translated *partner* in "the weaker partner" is *skeuos*, which often means "vessel, jar, container," but is also used in the New Testament to speak of human beings as "vessels" created by God and intended for His use (Acts 9:15; Romans 9:21; 2 Corinthians 4:7; 2 Timothy 2:21). There is no derogatory or misogynistic nuance here, since the fact that the woman is called the "weaker vessel" (that is, the weaker of the two) implies that the man is also viewed as a "vessel." The term recalls God's creation of all people, both men and women, and is a reminder both of human frailty and of obligation to God our Creator.

2. Considerate leadership does not imply equal sharing of leadership in the family.

Although Peter tells husbands to act in a thoughtful and understanding way toward their wives, he never tells husbands to submit to their wives or suggests that roles in marriage are interchangeable. Considerate leadership is *how* the husband exercises leadership in the family; it does not contradict his headship.

The phrase “in the same way” in verse 7 has the sense “also” or “continuing in the same area of discussion” (see note above on the word at 3:1; also, Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich-Danker, p. 568, and 1 Peter 5:7), for the idea of similarity in submission is excluded by the fact that here (unlike 2:18; 3:1) Peter does not command submission to any authority but rather the considerate use of that authority.

3. Considerate leadership does not imply lesser importance for a wife.

The fact that husbands are to treat their wives with “respect” does not mean that the wife, who has less authority, is less important. Peter’s telling husbands that their wives are joint heirs of the grace of life reminds them that, even though they have been given greater authority within marriage, their wives are still equal to them in spiritual privilege and eternal importance. Here as elsewhere the New Testament authors couple their treatment of differences in roles of husband and wife with an implicit or explicit affirmation of their equality in status and importance (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:3, 7, 12; Ephesians 5:22, 33; Colossians 3:18, 19).

4. Considerate leadership does not mean always giving in to a wife’s wishes.

Just as wives are not to obey their husbands when commanded to disobey God, so husbands must never allow love for their wives to become an excuse for sin—a principle tragically ignored by Abraham himself when he followed Sarah’s urging and decided to have a child by Sarah’s maid Hagar (Genesis 16:2, 5). The principle was also ignored by Solomon (1 Kings 11:1-3, 8), Ahab (1 Kings 21:25), and perhaps even Adam (Genesis 3:6). The mere fact that one’s wife—even a godly, believing wife—*wants* to do something morally wrong does not mean that a husband is free before God to endorse or participate in that wrong. To do so would be to abdicate the leadership God has given the husband and would be the opposite of the righteous leadership God requires him to exercise. In actual practice, it will often take much prayer and knowledge of Scripture for a husband to be able to tell the difference between a morally wrong choice being urged on him by his wife and a morally right choice that just differs from his personal preference or judgment of how things should be done. But there will be times in every marriage when a godly husband simply will have to make decisions that affect the whole family, that go against his wife’s desires and preferences and that he nonetheless is convinced, before God, are right.

5. Considerate leadership is not optional for husbands.

Just as submission to one’s husband is not optional for Christian wives, so the considerate leadership that Peter commands is not optional for Christian husbands. Husbands cannot rightly opt out of family leadership and become passive non-

participants in decisions and activities. Neither can they rightly make the opposite mistake and exercise harsh, selfish, domineering authority in their families. They are rather to live considerately and bestow honor. Yet in doing this they cannot escape the responsibility to lead that is implicit in the command for their wives to submit to them.

B. What Considerate Leadership Is

“[B]e considerate as you live with your wives” is literally, “living together according to knowledge.”²⁹ Peter does not specify what kind of knowledge he means by “according to knowledge,” so some general phrase like “in an understanding way” (*NASB*) is a good translation. The *RSV*’s “considerately” (similarly, *NIV*) is generally acceptable, but it probably gives too much emphasis to a considerate attitude while neglecting the focus on actual “knowledge” or information that is implied by Peter’s word. The knowledge Peter intends here may include any knowledge that would be beneficial to the husband-wife relationship: of God’s purposes and principles for marriage; of the wife’s desires, goals, and frustrations; of her strengths and weaknesses in the physical, emotional and spiritual realms, etc. A husband who lives according to such knowledge will greatly enrich his marriage—yet such knowledge can only be gained through regular study of God’s Word and regular, unhurried times of private fellowship together as husband and wife.³⁰

“[G]rant her honor” as “a weaker vessel” (*NASB*) affirms a theme found frequently in the New Testament. God is often pleased to honor those who are weaker or less honored in the eyes of the world (cf. Matthew 5:3-12; 1 Corinthians 1:26-30; 12:22-25; James 2:5; 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5).³¹ In this case, such honor may include kind and affirming words both in private and in public, as well as the highest human priority in allocation of time and money. (The *NIV*’s “treat them with respect” is too weak—one can treat another person with detached, formal respect and yet give no special honor.)

In the phrase, “Bestowing honor on the woman” (*RSV*), the word “woman” translates *tō gunaikiō*, a rare word that is used only here in the New Testament. It means more literally “the feminine one,” and suggests that Peter is looking to the characteristic nature of womanhood or femininity and seeing in it an appropriateness for receiving honor. It is appropriate that those who are “feminine,” those who give characteristic expression to “womanhood,” should receive special honor, for this is what God has directed.

C. The Reasons for Considerate Leadership

The first reason for such considerate leadership is that there are differences between husband and wife: the wife is the “weaker vessel” (*NASB*) or “weaker partner” (*NIV*) and thus more vulnerable to being hurt by a selfish, domineering husband.

The second reason for considerate leadership is the equality between husband and wife: “since you are joint heirs of the grace of life” (*RSV*).³² One who has equal standing in God’s kingdom is certainly worthy of equal honor and thoughtful, loving attention.

D. The Rewards of Considerate Leadership

At the end of this passage Peter indicates a reward for husbands who live considerately with their wives, but he does so by giving a warning of what will happen if they do not live this way: “so that nothing will hinder your prayers.” The implication is that if they *do* live in a considerate way with their wives, their prayers will not be hindered but helped, and God will answer them (compare 1 Peter 3:12, where Peter says, “. . . the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer”).

Some think that “your prayers” in this verse refers only to times when the husband and wife pray together, but this view is unpersuasive because Peter is addressing this sentence to husbands only, not to both husbands and wives. “Your” must refer to the “you” to whom Peter is writing: the husbands. The reference therefore is to the husbands’ prayers generally. This hindering of prayers is a form of God’s fatherly discipline, which Hebrews 12:3-11 reminds us is for our good and is given to those whom God loves. So concerned is God that Christian husbands live in an understanding and loving way with their wives that He interrupts His relationship with them when they do not do so! No Christian husband should presume to think that any spiritual good will be accomplished by his life without an effective ministry of prayer. And no husband may expect an effective prayer life unless he lives with his wife “in an understanding way, bestowing honor” on her. To take the time to maintain a good marriage is God’s will; it is serving God; it is a spiritual activity pleasing in His sight.

11: The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership: A Survey of Old and New Testament Examples and Teaching

Thomas R. Schreiner

This chapter focuses on the valuable ministries of women in the Scriptures. This is a crucial topic for at least three reasons. First, men often have hurt women. They have treated them as lesser citizens of the kingdom, and some men have denigrated or overlooked their contribution in ministry. An examination of the Scriptures will show that women have played a vital role in ministry. One reason for the current feminist movement, although not the only one, is that some women are responding to men who have oppressed them and treated them poorly.

Second, contemporary women should be encouraged by the women in the Scriptures who have contributed to the spread of God's kingdom message. God does not use men alone to accomplish His purposes. Both sexes are created in God's image, and both men and women have been used mightily by God. No woman who has a desire to please God should feel that there is no place for her ministry in the church.

Third, some contemporary evangelical writers appeal to the ministries of women in the Scriptures to support the notion that there should be no limits on women's roles in ministry today. They maintain that women and men should have equal access to every ministry function and that any limits on women derive from culture and tradition, not from the Bible, which they believe supports the full inclusion of women in any ministry.

This third area is particularly important. We will examine it carefully in this chapter, for if the examples of ministry by women in the Bible indicate that there should be no limits on women in ministry, then the church should open the doors of every ministry to women. We should be open to the possibility that we have misread the Scriptures by imposing some restrictions on women in ministry. Perhaps our culture and tradition have drawn lines and distinctions that cannot be supported from the Bible. Thus, we should listen to and evaluate carefully the arguments of those who contend that the ministries of women portrayed in the Bible demonstrate that every ministry that is open to men is also open to women.

I. Ministry in a General Sense

This chapter will focus on the third issue since that is a matter of particular debate today. Nevertheless, we should remind ourselves that ministry is a very broad word, stemming from the Greek words *diakonia*, *diakonos*, and *diakoneō*, and these words often convey the idea of “service” and “ministry” in the broadest sense. For example, Martha was distracted because of her “service” or “ministry”(*diakonia*), and the “service” being described is preparation of a meal (Luke 10:40). In Luke 22:27, one “one who serves” is contrasted to “one who reclines”(NASB) during the meal. The “ministry” in view is simply serving tables. Luke 8:13 tells of a number of women who were ministering (*diakoneō*) to Jesus and the apostles. The specific ministry they engaged in was not preaching the gospel but providing financial resources so that Jesus could carry on His ministry. First Peter 4:10 says that all spiritual gifts are to be used to “minister” (*diakoneō*) to one another in the church. And Paul says, “There are different kinds of service (*diako-nia*), but the same Lord” (1 Corinthians 12:5). So in this broad sense, anything any Christian does to help the work of the church is a ministry.

Other examples of the use of the words *ministry* and service in this general sense could be cited, but the point to be made is this: Not all ministries that are valuable are public or official ministries. Providing food and support for others is crucial, and this ministry should not be scorned, even if one does not get public recognition for it. Many unnamed men and women of God have quietly and humbly worked behind the scenes in this way, and they have found great joy and blessing in doing so. I am not suggesting that this is the only ministry role for women. Nevertheless, it is a crucial one that should not be overlooked. Those who denigrate such a role are downplaying the function of many men and women who have labored with love.

Women, then, have engaged in significant ministries, even if those ministries were unofficial. One thinks of Abigail in 1 Samuel 25. Abigail was not a prophetess and had no other official ministry that we know of. Nevertheless, her humble and gentle advice to David persuaded him not to kill Nabal. How many unrecorded events there must be of women persuading men, humbly and gently, to pursue a more righteous course! What a good model this story is for traditionalists who think being a leader means they must always know the truth and that their opinion is always right. David was certainly the leader in this account, but his humility is evident in that he listened to Abigail and was persuaded. For women, Abigail is a model of gentle and humble persuasion. There was no stridency or imperiousness about her manner. She was winsome, yet bold.

The “unofficial” ministries of women, therefore, are of great importance, and some

men, by desiring leadership for its status and power as the Gentiles do (Mark 10:42ff.), have contributed to the idea that these ministries are insignificant. Such a secular concept of ministry has done great damage in Christ's church.

II. The Argument for Full Inclusion of Women in All Ministries

The rest of the chapter will focus on the “official” or publicly recognized ministries of women in the Bible. What ministries did they have, and what are the implications of these ministries for today? We will begin by considering the evidence and arguments of those who think there are no limits on women in ministry. ¹ We will not evaluate these arguments until all the evidence for the full inclusion of women in ministry is presented. Otherwise, we may be guilty of not giving both sides of the debate a full and fair hearing.

A. Prophetesses

Those who see no restrictions on women in ministry argue that the prophets of both the Old Testament and the New Testament were authoritative messengers of God. Women clearly functioned as prophetesses in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Miriam is explicitly called a prophetess in Exodus 15:20, and she led the women in singing for Yahweh's triumph over Egypt (Exodus 15:21). The prophetess Huldah was consulted by the messengers of Josiah in 2 Kings 22:14-20. Other women probably functioned as prophetesses in the Old Testament but are unmentioned (cf. Isaiah 8:3), and Ezekiel pronounces judgment against daughters who prophesy falsely (Ezekiel 13:17-24). Compare also Nehemiah's words against the prophetess Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14). The problem here was not that these women prophesied, but that they did not prophesy according to the word of the Lord.

For our purposes, the most significant example of a prophetess is Deborah (Judges 4:4-5). Evangelical feminists consider Deborah particularly significant because she functioned as a judge over Israel, which would include judging men, and she exercised authority over the man Barak, who was a commander of the Israelite troops.

In the New Testament, too, women prophesy, and there may even be some indication that it was more common for them to do so. The prophetess Anna thanked

God and spoke of Him when Jesus was brought to the temple (Luke 2:36-38). Peter cites Joel's prophecy that when the Spirit is poured out both "sons and daughters will prophesy. . . . Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy" (Acts 2:17-18; cf. Joel 2:28-32).

Philip's four daughters are one indication that this promise was fulfilled, for they all prophesied (Acts 21:9). Paul also encourages women to prophesy, with proper adornment (1 Corinthians 11:5). Those who argue for full inclusion of women in every ministry point out that if Paul thought such prayer and prophecy were wrong, he certainly would not bother to explain in such detail how they should be adorned while they were sinning!

It is concluded, then, from both the Old Testament and the New, that women functioned as prophets, and they used this gift for the edification of the people of God. In addition, prophecy, according to those who argue for no limits on women's ministries, is defined as an authoritative declaration of God's Word; thus, if women can prophesy, they can perform any ministry. They argue that prophecy is just as important and as authoritative as teaching. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 12:28, the gift of prophecy is ranked *above* teaching. Now, nearly everyone agrees that women can function as prophets, for the evidence here is clear, but if women can function as prophets, it would seem that they can also function as teachers today, because prophecy is just as authoritative as teaching.

B. Women Teachers and Spiritual Gifts

Moreover, those who contend for no restrictions on women in ministry argue that women function as teachers. When Priscilla and Aquila heard Apollos teach, they took him aside and explained the gospel more accurately to him (Acts 18:26). The inclusion of Priscilla indicates that she must have taught Apollos as well. In fact, Luke mentions her first, and some suggest this implies that she did more of the teaching. Such ministry by Priscilla does not seem to be a one-time affair. In Romans 16:3, Paul greets both Priscilla and Aquila. He labels them his fellow-workers in the gospel, which implies that they shared in the gospel ministry with him. Their involvement in ministry is also confirmed by 1 Corinthians 16:19, for there Paul says that a church is in their house.

The argument for women teachers is also set forth from spiritual gifts. Teaching is a spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:28-29; Ephesians 4:12; Romans 12:7), and yet there is no indication that women are excluded from this gift. All Christians are told to teach one another (Colossians 3:16) and to share with the community what they have

learned (1 Corinthians 14:26). Surely this must include women. Indeed, Priscilla, as we have seen above, seems to use the gift in instructing Apollos. Paul also mentions women in the role of teaching in Titus 2:3.

Those who advocate no restrictions on women in ministry say that passages like 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36 should not be used to impose limitations on women today. First Timothy 2:11-15, they say, was not written to forbid all teaching of men by women. Paul here is only forbidding false teaching by women, or (according to others) preventing women who were uneducated from teaching men. First Corinthians 14:33b-36 was probably written to resolve a problem in the congregation where women were disrupting the assembly by speaking in tongues or by interrupting the service with questions. Or perhaps the passage quotes a Corinthian slogan or question that Paul rejects. Some also think that verses 34-35 were not part of the original text of 1 Corinthians and that they were added by a later scribe. These two passages, therefore, are designed to correct abuses by women in teaching, it is argued, not to forbid any teaching of men whatsoever. The fact that women could prophesy, which, it is claimed, cannot be distinguished from authoritative teaching, and that Priscilla engages in teaching, shows that the prohibitions in these two passages are not absolute.

C. Women as Fellow-workers and Laborers

It has already been noted that in Romans 16:3 Paul calls Priscilla a “fellow worker” (*sunergos*). It is instructive to note others who are called Paul’s fellow workers: Timothy (Romans 16:21; 1 Thessalonians 3:2; Philemon 1), Apollos (1 Corinthians 3:9), Urbanus (Romans 16:9), Titus (2 Corinthians 8:23), Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25), Aristarchus (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24), Mark (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24), Jesus Justus (Colossians 4:10), Epaphras (Philemon 24), Demas (Philemon 24), and Luke (Philemon 24). Some of those listed here we know very little about, but we know that Timothy, Apollos, Titus, Epaphroditus, Mark, Epaphras, and Luke proclaimed the gospel. Does it not follow, then, say those who espouse full inclusion of women in every ministry, that Priscilla as a fellow worker did the same? Moreover, Priscilla is not the only woman whom Paul calls a fellow-worker. In Philippians 4:2, he exhorts two women, Euodia and Syntyche, to agree in the Lord. In 4:3, he says that they struggled together with him in the gospel along with Clement and the rest of the fellow-workers. The implication is that Euodia and Syntyche were fellow-workers. They struggled together in the gospel by helping Paul spread the good news of salvation.

The point can even be made more specific. In 1 Corinthians 16:16, Paul exhorts

the Corinthians to be subject to the house of Stephanas and to “every fellow worker (*panti sunergounti*) and laborer (*kopiō nti*).” We have already seen that three women are called fellow workers: Priscilla, Euodia, and Syntyche. Paul says that the Corinthians are to be subject to all fellow-workers and laborers. It would seem to follow, according to those who reject any limits on women today, that since Priscilla, Euodia, and Syntyche were fellow-workers, these women held leadership positions in the church and, therefore, men were subject to them.

It is also noted that Paul says to be subject to “every laborer” (*panti . . . kopiō nti*) as well as every fellow worker (1 Corinthians 16:16). Paul often describes his ministry using this same word for labor (1 Corinthians 4:12; 15:10; Galatians 4:11; Philippians 2:16; Colossians 1:29; 1 Timothy 4:10). Indeed, the work of other leaders is also described in terms of laboring. The Corinthians are to submit to the house of Stephanas, which labors for them (1 Corinthians 16:16). The Thessalonians are exhorted “to respect those who work hard [or *labor*] among you” (1 Thessalonians 5:12), and these are clearly the leaders, because Paul goes on to say that they are “over you in the Lord and admonish you.” The elders who rule well should receive double honor, according to 1 Timothy 5:17, “especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.” Clearly, then, Paul often uses the verb *labor* to denote authoritative ministry and instruction. But Paul also mentions women who have labored. In Romans 16:6, he instructs the Romans to greet Mary, who labored much for them. And in Romans 16:12, three women, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis, are said to have labored much in the Lord. Some conclude, therefore, that women were leaders in the congregations, for the word *labor* is clearly used in this sense in 1 Corinthians 16:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:12, and 1 Timothy 5:17.

D. Women Deacons

It is also argued that women functioned in official positions in the church because they held the office of deacon. Many scholars have argued that this is the most probable interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:11. In 1 Timothy 3:8-10 and 12, the qualifications are given for men who are to serve as deacons. In 3:11, Paul says: “Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things” (NASB). The word for “women” here (*gunaikas*) could be translated “wives” (as in NIV), and that is the view of some commentators. The following reasons are given to support the idea that Paul is speaking of women deacons: (1) Paul introduces the women mentioned here in the same fashion he introduced the men in 1 Timothy 3:8, i.e., he uses the word *likewise*. In 3:1-7, Paul lays out the qualifications for elders, and in 3:8 Paul says likewise there are similar qualifications

for deacons. The *likewise* in 3:11 suggests that the qualifications for men who are deacons also apply to women deacons.

(2) If Paul were speaking of wives of deacons, he could have made this very clear by adding *of deacons* (*diakonōn* or *autōn*). By leaving the word *women* without any modifier, he implied that he was speaking of women in general, not just of the wives of deacons. (3) The qualifications Paul mentions in 3:12 are identical with or similar to those required of deacons, and this suggests that an office is in view.²

Further evidence that women functioned as deacons is found in the case of Phoebe. In Romans 16:1, Paul says that she was “a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae” (*RSV*). Actually, the word *deaconess* here is the same as the one used in 1 Timothy 3:8 and Philippians 1:1, where Paul writes of deacons. Thus, Paul is not calling Phoebe a “deaconess,” but a “deacon,” some have claimed. In addition, Phoebe is called a leader (*prostatis*) in Romans 16:2. The most commonly used translations (*RSV*, *NASB*, *NIV*) use the word *help* or *helper* here, but it has been claimed that this term is a technical one used for a legal protector or leader. If such an interpretation is correct, Paul here recommends Phoebe as a deacon and as a leader of many.

E. Women Elders

Evidence is also adduced that women could function as elders. The letter of 2 John is addressed to “the chosen lady,” and it is claimed that this does not refer to the church as a whole because the chosen lady is distinguished from her children (2 John 1, 4). The “chosen lady” refers to a woman who had authority over her children. Such authority is similar to the office of elder. Moreover, some suggest that Paul speaks of women elders in Titus 2:3. Although this is obscured by translations that render *presbytidas* by “older women,” it is clear that this word is a feminine rendering of the term *presbyteros* (*elder*) that Paul uses in Titus 1:5 to refer to church office.

F. Women Apostles

Most significantly, it is frequently claimed that women also functioned as apostles. In Romans 16:7, Paul writes, “Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles. . . .” Some commentators have thought that Junias was a man, and that the name here is a contracted form of the word *Junianus*. Nevertheless, this is said to be an

unpersuasive argument, for there is no example in Greek literature of this name being contracted. Thus, some have said that the name should be translated “Junia” (feminine) rather than “Junias” (masculine), showing that a woman is almost certainly included among the apostles here. Others have contended that the Greek (*en tois apostolois*) means “outstanding in the eyes of the apostles,” not “outstanding among the apostles.” Of course, such a rendering would exclude Andronicus and Junia(s) from the apostolic circle. The text would simply say that the apostles held them in high esteem. But it is claimed that this is an unnatural way to understand the Greek, and the most probable rendering is “outstanding among the apostles.” To sum up: there seems to be evidence here that a woman was an apostle, and this raises a serious question against those who want to deny women full participation in leadership positions in the church.

G. Conclusion

To sum up, the argument often given for full inclusion in ministry is cumulative. Women functioned as prophets, and such a ministry is just as authoritative as teaching. Women possess all the spiritual gifts, and this includes the gifts of teaching and leadership. Indeed, there is evidence in the New Testament that women held the offices of deacon, elder, and apostle. All of this evidence is in accord with Paul’s designation of women as fellow-workers in the gospel. The passages that seem to limit women in ministry can be explained from the situation that Paul addresses and thus should not be used to impose restrictions on women. The burden of proof, then, is said to be on those who want to impose restrictions on women in ministry.

III. The Argument for Some Restrictions on Women in Ministry

The preceding section has rightly shown that women participated in various forms of ministry in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The question is whether its argument establishes the case that no restrictions are to be placed on women in ministry. I think not. I propose to prove below that women participated in ministry in the Scriptures, but their ministry was a complementary and supportive ministry, a ministry that fostered and preserved male leadership in the church. Thus, the ministry of women in the church was notable and significant, but it never supplanted male leadership; instead, it functioned as a support to male leadership. This view

does not rule out all ministry for women. Instead, it sees the ministry of women as complementary and supportive.

A. Prophetesses

One of the strongest arguments for full inclusion of women in authoritative positions of leadership stems from the prophetic role women played in the Scriptures. Deborah, as we have seen, stands out as an authoritative messenger of Yahweh. Nevertheless, the evidence from prophecy actually indicates a supportive and complementary role for women. It buttresses the point that role distinctions between men and women are maintained. An examination of the evidence will indicate how this is so.

That women prophesied to men is clear in the case of Deborah, other women cited above, and 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. The last passage cited, however, is absolutely crucial for rightly understanding a woman's relationship to man as she prophesies. What is Paul's concern in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16? It is that women who prophesy do so with proper adornment. Why is Paul concerned about how they are adorned? Because a woman's adornment says something about her relationship with men (11:3-10). Indeed, as I show in Chapter 5 of this volume, 11:3 is the key to the passage: "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (*NIV*). Thus, the reason Paul wants women to be adorned properly is that this adornment shows that a woman is submissive to male headship, even while prophesying. The way she is adorned indicates whether the man is the head, i.e., the authority.

The implications for our study are clear. Paul affirms that women can prophesy, but even in the process of prophesying they are to do so in a manner and with a demeanor that will not violate male headship. Paul does not place the same limits on men, and thus upholds and preserves the notion that male leadership is God's ordained pattern in the church. Note carefully that this does not mean that women will not prophesy in church. Paul affirms that women have prophetic gifts, and he wants them to exercise those gifts in church, but he does not want them to overturn male leadership.

The only passage that creates any difficulty for such a supportive and complementary view of prophecy is Judges 4, where Deborah commands Barak what to do and is a judge in Israel. But there are several reasons why this is in harmony with the notion of male headship explained in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16: (1) Deborah is a special case because she seems to be the only judge in Judges who

has no military function. The other judges also lead Israel into victory in battle, but Deborah receives a word from the Lord that Barak is to do this (Judges 4:6-7). Deborah is not asserting leadership for herself; she gives priority to a man. (2) There is an implied rebuke of Barak because he is not willing to go to battle without Deborah (Judges 4:8). Because of his reluctance, the glory that day will go to a woman (Judges 4:9), but note that the woman is not Deborah but Jael (Judges 4:17ff.). In other words, Deborah did speak the word of God, but her attitude and demeanor were such that she was not asserting her leadership. Instead, she handed over the leadership, contrary to the pattern of all the other judges, to a man.

(3) Both Deborah and Huldah (2 Kings 22:14-20) exercised their gift of prophecy differently from the men who possessed the gift. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and other male prophets exercised a public ministry where they proclaimed the word of the Lord. But note that Deborah did not prophesy in public.³ Instead, her prophetic role seems to be limited to private and individual instruction. Judges 4:5 says, “And she used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment” (NASB). Note that Deborah did not go out and publicly proclaim the word of the Lord. Instead, individuals came to her in private for a word from the Lord. The difference between Deborah’s prophetic ministry and that of male Old Testament prophets is clear. She did not exercise her ministry in a public forum as they did. Note that even when she speaks to Barak she calls him and speaks to him individually (Judges 4:6,14). And the song of praise in Judges 5:1 was sung by both Deborah and Barak together. A confirming argument for this view is found in the case of Huldah (2 Kings 22:14-20). She did not publicly proclaim God’s word. Rather, she explained in private the word of the Lord when Josiah sent messengers to her. She exercised her prophetic ministry in a way that did not obstruct male headship. The prophetic ministry of Miriam is no exception to this, because she ministered only to women. “Then Miriam, the prophetess, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and *all the women followed her*, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang *to them* . . .” (Exodus 15:20, my italics).

(4) It is perhaps also significant that most of the other prominent judges in the book of Judges are explicitly said to have been raised up by the Lord:⁴ Othniel (3:9), Ehud (3:15), Gideon (6:14), Jephthah (11:29), and Samson (13:25; 14:6). But in the case of Deborah, there is no explicit statement that the Lord raised her up: we simply read, “Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time” (Judges 4:4). I am not suggesting that the Lord did not raise her up, for He did bring evident blessing to Israel through her, but it may indicate that the nature of her role as a prophet and a judge was different from that of the other judges in that she did not exercise leadership over men as the other judges did. Such an observation

harmonizes with the three points above.⁵

Also, prophecy differs from teaching. Prophecy is based on spontaneous revelation (1 Corinthians 14:29-33a), while teaching is an exposition of received revelation. A prophet, therefore, does not hold the same office as a teacher. Prophets speak forth God's revelation to the people, but the people go to the priests in the Old Testament to receive authoritative instruction based on tradition (Leviticus 10:11; Deuteronomy 21:5; Malachi 2:6-7). It is instructive to note in the Old Testament that some women were prophets, but never priests. It is the priests who had the more settled and established positions of leadership in Israel. This is not to deny that the Old Testament prophets spoke with great authority. Indeed, they criticized priests who abused their authority. The point is that prophecy is a different kind of gift from teaching, and when women functioned as prophets they did so with a demeanor and attitude that supported male leadership.

In addition, Wayne Grudem has argued that the gift of prophecy in the New Testament is not the same as the prophetic gift in the Old Testament.⁶ Old Testament prophets spoke the word of the Lord, and what they said was absolutely authoritative—no part of it could be questioned or challenged. Every word was to be received as God's very word. But the words of New Testament prophets do not have this kind of absolute authority. Paul calls on the church to sort and sift the good from the bad in prophetic utterances: "Do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21, RSV ; cf. 1 Corinthians 14:29-33a). When Paul says, "Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said" (1 Corinthians 14:29), he uses a verb for "weigh carefully" (*diakrinō*) that means "to sort or sift some things from others." This implies that in New Testament prophecies, not every word would be understood to be the word of God. By contrast, in the Old Testament, a prophet who spoke *anything* untrue was to be put to death (Deuteronomy 13:1 5; 18:20-22). Instead, New Testament prophecies are handled not as authoritative words from God but as spontaneous impressions or insights that may or may not be, either in whole or in part, from God. Thus, the church must judge and evaluate prophecies in order to determine whether they, either in whole or in part, are sound.

Why is this distinction relevant to our discussion? It provides further evidence, particularly with regard to New Testament prophecy, that the gift of prophecy is not as authoritative as the gift of teaching.⁷ Teaching involves a sustained and orderly exposition of divine revelation already given, while prophecy in the New Testament occurs when someone has a spontaneous revelation or impression, the whole or parts of which may or may not be from the Lord. The church does not accept such "revelations" uncritically, but weighs them carefully. Thus, the fact that women utter

prophecies in church does not logically imply that they can exercise a teaching gift over men, for the two gifts are quite different.

To sum up, those women who had the authoritative gift of prophecy in the Old Testament did not exercise it in a public forum as male Old Testament prophets did. The reason for this is that such a public exercise of authority would contradict male headship. In the New Testament, women could prophecy in a public forum, but Grudem has shown that prophecy in the New Testament is not as authoritative as either prophecy in the Old Testament or teaching in the New Testament. And even if one were to reject Grudem's interpretation, 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 makes it clear that women who prophesied in the New Testament were to do so in such a way that they acknowledged and supported male headship. Thus, the Biblical teaching on women prophets does not contradict male headship; instead, it supports male leadership in the church.

B. Teaching and Spiritual Gifts

We noted above, however, that Priscilla taught Apollos (Acts 18:26), and women have all the spiritual gifts, including teaching (Titus 2:3-4) and leadership. Several things can be said in response to this: (1) It is hard to tell from the Acts account to what extent Priscilla taught Apollos, since both Priscilla and Aquila are named. It is precarious to base much on this text, since it is an argument from silence to say that Priscilla was the primary teacher. (2) Even if Priscilla did all the teaching, this is not the same thing as teaching publicly in an authoritative position of leadership. Surely, Abigail "taught" David in the passage we looked at in 1 Samuel 25, but no one would say she had a position of leadership over men. More is often established from the example of Priscilla and Aquila than is warranted from the text.⁸ (3) The word Paul uses for teaching in Titus 2:4 is not the usual one, but derives from *sō phronizō*, which means "to advise, encourage, or urge." In any case, this passage does not support women teaching men, because the verses say that the older women are to teach the younger women. If anything, this text supports the traditional view that sees a complementary but distinct role for women. (4) The argument from spiritual gifts is not phrased carefully enough. surely have all the spiritual gifts, but does that mean that there are no restrictions regarding the exercising of those gifts? If our interpretation of passages like 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is correct, then women cannot publicly exercise their spiritual gift of teaching over men. This is not to deny that women have the gift of teaching or leadership. The point is that they are primarily to exercise those gifts among women. The idea that women are to exercise their gifts of leadership and teaching with other women harmonizes beautifully with Paul's

instructions to older women in Titus 2:3ff. It is inappropriate hermeneutically to conclude from Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts that there is no limitation on women in ministry. One must consider all of Paul's teaching on the subject, and then what he says about spiritual gifts should be integrated with his instructions elsewhere.

C. Women as Fellow-workers and Laborers

Several texts were cited above that spoke of women being fellow-workers and laborers. Since these terms are often used of men who exercised leadership, and since in 1 Corinthians 16:16 the church is called to submit to such, it was inferred that women had leadership positions in the church. But this argument is only convincing if these words are technical terms for positions of leadership, and it is not clear that the terms are technical. That women played a significant role in gospel ministry is clear from the use of these terms, but it is unwarranted to derive from these terms alone the nature of their ministry. The terms *fellow-worker* and *laborer* are vague. There are many ways that women could have been fellow-workers and laborers without holding leadership positions over men. The clear teaching of Paul elsewhere (1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:33b-36; 1 Timothy 2:11-15) must be the guide for understanding the role of women rather than the appeal to terms that are too vague to support the idea of women sharing full leadership with men. Women could, for example, be prophets and probably deacons (see below) without violating male leadership, and yet surely such women would be fellow-workers and laborers.

It could still be objected that Paul says to be subject to every fellow-worker and fellow laborer (1 Corinthians 16:16). Paul says in verses 15-16, "Now, brethren, you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you to be subject to such men and to every fellow worker and laborer" (RSV). What is crucial to see is that the command to be subject (*hypotassō*) to every fellow-worker and laborer is found in a particular context, and thus it cannot be generalized to prove that women were church leaders. Verses 15-16 make it clear that the household of Stephanas and others who worked with them were the leaders in the Corinthian church.⁹ There is no evidence in the context that any of these fellow workers and laborers in Corinth were women. In fact, the only leader mentioned, Stephanas, is clearly a man. Since the words *fellow-worker* and *laborer* are vague and can refer to men or women, there needs to be indisputable evidence that women are included here as leaders in the church, especially since such leadership is not stated elsewhere. Let me put the same argument another way: The words *fellow-worker* and *laborer* do not indicate that someone is a church leader, although that does not mean that these terms are

never used of church leaders. All church leaders would be fellow-workers and laborers, but not all fellow-workers and laborers are necessarily church leaders.¹⁰

One other objection should be handled. Some may conclude that the reference to the “household of Stephanas” shows that women must be included. This argument, however, proves too much. Surely, no one would say that the children in Stephanas’s house were church leaders, and yet they were part of his house. Those who want to prove that women held positions of authority over men must prove their case with arguments from indisputable examples rather than from the vague wording that Paul uses here.

D. and E. Women Deacons and Elders

Does not the inclusion of women as deacons, however, prove that they can hold an authoritative office? We have seen that many think that Phoebe is called a deacon in Romans 16:1. It should be noted, however, that the word *diakonos*, as we pointed out above, is often a general term, and thus one cannot be sure that Phoebe was a deacon.¹¹ And it is very unlikely that the word *prostatis* (Romans 16:2) is being used to say that Phoebe was a leader, as an examination of that verse shows. Paul commends Phoebe to the Romans and says “help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper [this is the word some think should be translated “leader”] of many, and of myself as well (NASB).” That Phoebe is being called a leader here is improbable for three reasons. (1) It is highly improbable that Paul would say that Phoebe held a position of authority over him. He says that about no one except Christ, not even the Jerusalem apostles (Galatians 1:6-7, 11), so confident is he of his high authority as an apostle (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:37-38; Galatians 1:8-9; 2 Thessalonians 3:14). (2) There seems to be a play on words between the word *prostatis* and the previous verb, *paristēmi*, in 16:2. Paul says to help (*paristēmi*) Phoebe because she has been a help (*prostatis*) to many, including to Paul himself. It fits the context better to understand Paul as saying “help Phoebe because she has been such a help to others and to me.” (3) Although the related masculine noun *prostatis* can mean “leader,” the actual feminine noun (*prostatis*) does not take the meaning “leader” but is defined as “protectress, patroness, helper.”¹²

With respect to women deacons, we need not come to a firm decision, for even if women were deacons this does not refute our thesis regarding male governance in the church.¹³ Even if women were appointed as deacons, they were not appointed as elders (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Two qualities demanded of elders—being

apt to teach (1 Timothy 3:2) and governing of the church (1 Timothy 3:5)—are not part of the responsibility of deacons (cf. also 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:9; Acts 20:17, 28ff.). The deacon's task consisted mainly in practical service to the needs of the congregation. This is suggested by Acts 6:1-6, where the apostles devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word (6:4), while the seven are selected to care for the practical concern of the daily distribution to widows.¹⁴ Elders were given the responsibility to lead and teach the congregation. Thus, women being appointed to the supportive and complementary role of deacons supports the major thesis of this chapter, as does the exclusion of women from the office of elder. So far, what we have seen is consistent with the Old Testament pattern. Women in the Old Testament functioned occasionally as prophets but not as priests. In the New Testament, women functioned as prophets and probably deacons but not as elders.¹⁵

Some have argued for women elders, as we have seen above, from the “chosen lady” in 2 John and Paul's reference to women who teach in Titus 2:3ff. The “chosen lady” in 2 John is almost certainly not an individual woman but a reference to the church.¹⁶ (1) John uses the second person plural in verses 6, 8, 10, and 12. The plural demonstrates that he is not writing to one person only; he is writing to an entire church. (2) Second John is much more general and less specific than 3 John. Third John was clearly written to an individual, Gaius, but the lack of specificity in 2 John suggests that a community is being addressed rather than an individual. (3) The description of the church as a “lady” accords well with the rest of Scripture. Paul and John both portray the church as Christ's bride (Ephesians 5:22-33; Revelation 19:7). The new Jerusalem is described as a bride (Revelation 21:2). In the Old Testament, Israel is often portrayed as a woman (Isaiah 54:1; Jeremiah 6:23; 31:21; Lamentations 4:3, 22). (4) The distinction between the “lady” and “her children” in 2 John does not suggest that she is distinct from her children. The “lady” is the church as a whole; the “children” are simply the individual members of the church.

Those who find a reference to women elders in Titus 2:3 are clearly mistaken. Paul uses the word *presbytidas* here, which means “older women.” The usual word for “elders” who served in church office in the Bible is related but different: *presbyteros* (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22ff.; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; 1 Timothy 5:17, 19; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1, 5). Now, someone might say that Paul uses this different word because in Titus 2:3 he is referring to women elders. The problem with this is that the usual word for “elders,” *presbyteros*, could easily have been made feminine (*presbytera*) if Paul wanted to refer to women elders. Paul did not use a feminine form of the word *presbyteros* here; he used a distinct word that never refers to elders.

Titus 2:2 demonstrates clearly that Paul was not speaking of women elders in Titus 2:3. In verse 2, Paul addresses the “older men.” Now it is clear that Paul is not referring to elders here who hold a church office of authority, for he does not use the word that indicates such an office, *presbyteros*. Instead, Paul uses a word that always refers to “older men,” *presbytas* (cf. Luke 1:18; Philemon 9). Paul could have used the word for elders that conveys church office in Titus 2:2, but instead he used a distinct word that refers to older men. He uses the related word that refers to older women in Titus 2:3. Thus, there is no doubt that Paul is speaking of older women in Titus 2:3, not of women elders.

F. Women Apostles

Of course, if Junias was a woman apostle (Romans 16:7), then a tension is created between the apostleship of Junias (if Junias was a woman) and the other arguments adduced in this chapter, for apostles were certainly the most authoritative messengers of God in the New Testament. But it should be said from the outset that this passage is unclear. Now, some scholars contend that lack of clarity is also a problem in texts like 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15, but the passages are not analogous in one respect. The texts in First Corinthians and Timothy, although they have their difficulties, contain a sustained argument, and the basic thrust of the passages is clear. Here, however, we have a single verse, and the meaning of that verse is not altogether clear. The passage is unclear in three ways. (1) It cannot be definitely established that Junias was a woman. The name may be a contraction of a man’s name, Junianus.¹⁷ Of course, if this is true, then the text is irrelevant for the question before us. (2) Even though some scholars claim confidently that the verse means that Andronicus and Junias are outstanding apostles, it is also possible that the text is saying that they are “outstanding in the eyes of the apostles.” (3) Even if we grant that Paul is speaking of a woman and he designates her as a distinguished apostle, what does he mean by the word *apostle* here? It is by no means clear that he is assigning Junias the same position that he assigns to himself, the twelve, and James (1 Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 1:19). The word *apostle* in Paul could be used in a non-technical way refer to “messengers” or “representatives” (2 Corinthians 8:23; Philippians 2:25). In any case, the verse is too ambiguous to be used to establish the notion that there were female apostles in the technical sense. (See also Chapter 2, Question 38 in this volume.)

In contrast, it is remarkable that Jesus did not select a single female apostle, and the other clearly apostolic figures in the New Testament are men: Paul, James, and Barnabas. Not one indisputable example of a female apostle can be given in the

New Testament. G. Bilezikian says that Jesus chose twelve men to be His apostles because of the “cultural constraints” that would have made the ministry of women “unacceptable.”¹⁸ There are at least two problems with this view. (1) Nowhere else does Jesus give in to cultural pressures when a moral issue is at stake. To imply that He gave in for this reason impugns His courage and integrity. Jesus associated with tax-collectors and sinners, healed on the sabbath, commended Gentiles who had great faith, and rebuked the scribes and Pharisees. All of these actions brought considerable cultural pressure on Jesus, and yet He continued to do what He thought was right. Thus, it is unlikely that Jesus did not appoint a female apostle because of merely cultural reasons. (2) If, as Bilezikian asserts, Junias was an apostle, then Jesus’ reluctance to appoint a woman apostle becomes even more blameworthy. For just a few years after Jesus’ resurrection, the church (according to Bilezikian) is willing to appoint female apostles. Had the culture changed so dramatically in the few years since Jesus’ ministry that now such appointments were feasible? Bilezikian’s view suggests that the early church was even more courageous than Jesus, and this is surely incorrect!

It should also be said that some who argue for no restrictions on women in ministry argue from isolated and ambiguous verses, such as Romans 16:7 or Priscilla’s teaching of Apollos in Acts 18:26. Others have appealed to the fact that there were churches in a woman’s house, but that says nothing about who the leaders of the church were. The church met in Mary’s house in Acts 12:12, but there is no reason to think Mary was the leader of the church in that situation. If a woman has a Bible study in her house today, that is no indication that she is the leader of that study. It is also irrelevant to appeal to the fact that Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman, treated women with dignity, and appeared to them first after His resurrection. Of course, Jesus treated women with dignity and respect, and we should learn from His example. But such examples are not directly relevant in discussing women in leadership roles.

G. Conclusion In conclusion, men

In conclusion, men sometimes have gone farther than Scripture and suppressed the valuable ministry contributions of women. There are innumerable ministries with which a woman can become involved in order to further God’s kingdom on earth. The ministries women do become involved in, however, should be complementary and supportive of the male leadership in the church. Such a supportive ministry does not rule out every public ministry of women when men are present. Many borderline cases depend on the demeanor and attitude of women.¹⁹ There are inevitably some

gray areas in applying any basic principle of Scripture. Nevertheless, in my opinion, it is clear that Biblical writers consistently ascribe ultimate responsibility to men for the leadership of the church.

IV. Valuable Ministries of Women

This chapter should not end on a negative note, for even though there are some restrictions on women in ministry, we want to highlight the valuable ministries of women in the church today. One could get the impression from this chapter that the main burden of Scripture is to limit women in ministry. Actually, Scripture lays only a few restrictions upon women. Indeed, the possibilities for ministry for women are myriad. It is not the case that there is nothing for women to do and so they might as well while away their time watching television.

No woman could possibly say that if there are some restrictions on women in ministry, then there is nothing valuable for her to do. Surely there is more work to do than can possibly be accomplished by men alone. Billions of people need to hear the gospel (most of them women and children), many people in our culture are without Christ, or they are hurting in innumerable ways. There is so much to do to advance the gospel of Christ that no woman should fear that there is no place for her ministry.

One of the most significant ministries for women (and men too!) is prayer. Without prayer, God's kingdom work on earth will not advance. If in practice we put prayer low on the list of our priorities, then we are actually saying that it is not crucial. How we need a revival of prayer in the church today, and a seeking after God that is intense and full of faith! What a significant ministry women can have in prayer for the work of God on earth!²⁰ Both women and men should ask God to pour out His Spirit on us so that the message of the gospel will go forth in power.

Women have advanced the gospel in missions, are advancing it, and will continue to advance it. A wife can aid her husband in innumerable ways in setting up a mission station. And as a wife she can exert, by word and quiet example, a remarkable impact on a godless culture, especially since so many people in that culture will be women and children. And I think women can proclaim the gospel to men in those cultures, for 1 Timothy 2:11-15 prohibits only authoritative teaching to a group of Christians within the church, not evangelism to those outside the church. Such proclamation of the gospel is not limited to men. She should clearly explain, however (as many missionary women have done in history), that men should assume leadership roles in the governance and teaching ministry of the church as soon as it is established.

Titus 2:3-5 indicates that mature women have the responsibility of instructing younger women regarding a life of godliness. There are more women in evangelical churches today than men, and how the church needs godly women who will instruct younger women in the Christian life! Any woman who has a gift for teaching will find great fulfillment in instructing other women in this way. The church is in great need of women who are theologically and Biblically sound to instruct younger women in the matters of the faith.

There are also some ways in which women can instruct both men and women, in my opinion, if the function of authoritative teaching to men is not involved. Thus, it is appropriate for women who travel as speakers to address a mixed audience as articulate and thoughtful representatives of a feminine perspective on many experiences of life. One thinks here of the ministry of Elisabeth Elliot, whom God has used significantly. Moreover, women can exercise their creative gifts through writing, including the writing of curriculum, fiction, nonfiction, scholarly writing about Scripture, and editing. Several of today's most widely read Christian books have been written by women.

There are so many ministries today in which a woman can advance the cause of Christ and righteousness! I will list a few here so that one can get some idea of the wide scope available: engaging in personal witnessing and joining campus organizations committed to spreading the gospel, ministering to the sick and elderly, fighting against abortion, fighting against pornography, helping with literacy, writing to government leaders to support the cause of righteousness, helping the disabled, aiding the poor, ministering in prisons, counseling and praying with the troubled and confused, supporting missionaries and the church financially, visiting newcomers to the church, extending hospitality to the lonely, using artistic gifts by ministering in music, the visual arts, drama, and theater, helping in youth ministry, etc.

Probably one of the most significant ministry roles for women, although it is not their only role, is their role as wives and mothers. Paul says that mature women are to "train the younger women to love their husbands and children" (Titus 2:4). One thinks of the godly mothers in Scripture like Sarah, Hannah, Ruth, and Mary. What a significant role they played in the history of redemption as wives and mothers! Their influence on their husbands and children is still not fully known to us. Countless unknown wives and mothers have had a tremendous impact on their husbands and children, and the influence of these women will only be revealed on the day of redemption. What a tragedy it is that women's role as wives and mothers is often viewed as second best today! God has ordained that most women will find the greatest fulfillment in these very callings, and those who do should also realize that the example of their lives, lived faithfully with "the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit" (1 Peter 3:4), will have a lasting effect on many others around them.

Another area in which women can have a powerful ministry is with children in the church. Of course, not all women are intended to work with children. But churches are crying out today for women to work with children, and it is harder and harder to find women who are available. I think part of the reason is that our culture, even in the church, does not think such a ministry is very honorable or significant. Now, we need men to work with children as well, but, as other parts of this book show, women are particularly fitted by God to work with children. How we need women who love children to help mold our children in churches and schools by teaching and example!

Of course, other examples of significant ministry by women could be mentioned, but as we noted, the possibilities in a hurting and lost world are endless. God has fitted women for particular ministries for their own fulfillment and satisfaction and for His glory. Such ministry builds up the body of Christ so that the church can truly accomplish its work in the world.

12: Men and Women in the Image of God

John M. Frame

The idea that we are made in the image of God has given comfort and moral stimulus to many. But what does it mean? The basic idea is simple.¹ An “image” is a picture or statue. Israel was forbidden to worship images, but, perhaps surprisingly, Scripture teaches that there is a true image of God, ourselves.

An image *resembles* and *represents* the one it pictures.² Let us look at each of these functions in turn.

I. Resemblance

To say that we are God’s image is to say that we are like God. To be sure, in many ways God is very different from us (Isaiah 46:5; 55:8ff.). But Scripture often compares God to human beings, even deducing from our physical make-up what God must be like (Psalm 94:9). How are we like God?

A. Human Nature As Such

First, *everything we are* is like God. We *are* the image of God (1 Corinthians 11:7). To say we are “in” God’s image is to say that we are made “to be” the image of God.³

I would infer that everything we are reflects God in some way, though of course everything we are is also different from God! Our souls, bodies, reason, will, goodness are like God, but also unlike Him, for He is the Creator, paradigm and infinite exemplar of these qualities. Even sin images God in perverse sorts of ways. In sinning, Eve sought to be like God (Genesis 3:5), not by imitating His goodness, but by coveting His prerogatives. And all sin is moral decision, a faculty that we share uniquely with God and the angels.

So human nature itself is the image of God. But more must be said. The fact that we image God in the totality of our being does not discourage but rather encourages us to find more specific kinds of correspondence.⁴ So we move ahead.

B. Moral Excellence

When Scripture mentions specific ways in which people resemble God or Jesus Christ, it usually focuses on moral qualities like righteousness (Ephesians 4:24), ethical perfection (Matthew 5:48), purity (1 John 3:2ff., 9), love (John 13:14, 35ff.; Titus 3:4; 1 John 3:10, 16-18; 4:7-20), forgiveness (Matthew 6:14ff.; Colossians 3:13), humility (Philippians 2:3-11), holiness (Ephesians 4:24; Leviticus 19:1), and knowledge (Colossians 3:10).⁵ Following John Murray, I call these qualities of “moral excellence,” thereby distinguishing them from the mere fact (see below, C) that we are capable of making moral decisions.⁶ Moral qualities are important in Scripture, because Scripture is the story of how God restores His righteousness in the world.

God renews His people. And that renewal is a renewal in the image of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:49; 1 John 3:2ff.). Christian love is defined as the imitation of Jesus, especially His atonement (John 13:34ff.; 15:12; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 5:2; Philippians 2:5-11; 3:21; 1 John 3:11-16; 4:10ff.). Christ is *the* image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3, cf. John 1:18; 12:45; 14:9). Adam defaced the image of God in which he was made, but Jesus honored and glorified the God whom He supremely pictured and represented. Salvation transfers us from the old humanity dead in Adam to a new humanity alive in Christ (Romans 5:12-19; 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45-49). As Adam begat sons in his defaced image of God (Genesis 5:1ff.), so Christ’s children bear His pure image.⁷ Thus the Lord removes from us the distortions of the image due to sin and leads us toward a perfect likeness to God.

Illustration: In photocopying, you can make copies from another copy as long as the latter is perfect. If you try to copy from a defaced copy, you will get defaced images. The only recourse is to go back to the original or to a perfect copy. To be restored in God’s image, God must turn us away from our fallen nature in Adam and re-create us in Jesus Christ, who is both the original (John 1:1) and a perfect copy (Hebrews 1:3).

The Old Testament writers never said explicitly that the image of God was defaced by sin and required divine renewal. That theme emerges clearly for the first time in the New Testament, for the New Testament writers saw in Jesus what the image of God was really supposed to be.⁸

C. Moral Agency

Some theologians have argued that since God's image involves righteousness and holiness, Adam must have lost the image altogether when he fell into sin.⁹ The unredeemed sinner, surely, is bereft of ethical knowledge,¹⁰ righteousness and holiness (Genesis 6:5; 8:21; Romans 3:10-18; 8:5-8).¹¹ Scripture, however, does speak of man after the fall as bearing the image of God (see Genesis 5:1ff.; 9:6; 1 Corinthians 11:7; James 3:9).¹² We should expect that from the foregoing; had we lost the image of God after the fall, we would have lost our very humanity.

If that is so, then evidently the image does not consist only in the qualities of moral excellence discussed in the last section, though, as we have seen, Scripture has important reasons for stressing them. In what other ways do we reflect God?

Well, certainly our reasoning power, creativity, ability to use language, ability to sense moral distinctions and to make moral choices, and above all our religious capacity distinguish us from the animals (Genesis 1:27-30) and make us like God.

But beyond these, remember the fundamental principle: everything we are images God.

Sin disrupts and defaces the image, but it does not destroy our humanity. It is edifying (and appropriate to this volume!) to compare the God-human relationship with the man-woman relationship. As Scripture emphasizes the likeness between God and man, it also emphasizes the likeness between man and woman (Genesis 2:23). Human beings are to help God (1:28);¹³ woman is to help man (2:20; cf. my later discussion of 1 Corinthians 11:7). Both relationships are hurt by sin, but the fundamental likeness on which they are based remains.¹⁴

D. The Body

Our fundamental principle, that everything human images God, requires us to hold that the human body, also, images God. Some theologians have denied that the body bears God's image, first because God has no body, and second because the commandment against idolatry seems to assume that God has no physical image. But the prohibition of idolatry is not based on the lack of a divine image, but on God's jealousy (Exodus 20:5).¹⁵

As to the objection that God has no body: True enough, but there are ways in which a body can picture a spirit. Psalm 94:9 asks, "Does he who implanted the ear not hear? Does he who formed the eye not see?" God does not have literal ears or eyes, but our ears and eyes image His ability to hear and see.

The body is an important aspect of human nature. We (not just our bodies) are made of dust (Genesis 2:7; 3:19). Sin pertains to the body as much as to the spirit (Romans 6:6). Even a dead body is a person, considered from his physical side (Matthew 28:6; John 5:28; 11:11ff., 43; 1 Corinthians 15:6, 18; 1 Thessalonians 4:13ff.). It is we ourselves who “return” to the dust (Genesis 3:19). The incarnate Son of God is both body and spirit, and His physical presence on earth was essential to His saving work (1 John 1:1-3; 4:1-3). So was His physical resurrection, which serves as the pattern for our resurrection (Romans 8:11, 23; Philippians 3:21). The division between soul and body on a person’s death is something unnatural, a result of the fall.¹⁶

E. Sexual Differentiation As is appropriate to this volume

As is appropriate to this volume on Biblical manhood and womanhood, I have of course been laying a foundation to investigate how our sexual differences relate to the image of God. Our fundamental principle is that everything we are images God. Therefore (especially since the body itself participates in the image), we would expect that our sexual and social diversity, also, would picture God in some way.

1. The first thing that must be said is that both men and women are made in God’s image (see especially Genesis 1:27; 2:20, 23; 5:1 ff.).

Hurley points out that *man* in 1:26 and 27 is a collective noun (*adam* = “mankind”). The plural membership of that collectivity is indicated by the phrase “male and female” in verse 27, and then to both male and female is given the task appropriate to those created in the image of God (verse 28).¹⁷ Any limitation of the image of God based on sexuality would also contradict the thrust of Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9: such limitation would imply that only males are protected against murder and slander because only they are in God’s image. Re-creation in God’s image also applies without sexual distinction (Colossians 3:9-11; and compare Galatians 3:26 with verse 28).

2. Are men and women equally in the image of God?

Some have answered in the negative because of Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 11:7, “A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.”

I agree with C. K. Barrett¹⁸ that “in this context Paul values the term *image* only as leading to the term *glory*.” The reference to “image” is incidental to Paul’s purpose, and therefore not mentioned with respect to woman; but it notifies his readers of the Old Testament basis for saying that man is the *glory* of God, “glory” and “image” being roughly, but not entirely, synonymous.

“Glory” in this context is the honor that one person brings to another. Man, Paul says, was made to honor God. Of course, woman was also made to honor God; but in addition, she is also made for a second purpose: to honor man. God made her specifically to be a helper for Adam (Genesis 2:18, 20; cf. Proverbs 12:4; Ephesians 5:25-29).¹⁹ Man honors or glorifies God by uncovering his head, for covering the head connoted subservience to another creature.²⁰ Such subservience to men is especially inappropriate for a male prophet, whose whole function is to speak for God, or for one leading in public prayer, whose whole function is to lead the people to God’s own throne. Woman, however, even when prophesying or praying in public, must not only honor God, but also honor man. Indeed, she honors God when she honors the specific task of “helper” for which God made her. Unlike the man, then, she honors God best by displaying a symbol by which she honors her fellow-creature.

Does such subordination itself detract from her capacity to image God? That is an important question for us to ask at this point. But the answer must surely be negative: (a) Men too are always placed in relations of subordination to other people (Exodus 20:12; Romans 13:1; Hebrews 13:17),²¹ but that does not prejudice their being the image of God.

(b) Jesus Himself became subordinate to His Father, even subordinate to human authority structures, in order to redeem us. Human authority, therefore, imaging Jesus, is to be a servant-authority (Matthew 20:20-28). A willingness to subordinate oneself to others for God’s sake is, indeed, itself a component of the image, not a compromise thereof. Even submission to *unjust* authority shows a special likeness to Christ (1 Peter 2:12, 19-25; 3:14-18).²²

(c) It is often by submitting to others that we best display the ethical components of the divine image. How better to demonstrate God’s love, His patience, His gentleness, His self-control, than by submitting to others?

3. *Is sexual difference itself the image of God?*

Karl Barth’s famous discussion says that it is.²³ Genesis 1:27 may be divided into three parts: (a) “So God created man in his own image,” (b) “In the image of God he created him,” (c) “Male and female he created them.” Barth argues that (b) and (c)

form a “synonymous parallelism,” typical of Hebrew poetry. Therefore, says Barth, the writer believed that the difference between male and female *is* the image of God. Some problems, however, attach to this idea:

(a) If this is the proper reading of Genesis 1:27, it would seem odd that this concept of the image is not found, suggested, or even alluded to elsewhere in the Bible. Indeed, as we have seen, Scripture elsewhere describes the image in other ways that, to say the least, would be hard to integrate with Barth’s definition, should we adopt it.

(b) Although there is a corporate aspect of the image (see F below), the image also pertains to individual human beings. That is evident in Genesis 5:3, where Adam transmits his “image” (the image of God, according to verse 1) to his son Seth. That is also evident in Genesis 9:6; 1 Corinthians 11:7; James 3:9; Colossians 3:10, and elsewhere. But individual human beings are *either* male *or* female, not “male *and* female,” as in Genesis 1:27c. Therefore, the bearer of the image need not be “male *and* female” as Barth suggests.

(c) Scripture never represents God as sexually differentiated or as entering into marriage with Himself, although to be sure there are trinitarian pluralities within the one divine nature. It would therefore be odd to claim that sexuality is the *essence* of the divine image, though I do believe that it (together with everything else we are) is a component thereof.

(d) Meredith G. Kline presents a devastating exegetical critique of Barth’s position.²⁴ He argues that the reference to “male and female” in Genesis 1:27 cannot state the essence of the image of God, because (i) it is not found in the statement of the divine intention in verse 26; (ii) sections (a) and (b) of verse 27 form a complete synonymous parallelism without 27c; so 27c serves, not as an additional parallel, but as a further description of *how* man is created in God’s image. The point is simply that the image of God extends to both men and women (same in 5:1ff.); (iii) In Kline’s view, 27c and 5:2a also point ahead to the following contexts. The “male and female” in 27c describes a prerequisite for the subduing of the earth in 28ff. In 5:2a, it presents the scope of the divine blessing in 5:2b.

(e) Barth does not stop with saying that the image is human sexual differentiation. Perhaps realizing the implausibility of that notion, he says that the sexual difference is only the original concrete form of *social* relationships that are more properly the content of the divine image.²⁵ There is some truth in this idea (see F below), but: (i) Though social differentiation is an aspect of the image, it is not the essence or definition of the image (see below). (ii) This move increases the exegetical implausibility of Barth’s proposal. If it is unlikely that the writer of Genesis identified

the image with sexual difference, it is even less likely that he was using that sexual difference as a kind of stand-in for social differentiation in general. Nothing else in Scripture suggests such an idea.²⁶

4. *Is sexual differentiation an aspect of the image?*

Yes, for everything we are images God. The point is not that God is male, female, or both. To say that our eyes image God, remember, is not to say that God has eyes; it is rather to say that our eyes picture something divine. Similarly, our sexuality pictures God's attributes and capacities:

(a) It mirrors God's creativity, by which He brings forth sons and daughters (John 1:12; Romans 8:14ff.; etc.).

(b) The love of a husband for his wife pictures God's love for His people (Ezekiel 16; Hosea 1-3; Ephesians 5:25-33).

(c) Scripture describes God both in male and in female terms, though the overwhelming preponderance of imagery is male. The reason, I think, is basically that Scripture wants us to think of God as *Lord* (Exodus 3:14; 6:3, 7; 33:19; 34:5ff.; Deuteronomy 6:4ff.; cf. Romans 10:9f; 1 Corinthians 12:3; Philippians 2:11), and lordship, in Scripture, always connotes authority.²⁷ Since in the Biblical view women are subject to male authority in the home and the church,²⁸ there is some awkwardness in speaking of God in female terms. Our need today, in my opinion, is for a far greater appreciation of the *Lordship* of God and of Christ.²⁹ Therefore, in my view, the movement to use unisex or female language in referring to God is fundamentally wrongheaded from a Biblical perspective.

(d) Nevertheless, the very submission of the woman also images God. See E(2) above. God the Lord is not too proud to be our "helper." Christ the Lord is not unwilling to be a servant. Godly women stand as models, often as rebukes, to all who would be leaders (Matthew 20:20-28).³⁰

F. Social Differentiation

As we saw earlier, Barth regards the "sexual image" as a kind of stand-in for a "social image." We image God, he thinks, in social relationships.³¹ For reasons noted, I reject the *identification* of the image with such relationships. Individuals, not just corporate groups, are in the image of God. On the other hand, there is a social aspect of the image, for the image contains everything human. In the Old Testament,

God speaks as a plurality (Genesis 1:26; 3:5, 22; 11:7; Isaiah 6:8), which may reflect His trinitarian nature or, perhaps more likely, a heavenly “society” or “council” that God shares with His angels (Psalm 89:7).³² The New Testament reveals God Himself as a Trinity, a society of Father, Son and Spirit. The task associated with the image (Genesis 1:28) is one that no one can perform fully as an individual. Through Scripture, God calls to Himself as his children not only individuals, but also families, nations, churches. Like godly individuals, godly families image God (Ephesians 5:22-6:4, noting 5:1; 1 Peter 3:1-7, noting 2:21-25; 4:1, 13-16). Godly nations also display the Lord’s righteousness, peace, and glory. Preeminently, however, the corporate image of Christ in the world today is His body, the church. Note Romans 12:4ff.; 1 Corinthians 12:12ff.; Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 1:18, which show the corporateness of the body figure in the New Testament.³³

Does a group image God better than an individual? Well, groups do resemble God in ways that individuals cannot by themselves, e.g., in taking counsel together or in displaying love for one another. Even the unity of God is imaged by the corporate body: note how in John 17 the unity of believers pictures the oneness of God the Father and God the Son. However, individuals in Scripture often image God precisely as they stand against the group, the crowd. Individuals, as we have seen, do bear the image of God (Genesis 9:6; 1 Corinthians 11:7; Colossians 3:10; James 3:9). There is not much value, I think, in such comparisons. God is one and many and is properly imaged both by groups and by individuals.

II. Representation

We have been discussing the image as resemblance; now we look at the image as representation. The distinction between resemblance and representation corresponds to the differences between structure and function and between nature and task.

Like the image of King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 3:1-6), images in the ancient world often represented those whose images they bore. Loyalty to the image was a form of loyalty to the one whose image it bore. Similarly, Adam represents God in the world. He does God’s work, but under God: the task of ruling and filling the earth (Genesis 1:28). God is Lord, and Adam is God’s assistant or vassal lord.

Elsewhere I have defined God’s Lordship in terms of control, authority, presence.³⁴ “Control” is His working out “everything in conformity with the purpose of his will” (Ephesians 1:11). “Authority” means that He is the supreme lawgiver of the universe, the One whom all people and things *ought* to obey. “Presence” is God’s will to be

“with” His creatures, in various ways. He takes Abraham’s family to be His people. He dwells with them in the tabernacle and the temple. Indeed, He dwells throughout His whole creation, so that we can never escape His presence (Psalm 139:7).

As vassal lord, Adam is to extend God’s *control* over the world (“subdue” in Genesis 1:28). He has the right to name the animals, an exercise of *authority* in ancient thinking (Genesis 2:19ff.; cf. 2:23; 3:20, where he also names his wife!). And he is to “fill” the earth with his *presence*.

This dominion mandate continues after the fall (Genesis 9:1-3). But human beings apart from God’s grace are unable to accomplish God’s original purpose to subdue and fill the earth *to God’s glory*. Hence Jesus proclaimed the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19ff.), also a command about filling and subduing, but in this case by the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. As evangelists, we are in a special sense God’s representatives on earth (Matthew 5:14; 2 Corinthians 5:20; Philippians 2:14ff.).

Hence Scripture emphasizes the doctrines of sonship, adoption, and inheritance (John 1:12; Romans 8:14ff.; Galatians 3:26ff.; Hebrews 2:10; 1 John 3:1ff.). In these respects, man and woman share equally—Scripture makes no sexual distinction in such things. Indeed, Galatians 3:26 (“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus”) precedes by two verses the famous “There is neither . . . male [n]or female. . . .” And, as we have seen, “male and female” equally are given the original dominion mandate (Genesis 1:27ff.).

Men and women, then, both have authority. But they are also under authority. There is no inconsistency there. Jesus Himself is both Lord and servant. A man rules his family, but he is subordinate to his employer and to the civil magistrate. A woman may have legitimate authority over her children (Exodus 20:12), her household (presumably including both children and servants, 1 Timothy 5:14), other women (Titus 2:4), a business (Proverbs 31:10-31), and the earth as part of Christ’s body (Genesis 1:28; 1 Corinthians 3:21), even (in some sense) over everyone in her ministry as a prophet of God (Judges 4:4; Acts 2:17; 21:9; 1 Corinthians 11:5, 10).³⁵ But these facts do not conflict with the rule that a wife must be subject to her husband in the home and to male elders in the church (cf. above, I.E.2).

Citing Matthew 8:9, Stephen B. Clark well observes that one’s own authority often finds its *basis* in submission to another.³⁶ Even the authority of prophets, priests, and kings in Scripture is based on their submission to God’s higher authority. Thus the head covering of the woman (1 Corinthians 11:3-16), a sign of submission, also enables her to pray and prophesy in public.

Summary and Conclusion

Women and men equally image God, even in their sexual differences, even in their differences with regard to authority and submission. The reason is that the image of God embraces everything that is human. Both men and women, therefore, resemble God and are called to represent Him throughout the creation, exercising control, authority, and presence in His name. This doctrine is not at all inconsistent with the subordination of women to men in the home and in the church. All human beings are under authority, both divine and human. Their submission to authority, as well as their authority itself, images God.

Note: Will We Be Male and Female in Heaven?

Scripture doesn't explicitly address this question, so we should not be dogmatic in trying to answer it. But some broad Biblical principles may lead us in one direction or another.

We might be inclined to answer "no" to this question because of Jesus' statement in Matthew 22:30 that resurrected saints will neither marry nor give in marriage. In the resurrection, earthly families will be overshadowed by the great family of God (cf. Luke 20:36).

I am, however, inclined toward an affirmative answer: (1) Those who appear after death in Scripture always appear similar to their earthly forms (1 Samuel 28:11-15; Matthew 17:1-13; 27:52ff.; Revelation 11:1-12). I would assume that the men continued to appear as bearded (if they wore beards on earth), speaking with masculine voices. This fact seems to yield some presumption, at least, that we retain our sexual characteristics after death.

(2) Even angels (whom Jesus says we will resemble in the resurrection) to appear in Scripture as men, rather than as women or as asexual beings (Genesis 18:2, 16, 22; Joshua 5:13; Hebrews 13:2).

(3) Jesus' resurrection body also resembled the form He bore on earth, even down to the wounds in His hands and side (John 20:25, 27), although His new existence is mysterious in many ways. At the resurrection appearances, I have no doubt that the disciples saw a male figure.

(4) Sexuality, as we have seen, is part of the image of God, part of what it now means to be human. It is possible that this resemblance might in the next life be

replaced with other kinds of resemblance. ("Image of God," we will recall, covers much territory.) But if we lose our sexuality, why should we not also lose our arms, eyes, and brains?

(5) Our sex organs and secondary sexual characteristics have functions other than procreation. They also image different attributes of God and express the variety of human personality. Sex, after all, is not just reproductive capacity. Stereotypes aside, men and women do differ in personality and in the distribution of their spiritual gifts. The body of a godly woman often serves as an appropriate accompaniment to her personality, reinforcing our impression of her inner meekness and quiet strength. Similarly for men, *mutatis mutandis*. We would, I think, sense something odd if Mother Teresa's personality were found in the body of, say, Sylvester Stallone, or vice versa.

So here's a weak vote in favor of the affirmative: I rather *suspect* that we will still be male and female in the resurrection.

13: The Church as Family: Why Male Leadership in the Family Requires Male Leadership in the Church

Vern Sheridan Poythress

The Bible teaches us to call God “our Father” (Matthew 6:9). We who are redeemed by Jesus Christ are children of God (Galatians 4:1-7). These two Biblical affirmations are among many in which the Bible employs an analogy between a human family and the church. By means of this family analogy God makes some of His most precious promises to us concerning His present love, our future inheritance, and our intimate fellowship with Him (for example, Romans 8:12-17; Hebrews 12:5-11; Revelation 21:7).

The practical implications of these “family teachings” are so deep and so many-sided that we can never fully fathom them. Let us here concentrate only on one strand of implications, those for our conduct toward one another within the Christian community. The Bible invites us to use these family teachings to draw some particular inferences about the respective roles of men and women within the church. In brief, the argument runs as follows: Just as husbands and fathers ought to exercise godly leadership in their human families, so wise, mature men ought to be appointed as fatherly leaders in the church (1 Timothy 3:1-7). A particularly important role also belongs to more mature women (1 Timothy 5:9-16; Titus 2:3-5). Like wise mothers of the church, they are to train their spiritual daughters by example and word. But just as in the case of marriage (Ephesians 5:22-33), the respective functions of men and women are not reversible in all respects. Men—and not women—are called on to exercise the decisive fatherly leadership as elders.

New Testament Teaching Comparing the People of God to a Family

Now let us look in detail at the steps in the argument. First, consider the variety of New Testament teachings comparing the people of God to a family.¹ The confession that God is our Father belongs to a most fundamental strand of New Testament teaching, beginning with Jesus’ model prayer in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:9) and continuing through the many instances where God is called “God the Father.” The Bible never simply means that God is the Creator of all human beings. Having God as Father implies having intimate family fellowship with Him (Romans 8:14-17) and reflecting His holy character (1 Peter 1:14-17). Christ the only Son of

God has God as His Father in a unique sense. In addition to Him, only Christians, that is, those who have received the Spirit of Christ, are rightly able to cry, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15). Those outside of Christ have the devil as their father and want to carry out their father's desires (John 8:44; cf. 1 John 5:19).

Thus, Christians are called "sons of God" and "children of God," in pointed contrast to non-Christians, who are outside God's family (1 John 5:1-5). To be called a child of God has many implications. We have intimate fellowship with God the Father (Romans 8:15). Jesus Christ is our elder brother (Romans 8:29). We are legally adopted out of a situation of bondage (Galatians 4:1-7). We are no longer slaves (Galatians 4:7; Romans 8:15). We are to receive the full inheritance from God as co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). We are conformed to the pattern of death and resurrection life established through Christ (Romans 8:11-13). We share in the common family Spirit, the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14-15). We are remade in God's image (Romans 8:29). We are born from God (1 John 5:4; John 1:12-13). As obedient children, we are to imitate the good character of our Father (Ephesians 5:1; 1 Peter 1:14-17).

Because God is our Father in this intimate sense, and because Jesus Christ is our brother and our all-sufficient advocate to the Father, we do not need any other human intermediary to bring us into contact with God. In relation to God the Father, we are brothers to all other Christians. We are to be servants to one another, and no one of us is to lord it over the others (Mark 10:42-45). Hence Jesus specifically criticizes the use of honorific titles that might contradict our status as children and undermine our sense of intimacy with God:

But you are not to be called "Rabbi," for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth "father," for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called "teacher," for you have one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. (Matthew 23:8-12)

Jesus' own emphasis on humility and service and the larger context of Matthew 23, where Jesus is criticizing the Pharisees, indicate that Jesus is not setting forth a legalistic rule about the mere verbal use of the words "father" and "teacher." Rather, He is criticizing an attitude of the heart. We must always recognize the fundamental character of Christian brotherhood. Our common status as brothers implies that we should submit to Christ and serve one another.

In fact, then, Jesus' teaching is complementary to other teachings in the New Testament epistles that do assign a special role to pastors and teachers (for example, Ephesians 4:11). The most fundamental relationship is the Father-son relationship between God and Christian believers. But God's fatherly care ought to

be reflected in the care Christians exercise towards one another within the church. For example, Christ is our Teacher in a most exalted sense (Matthew 23:10; John 13:13-14). From the fullness of His wisdom and His teaching gifts, He has distributed gifts to the church and thereby makes some people into subordinate or assistant teachers (Ephesians 4:7, 11). Christ is our Shepherd in a unique sense (John 10:11-18). He also imparts gifts to human beings who then become under-shepherds (1 Peter 5:1-4). God the Father and Christ are the ultimate models we ought to imitate (1 Peter 1:14-15; Romans 8:29). But in a subordinate sense we are supposed to imitate the good examples set by more mature believers (1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:4, 7).

God's Household in 1 Timothy

The theme of family relationships is particularly prominent in Paul's First Letter to Timothy. Paul repeatedly invokes the analogy of a family in order to enable Timothy better to understand the appropriate order and responsibilities within the Christian church. Paul calls Timothy his "son," expressing both his affection and the discipling relationship between them (1 Timothy 1:2, 18). He advises Timothy to treat an older man "as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters" (1 Timothy 5:1-2). If a widow has children or grandchildren, they should look after her (1 Timothy 5:4). But if the immediate family is lacking, the larger Christian family should care for her (1 Timothy 5:5, 16).

The overseers or elders ought to be respectable family men:²

Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to much wine, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) (1 Timothy 3:2-5)

The requirement concerning "managing his own family well" is particularly important, because the same wisdom and skills necessary for good family management apply also to the management of God's church.³

Finally, the Apostle Paul explicitly indicates the prominent role of the family theme in 1 Timothy 3:14-15:

Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

In fact, these verses summarize the thrust of the whole letter. The phrase “these instructions” is most naturally understood as referring to the contents of the letter as a whole. Thus the letter as a whole has the purpose of indicating “how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household.”

The reference to “God’s household” could theoretically involve either of two ideas, namely, the idea of communion with God in the “house” or “temple” of God, or the idea of a household managed by God. In some contexts within the Bible, the idea of God dwelling among His people as in a temple is emphasized (1 Corinthians 3:10-17). But in the context of 1 Timothy, the idea of household order and arrangements is obviously the most prominent. The order of the church is analogous to the order of a human household. Members of the church are to treat one another as they would members of their own family (1 Timothy 5:1-2). They are to care for one another in need (1 Timothy 5:5, 16). The overseers are to be men skillful at managing the household of God, as demonstrated by their earlier skill with their own immediate families (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

The Use of the Household Idea as the Basis for Inferences

In 1 Timothy the fundamental household analogy is not merely confined to one or two incidental illustrations or colorful flourishes of rhetoric. Rather, it is used as a basis for arguments and inferences concerning Christian responsibilities. The central role of the analogy is particularly clear in 1 Timothy 3:4-5, which concludes with the sobering question, “If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?” Paul in effect presents an argument: good family leadership *must* be one of the criteria for appointment to a position of overseer because the very same skills and competencies are required for overseeing “one’s own house” and the Christian “house.” Paul does not expect Timothy simply to take Paul’s word for the fact that such-and-such a criterion is suitable for elders. He expects Timothy to see the wisdom—yes, the inevitability—of this criterion on the basis of the validity of the analogy. Indirectly, Timothy is presumably even being invited to use the same argument himself, if someone else should have doubts about the matter.

Similarly, in 1 Timothy 5:1-2 we can see the beginnings of an argument. “Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.” The key comparative word *as* might possibly be interpreted as

introducing mere illustrations. But all the illustrations are of exactly the same type, in that they all use the analogy between church and family. In view of the general statement about conduct in “God’s household” in 1 Timothy 3:14-15, the comparisons in 5:1-2 are to be seen as so many ways of fleshing out the implications of being a member of God’s household. We can perceive the obligatory nature of the inferences. You *must* treat the older men like fathers, the younger men like brothers, etc., not only because in some very general sense you must love them, but because you are part of the very same spiritual household. Conduct toward any other member of the household must take into account not merely sweepingly general obligations to love but the concrete distinctions introduced by differences in status within the household: treating some like fathers, others like brothers, others like mothers, others like sisters. Hence, 1 Timothy 5:12 presupposes the structure of an argument. The church is like a family. Therefore you must treat fellow church members like fellow family members.

The household analogy appears, then, to be one constituent element in Paul’s own approach to articulating the nature of Christian church order. In fact, it might easily be one means by which the Holy Spirit led Paul himself to grasp the teaching that he presents in the pastoral letters (1-2 Timothy and Titus). Of course, we do not know for certain. Paul received spectacular special revelations from the Lord (Acts 9:1-8; Galatians 1:16; 2 Corinthians 12:1-7). But he was also one who had “the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16). Through the wisdom and insight that the Holy Spirit had given to Paul, he understood the basic principles of Christianity in tremendous depth. Under the gentle superintendence of the Spirit, he was able to give inspired teaching in his letters even on matters that his spectacular experiences had not directly addressed.⁴ Moreover, the Apostle Paul wants all Christians to arrive at a deep, principial understanding of the Christian faith. The Corinthians are rebuked for being carnal, not having the mind of Christ as he does (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). In Romans 12:1-2, Paul urges upon all the necessity of growing in their grasp of the will of God, concluding, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Similarly he says, “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:10-11).

How, then, do we know what sort of order is appropriate for Christian communal life? We know, in part, because Paul tells us in his letters. But how did Paul himself know? And how does he expect us to apply his teachings in circumstances slightly different from the ones he addressed in his letters? Paul had such wisdom partly

because he had deeply absorbed the fundamental teaching of Christ about God being our Father and about Christ's saving work on the cross. Christ's work reconciled us to God and gave us intimate family communion with God, the communion of sons (Galatians 4:1-7). We are members of God's family. That family structure of God's church has definite implications about the specific forms of love to be exercised within the family (1 Timothy 3:1-7), the specific kind of management needed in dealing with family needs (1 Timothy 3:8-13), and so on.

In fact, almost the whole of 1 Timothy may be seen as a catalog of types of behavior and organization needed in a harmonious family. True doctrine is necessary because the family needs to know its own rules (1 Timothy 1:3-11, 18-20). Doctrine is therefore foundational for all the more specific kinds of organization and mutual relations within the family. Mercy and forgiveness bind the family together (1 Timothy 1:12-17). Protection is necessary from destructive outside interference and for the benefit of the family's relations to the larger world (2:17). The men in the family must not generate strife among themselves but be united in petitions (2:8). The women must devote themselves to family service and not to frivolities (2:9-10) or to usurping authority over men (2:11-14). The family must have wise, competent overseers (3:1-7). It must have wise care for family needs (3:8-13). In every respect it must conform to divine order (3:14-16). Proper rules and examples from the leaders are most important (4:1-16). Family members must all treat one another with the respect and honor and sensitivity appropriate to their mutual status (5:1-6:2). Those in need must be cared for, preferably by those closest to them (5:3-10). Use of money must support family goals (6:6-10, 17-19).

In sum, the theme of God's household runs through 1 Timothy and is validly used as the basis for inferences about Christian behavior, not merely as an incidental illustration.

Male Leadership in the Church

The central use of the household analogy naturally points toward inferences regarding authoritative leadership in the church. The leadership within a family is vested in the husband and father (Ephesians 5:22-6:4).⁵ The church as God's household also needs wise and competent leadership. That leadership is to be sought among men who have already shown their abilities in the context of their immediate families (1 Timothy 3:1-7). Women, by contrast, are not to be placed in authority in the church, because such a role would not harmonize with the general relations between men and women in marriage, as established at creation (1

Timothy 2:11-14).⁶ Thus, the differences between men and women within the context of marriage and family carry over into differences in roles that men and women may assume within the church.

Such a set of inferences is natural, once we have noticed the decisive connection between the natural family and the church as our spiritual family. But do these inferences really hold up? Let us look at the distinct steps more closely.

First, do families have a God-ordained structure of leadership and authority? Do husbands have a unique responsibility for leadership within the family? Ephesians 5:22-6:4 and Colossians 3:18-21 indicate that they do.

Second, are there irreversible relations of leadership and submission within the church? Clearly there are. The very title “overseer” used in 1 Timothy 3:1 indicates a position involving exercise of leadership. These overseers are also described as “elders” in Titus 1:5, 1 Peter 5:1-4, Acts 20:28-31. They are worthy of honor, especially when they discharge their responsibilities of leadership well (1 Timothy 5:17). Hebrews 13:17 makes it very clear that they deserve our obedience: “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

In fact, principles of submission should operate more broadly in the relations between older people and younger. Humility should characterize everyone (1 Peter 5:5b-6). But the younger men are particularly called on to be submissive to the older men (1 Peter 5:5). Paul counsels Timothy to exhort an older man “as if he were your father” (1 Timothy 5:1). Clearly, different people are to be treated differently, in accordance with the kind of people they are.

Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity. (1 Timothy 5:1-2)

In fundamental matters pertaining to our relation to the Lord, all of us enjoy the same privileges.⁷ We have all been justified by faith (Romans 5:1). We have all become a kingdom of priests and share in a heavenly inheritance (1 Peter 2:9-10; Ephesians 1:3-14). We have all put on Christ and are children of Abraham (Galatians 3:27-29). We are all members of God’s family or household. But these fundamental privileges enhance rather than eliminate the distinctiveness of our gifts (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). Our privileges should stimulate rather than destroy our concern to treat each person in the church with the sensitivity and respect due to that person by reason of his or her gifts, age, sex, leadership status, and personality.⁸ Such is Paul’s point in the text of 1 Timothy 5:1-2 given above. Timothy

is not exhorted to treat each person in a manner mechanically identical with every other person, but to take into account the full range of personal factors that go into an intimate family relationship. Each person in God's household is not an abstract, faceless mask to be treated according to an invariant recipe, but a full person who is to be recognized as such—as a man or a woman, an older person or younger, an adult or a child.

Must the church's leaders or overseers be men? The Apostle Paul assumes that they are to be men rather than women when he describes them as "the husband of but one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2). But could not this expression be incidental? We must consider carefully whether Paul's rule here is intended to be absolute.

According to Paul, the fundamental principles regarding the structures of the human family are to be applied to the church as God's household (1 Timothy 3:15). Our personal relations to others in God's household should take into account what kind of persons they are, whether young or old, male or female (1 Timothy 5:1-2). In particular, the structure of family leadership is to be carried over into God's household: qualified men are to be appointed as overseers, that is, fathers of the church. A woman, however capable and gifted she may be, can never become a father of a family. As a woman, she is simply not so constituted. Likewise, a woman may never become a father in God's household. She may indeed become a "mother" in God's household, and exercise the roles indicated in 1 Timothy 5:2; 3:11; 5:9-10, 14; Titus 2:3-5; 2 Timothy 1:5. The life of the church never overthrows but rather enhances the life of the family, based on God's design from creation.

Such reasoning on Paul's part is the best context for understanding Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 2:8-15. There Paul sets out distinctive responsibilities for men (2:8) and women (2:9-15). The necessity of such distinction is best understood as flowing from the fact that men and women are not interchangeable within God's household, just as they are not within human families. Under the topic of women's responsibilities, beginning in 2:9, Paul includes the statement that a woman is not "to teach or to have authority over a man" (2:12). According to our previous arguments, this conclusion is a natural outcome of the analogy between the church and the human family, in which the wife is not to have authority over her husband (Ephesians 5:22-24). Paul then appeals to the background of the order of creation (2:13), in which the pattern for a husband's authority is initially established.⁹ He also appeals to the fall (2:14), in which male and female roles were not identical. Paul concludes with a reminder of one of the central and proper services of women, the bearing of children (2:15). This particular distinctive service by women reminds us more broadly of the larger responsibilities that women have in rearing children within a family.¹⁰ Thus the whole passage organizes itself naturally once we understand the centrality of the idea of family and the fruitfulness of using human households as a basis for

discerning people's responsibilities within God's household.

In sum, Paul bases his reasoning on general principles, going back ultimately to the Biblical account in Genesis 2 and 3. Paul has an understanding of God's plans and purposes in creating marriage and the family. Paul teaches that in the church, God's household, women are not to exercise authority over men, just as in a human family they are not to exercise authority over their husbands. Paul understands the position of overseer as involving the exercise of fatherly care over God's household. Hence women are excluded from being overseers on the basis of general Biblical principles concerning the family, not on the basis of some temporary circumstances.

The Inevitability of Inferences Concerning People's Distinctive Roles

The conclusions that we have reached concerning distinctive roles of men and women in the church will doubtless be resisted in certain quarters. Nevertheless, in my opinion, church life in line with such conclusions inevitably results from the robust practice of Christian obedience and love within the body of Christ. Only temporary circumstances and difficulties within the body of Christ and within the surrounding society make genuinely Biblical practices seem less inevitable or even counterintuitive. Let us see how the process works.

Robust Christianity begins with fervent faith in Christ. When in faith we behold Christ in His true beauty and love, we begin to respond with vigorous love for Him. Love for Christ is in turn expressed and reflected in love for fellow Christians (1 John 4:20-21).

In particular, Christian love transforms the family. Husbands and wives begin to practice the Word of God in Ephesians 5:22-33 and begin to imitate the love that Christ has for the church and the submission that the church ought to practice to Christ. Christian love at its best and most intense is not merely a general, vague sentiment of love or an undefined impulse to do good. It is love in union with Christ. Our love ought to be enlivened by the supreme example of Christ, empowered by the resurrection of Christ, embodied in the practice of following Christ. In the family, such love will never find itself able to dispense with the power generated by the Christological analogy of Ephesians 5:22-33 and the Old Testament discourses about God as husband to Israel (for example, Hosea 2; Ezekiel 16; Isaiah 54:5-6). According to Ephesians 5:22-23, husbands have responsibilities like those of Christ, while wives have responsibilities like those of the church. The responsibilities are not

simply interchangeable, any more than the roles of Christ and the church are interchangeable. The Bible thus moves us away from any pure identity in the roles of husbands and wives. The husbands grow in imitation of the love of Christ and the wives grow in imitation of the submission of the church. The roles of husband and wife are not reversible. The Bible contradicts radical egalitarian philosophy, that is, a philosophy that says that men and women are in virtually all respects interchangeable and that their roles ought to have no relation to their sexual constitution.

Of course there is *some* degree of overlap in the ways in which we may describe the responsibilities of husbands and wives. Though Ephesians 5 does not put it this way, it is nevertheless true that husbands ought to minister to the needs of their wives just as Christ serves the needs of the church, and wives ought to love their husbands as the church loves Christ. But the duties and practices of husbands and wives are not purely identical and interchangeable, precisely because they are modeled even more deeply on the irreversible Biblical patterns given once for all in the accomplishment of redemption through Jesus Christ.

Thus Christian marital practice gradually moves beyond the pure egalitarianism of some people and the immature domineering of others. Different Christian marriages may still have many differences, corresponding to the different gifts and different personalities of the two partners. But, as Christ transforms a marriage, a responsibility of overall family leadership and “headship”¹¹ begins to be practiced by husbands in distinction from wives.

Christian love also binds together all the members of the universal church. Since God is our Father, we really are in a fundamental sense one family. The Holy Spirit as the Spirit of the family gives us yearnings toward our fellow family members. In the long run, Christians cannot be satisfied with nothing more than a large, anonymous meeting once or twice a week. The ties of love demand more frequent and more intimate relations, perhaps alongside a Sunday morning meeting with a very large group.

As Christians meet with one another and know one another more intimately, their sense of being one family grows. They begin to treat one another in the way Paul counsels: the older men as fathers, the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, the younger women as sisters (1 Timothy 5:1-2). People are no longer faceless masks, but real people, bound together by family ties. The same logic operative in natural families begins then to play itself out in the church as God’s household. In the intimacy of this spiritual family, people find that they are treating one another in a manner that respects differences of age, sex, and personality.

The presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit in God's household, as well as God's own Fatherhood, demands the observance of household order. Quarrels, heresies, and various kinds of immaturity must be looked after rather than simply ignored or viewed with indifference. The intimacy of the spiritual family itself calls for loving involvement when there are sins and difficulties, not merely withdrawal or soupy tolerance.

In such situations, the "fathers" of the church stand out. Mature, sober, sound, godly men with exemplary family lives are the natural leaders in this extended family. First, the whole church naturally treats them as fathers and perceives the leadership abilities they exercise in their own immediate families. Second, church leadership in a situation of family intimacy is like family leadership—a matter not primarily of laying down formal rules but of setting a good example that naturally engenders admiration and that people attempt to emulate. Paul himself functions as an example in subordination to Christ, who is the example *par excellence* (1 Corinthians 11:1). Timothy is exhorted to set a good example (1 Timothy 4:12). The general godliness of overseers, and not merely their doctrinal orthodoxy or speaking ability, is important to Paul for the same reason. Of course mature men and women should both function as examples in a general way (Titus 2:2, 3-5). But in the particular case of overseers, we are dealing with people who must be an example specifically in their *family leadership*, both leadership in God's household and leadership in their own household. That natural qualification points the church away from looking for women and towards looking for men as overseers.

Finally, note that in situations of face-to-face intimacy, the church is largely made up of whole families who as a family come to the church meetings. The church is quite likely to meet regularly in small groups in members' homes, and the home atmosphere extends to the whole meeting. In the church meetings themselves, the fathers continue to exercise authority over their families. In Titus 1:6, Paul indicates that the elders should be men "whose children believe," in which case the whole family would regularly come to meetings and the obedience or disobedience of children to their father would be manifest at the meeting itself (see Titus 1:6; 1 Timothy 3:4). In fact, at a church gathering the lines between family and church are not very clearly drawn, because the family comes to the meeting as a family and not merely as isolated individuals. Family worship at home and family worship with a larger group might seem very like one another, except that the larger group is the extended family—that is, God's household.

All these factors, then, add up to generate a firm impulse to see the mature fathers in the church as the natural people to become fathers in a more extended and official sense, namely, fathers of the church as an extended spiritual family. If church life is as robust and intimate as it should be—if it is normal *family* life—the church will find

itself recognizing male overseers even if hypothetically it did not have the specific instructions from the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

The Temporary Character of Modern Doubts

Of course, large sections of the church today have doubts about these matters, and some go so far as openly to oppose Biblical principles. But the doubts and oppositions arise, as I see it, from temporary aberrations and weaknesses in the life of the church and the larger society, rather than from the force of truth.

First, the Western church is deeply infected by theological modernism or liberalism. When the Bible is no longer acknowledged to be the Word of God, it is no longer clear that there is a divine standard for the church to obey, and love for Christ (if present at all) grows cold.

Second, the pace of technological and social change within post-industrial societies has made us reserved about the answers of previous generations, and our questioning extends to every aspect of society and church life. In addition, various changes in women's education, the nature of housework, and the involvement of women in work outside the home have raised many new and difficult questions about the nature of men's and women's roles in both family and church.

Third, radical philosophical and political egalitarianism, coupled with sin and envy, has generated hatred of all differences and differentiations among human beings. Many today think that the rich, the powerful, the gifted, and the possessors of official authority must be brought down to the level of the mediocrity of the mass, whether or not they have obtained their situation and function through righteous means. Such egalitarianism, when extended to the family and the church, refuses to acknowledge any differences between men and women.

Fourth, many people have become sincerely concerned about past and present oppression of women and unnecessary strictures on the use of women's gifts. Such evils do exist and should be opposed, but they do not justify radical egalitarian conclusions.

Finally, many evangelical churches today are seen primarily as lecture halls or preaching stations. People identify the church with its building, in contrast to the Biblical emphasis that those united to Christ are the real church. Moreover, the building is viewed merely as a place for hearing a sermon or enjoying religious entertainment. Such a view impoverishes our communal life as Christians. Certainly

monologue sermons are important, since they are one means of bringing God's Word to bear on the church. But God intends the church to be much more. If we think only of sermons, we have lost sight of the riches expressed in the fact that the church is the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Each member of the church is to exercise gifts for the benefit of the rest. We are all supposed to exhort and encourage one another, based on the love of Christ (Colossians 3:12-17). We are to be tender to one another as beloved children of God (Ephesians 4:32-5:1). Christian fellowship is not supposed to mean merely a superficial social time, but sharing based on our relation to God the Father and to Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3-4). We are to express intimacy and care for one another as we would towards members of our own family, since we are in fact all members of God's family or God's household.

But in too many evangelical churches, people have little experience of the Biblical practice of common family life. There may also be no regard for the necessity of church discipline. The church leaders are nothing more than gifted speakers or counselors (paid ministers), or else managers of church property and/or programs (whether these people are called trustees or elders or deacons). Such "leaders" are just people whose useful gifts have brought them into prominence. In such situations, it is understandable that some people may fail to see why appropriately qualified women may not exercise the key functions they associate with leadership. In fact, Christians will not fully understand the logic leading to male overseers until they come to grips with what the church should really be as God's household.

Household Management Contrasted with Simple Communication

The analogy between family and church also helps to make clear what distinguishes the office of overseer from other roles in the church. Consider the situation within a natural family. Within a family we may find a variety of skills, abilities, and gifts. A wise husband and father will encourage the full development and use of these abilities. His leadership, properly understood, is enhanced rather than threatened by the full flourishing of the family as a whole.

For example, in a healthy situation family conversation involves rich communion, including give and take among all the members of the family. Even the children participate actively. As they learn from God and from outside sources at school or play, they may sometimes communicate to their parents things the parents did not know. The wife, as a mature person, is in an even better position to cause her husband to learn and grow through things she communicates to him. Thus the

leadership belonging to the husband does not contradict many-sided communication among all the family members.

Similarly, all the family members have, in some broad sense, responsibilities for management. Even the youngest child may help to “manage” setting the table or doing dishes or caring for the cat. Wives exercise authority over their children, but they also may have very extensive projects in which they exercise management not only over the physical domain of the household but also over transactions with the surrounding society (Proverbs 31:10-31; cf. 1 Timothy 5:14). Thus management in a broad sense is everyone’s responsibility. The father nevertheless exercises an overall authority over the household as a whole.

Advocates of women overseers are quick to observe that Christian women have many of the gifts and skills necessary for good communication and good management. If they have such gifts, they should exercise them for the benefit of the body of Christ (1 Peter 4:10). These observations are basically correct, but they are in fact just as relevant and useful to Christian families as they are to the church as an extended family. In both cases, wise leaders should encourage the use of gifts. But in neither case does the existence of gifts overthrow the legitimacy of investing unique leadership in the father. Quite the opposite: the comparison with the family shows that gifts, in and of themselves, can never be a sound reason for displacing an order grounded in other factors from creation.

Since management is crucial to the argument, let us become more specific about various kinds of management. The picture in Proverbs 31:10-31 illustrates several significant types of management: management of clothing, food, money, fields, charitable gifts, purchases, and sales. All these types of management ought to be treated as instances of stewardship, since the whole world belongs to God. We are never absolute owners, but only stewards who have been temporarily entrusted with some of God’s property. In addition, management of other people should always respect the fact that people are created in God’s image. Authority over them necessarily has a character different from authority over the subhuman creation.

Men and women may vary considerably in their skills in these various areas. Skills related to wisdom and general Christian maturity help in all types of management, but some people are still more skillful in some areas than in others. Moreover, people may improve their skills as they develop maturity and experience.

Within a family, the diversity of skills naturally results in division of labor. The husband, the wife, and the children may all have some specific areas of responsibility delegated to them. If grandchildren or other relatives are living together, they are naturally included as well. In addition, consultation and imitation

help family members learn from one another. Some areas of management may work out best if they are the responsibility of the whole family rather than delegated to one person.

Ephesians 5:22-6:4 and other passages about the family clearly leave open a great many possibilities for the exact form of managerial arrangements. In these matters, a wise leader attempts to work out arrangements that best use and enhance the gifts of each family member. But Ephesians 5:22-6:4 does nevertheless draw some clear boundary lines. Children should submit to their parents, and conversely the parents have responsibility for managing their children. Wives should submit to their husbands, and husbands have managerial responsibility with respect to their wives, as well as for the rest of the household. These managerial responsibilities are fixed by God. Responsibilities can be delegated to other family members in accordance with their maturity and skills. In particular, they may all engage in various types of management of the subhuman creation. But there is still a leader where the buck stops. The roles of men and women in marriage are at this point irreversible, not interchangeable.

In sum, a wise husband leads his household using the fullest consultation and conversation, and he delegates authority. In all these practices, he is simply imitating Christ's care for the church. Christ involves us in two-way conversation and delegates responsibilities to us. Christ is nevertheless the ultimate authority in all of life; husbands, subject to Christ's authority, have been assigned as heads of their households.

When Paul's instructions are abused and husbands use their authority as an excuse for selfish and domineering behavior, a reaction sets in. Many people in our day deplore the oppression of women and the foolishness involving in refusing to encourage them to test and use their gifts. If people do not have proper godly models before them, it is understandable that they should think a pattern of completely interchangeable responsibilities is the only reasonable alternative consistent with the freedom given us in Christ. Yet the actual goal of Scripture is richer.

The analogy between the natural family and God's household therefore suggests the same procedures for God's household. Responsibilities for management may, in a broad sense, be delegated and distributed throughout God's household. But the overseers, as fathers in the household, possess more ultimate authority.

The overseers ought to be men, in analogy with the fact that the father and not the mother of a family possesses higher authority.

Advocates of women overseers also appeal to the good that has been accomplished in the past by Christian women—in particular, by women who have exercised leadership. In evaluating this appeal, several factors must be borne in mind.

First, Proverbs 31:10-31 shows that some types of leadership and management by women harmonize with a husband's more ultimate leadership (Proverbs 31:23). Second, bold but humble communication of the truth by wives to their husbands need not undermine their husbands' authority, any more than Paul intended to undermine general state authority by his criticisms of the actions of particular state authorities (see Acts 16:37; 22:25; 23:3-5; 25:10-11). Third, family cases involving widows, divorcées, and absent fathers show that sometimes women must exercise authority in the absence of any better alternatives; but such situations are far from ideal. Fourth, family cases involving domineering wives show that by the grace of God some good can be accomplished even through people and actions contaminated by sin.

All of these cases illumine by analogy what may happen within the church as God's household. None of these cases negates the principal point that ideally fathers are to exercise overall authority in both family and church.

In particular, we must avoid confusing leadership with ability to understand the Bible and ability to communicate its teaching to others. Such abilities are valuable within the body of Christ. But when they are present in women they obviously do not imply any lessening of their responsibilities to submit to their husbands in the Lord. Husbands on their part should encourage the full use of their wives' abilities, and they themselves may benefit greatly; but the husbands do not thereby relinquish their own responsibilities. The same holds for the overseers in God's household.

Evil Effects Arising from Disrupting the Order of God's Household

Maintaining male leadership in the church is not a matter of indifference. Evil effects inevitably arise when we deviate from God's pattern. Such effects are largely the reverse side of the picture that we have been drawing. Because of the close relation between family and church, godly family life stimulates appreciation of God as our heavenly Father, and appreciation of God stimulates godly family life. Both are enhanced by the example of mature, fatherly leaders within the church. Conversely, disintegration of household order within the church adversely affects both our

consciousness of being in God's family and the quality of love within Christian families.

To begin with, absence of godly, fatherly leadership within the church makes the affirmation of the Fatherhood of God closer to an abstraction. God's Fatherhood is, of course, illustrated preeminently in the great deeds of the history of redemption that embody His fatherly rule, care, and discipline. But we are richer in our understanding of God because most of us have enjoyed having a human father, and we are richer still if we can see the fatherly care and the rule of God embodied at a practical level in the older men of the church (Titus 2:2) and especially in the overseers.

Church order can deviate from the ideal either by lacking overseers, by having unqualified overseers, by appointing women overseers, or by redefining the office of overseer. Any of these moves tends to make more vague people's experience of the church as a family. The lack of genuine practical correspondence between the church and Biblically-based natural families suppresses people's ability to see the analogy. Hence they lose some of their grip on the importance of family-like intimacy and support within the church. Moreover, they cease to understand that God's Fatherhood is expressed in His rule over us and that His rule is exercised in part through mature, father-like overseers.

In particular, radical egalitarian philosophy, which says that we are to treat all people exactly the same, hinders Christians from having the kind of sensitivity toward the age, sex, and position of others that Paul enjoins (1 Timothy 5:12, 17). Relations become more impersonal, and the realities of membership in one family of God recede out of Christians' consciousness and their practice.

The practice of Christian family life is also adversely affected. Most people learn far better from example, and from teaching closely related to their leaders' examples, than they do from teaching in the abstract. So how do they properly assimilate teaching about family life? Ideally, they imitate the family lives of their church leaders. But this imitation is most effective if they can actually see something of the family life of their leaders. For example, in a smaller group meeting in a home, they see the way the leader conducts himself with respect to the other family members present for worship. Christian worship in smaller groups becomes something very like family worship, which ought to be the heartbeat of life for each particular family. This whole process becomes confused when the distinctions between men and women, fathers and mothers, are overlooked. Ordinary families then have no direct models to build on.

Ostensibly, the feminist movement aims at freeing women from oppression. But

such freedom in the true sense can come only through the divine powers of liberation and love contained in Jesus Christ. True freedom is found in obedience to Christ; anything else only constitutes some form of slavery to sin.

The family more than any other single institution in modern society desperately needs freedom and renewal through the love of Christ. That freedom comes most effectively when we are able, under God, to harness the full, rich resources that He provides. We are to teach people above all to embody in their families the model of Christ set forth in Ephesians 5:22-23. And we are to teach them by examples that we set forth in the family-like life of the church, including the godly example of mature spiritual fathers, the overseers. Hence we hinder true liberation if we deviate from the pattern of male overseers. It would be ironic if a sincere desire for women's liberation should be corrupted in practice into its opposite, a hindrance to the liberating power of God that is at work in His household.

Conclusion

Some Christian people think Christian marriage ideally should express a radically egalitarian pattern: a husband and wife should in every respect be able to function interchangeably. If they were right, the analogy between family and church would suggest that men and women could in every respect have interchangeable roles within the church.

But they are not right. Ephesians 5:22-23 resists them, as do the other passages comparing the relation of God and His people to marriage.¹² In time, we may hope that the Holy Spirit will use the power of these Biblical passages to generate godly marriages and so prevail over abstract egalitarian sentiments. If, as I believe, these Biblical passages do provide a warrant for assigning specific leadership responsibility to husbands and fathers, we need also to recognize the same pattern within the church. Mature men and not women are to be appointed overseers. But blind obedience to a formal rule is not sufficient. We must work towards more richly embodying in our churches the realities of our common life. We are children of God, members of one divinely ruled family. Only a full-orbed expression of Christ's love in the Christian community will bring to realization the freedom, power, and beauty derived from the manifestation of the glory of God in His household (Ephesians 3:10).

14: The Meaning of Authority in the Local Church

Paige Patterson

On February 11, 1989, Rev. Barbara C. Harris was consecrated a bishop of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Massachusetts. Harris thus became the first female bishop in the history of Anglicanism. The three-hour ceremony featured avowals such as “God with His mighty hand has exalted her,” and “the Word of God is once again being made flesh among us.”¹ Some churches were reticent to make such sweeping claims, whereas others suspected the hand of the devil rather than the hand of God and staged requiem services to lament the demise of the church.

The case of Bishop Harris is representative of the impasse developing over the past decade in ecclesiastical circles that, only a few years earlier, would have been considered sanctuaries for male clergy. At least two traditions had long since endorsed the preaching of women. Aimee Semple McPherson (1890-1944) of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel mesmerized live audiences and radio clientele from her five-thousand-seat Angelus Temple in Los Angeles.² Pentecostalism in most of its expressions has sanctioned the ministry of women. By the same token, various denominations comfortable with a modern perspective, which more traditional groups labeled “liberal” but which viewed themselves as “progressive,” welcomed women into the clergy. This participation of women at the highest level of church ministry was thought to represent the natural outgrowth of the socially liberating principles of the gospel.

Among more conservative and traditional denominations, the entrance of women into the clergy was consistently resisted until the decade of the seventies. Conservative Presbyterians, Southern Baptists, and other free church groups were joined by Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, and other communions of the episcopal tradition in rejecting the inroads of a growing feminist perspective. The recent confrontation in the Shelby County Baptist Association of Memphis, Tennessee, in which the Prescott Memorial Church (a Southern Baptist congregation) was disfellowshipped by the SBC Association because it had called Rev. Nancy Hastings Sehested as pastor, simply demonstrates that the issue of the rights of women to serve in pastoral roles has now been contested in arenas scarcely deemed possible a few years ago. This in turn has raised the question concerning the nature and authority of ordination, especially in communions that practice a congregational form of church government.³

Lexical investigations provide limited assistance on the subject of ordination. In the *KJV*, “ordain” is the English translation of more than twenty Hebrew and Greek

terms. Most of these words also are translated at times by numerous other English words. The translators of the *NIV* have simplified the matter by almost uniformly translating the various Greek terms with the word *appoint*. Titus is instructed by Paul to “appoint elders in every town” on the island of Crete (Titus 1:5). In Mark 3:14, it is said that Jesus “appointed twelve,” whereas in 1 Timothy 2:7 Paul confesses that he was “appointed a herald and an apostle.” Such translations may reflect a conviction on the part of the *NIV* translators that “ordination” as practiced in most communions today has little in common with New Testament practice. A. H. Strong noted precisely that when he wrote, “The word ‘ordain’ has come to have a technical signification not found in the New Testament. There it means simply to choose, appoint, set apart.”⁴

Even an ardent proponent of episcopacy such as Rudolf Schnackenburg admits that the primitive church was not highly organized in terms of ecclesiastical structure. “Now it would certainly be erroneous to try to affirm and defend in opposition to this an ecclesiastical juridical organization for the Pauline churches based on a starting point of later conditions in view.”⁵ Spurgeon, who was never ordained, considered ordination as practiced in his day to be essentially a vestige of Romanism void of foundation in the New Testament.

Examination of the salient “ordination” texts appears to sustain the judgment of Strong, Spurgeon, and the *NIV* translators. Mark 3:14 records that Jesus “ordained (*poieō*) twelve” (*KJV*; henceforward all Scripture citations in this chapter are from *KJV* unless otherwise noted). In Acts 14:23, Luke mentions that Paul and Barnabas traveled to certain cities in Asia Minor and “ordained (*cheirotoneō*) them elders in every church.” Paul refers possibly to his own ordination in 1 Timothy 2:7, asserting that he was “ordained (*tithēmi*) a preacher and an apostle. . . .” Finally, Paul calls for Titus to “ordain (*kathistēmi*) elders in every city. . . .” Of the four texts, three use common words, each of which has the sense of “appoint,” “place,” or “establish.” Only Acts 14:23 uses a word (*cheirotoneō*) that can mean “to stretch forth the hand,” or “elect” or “appoint.”⁶ *Cheirotoneō* is a rare term, appearing in the Septuagint once (Isaiah 58:9) and in the New Testament only two times (Acts 14:23; 2 Corinthians 8:19, where Titus is appointed by the churches to travel with Paul to Jerusalem). The closely related compound word *procheirotoneō*, “to appoint beforehand,” is found in Acts 10:41.

A possible connection suggesting formal ordination can be imagined by linking Acts 14:23 (Paul and Barnabas “ordained them elders in every church”) with 1 Timothy 4:14. Timothy is told not to neglect the gift that he had received through “prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.” This may parallel the experience of Paul and Barnabas, recorded in Acts 13:1-3, when the Lord instructed

that the two apostles be separated for a particular work, in response to which, the church “laid their hands on them” (verse 3). On the other hand, the Acts 10:41 reference employing *procheirotoneō* seems to imply nothing except the sovereign choice of God, by which the apostles are called “witnesses whom God has already chosen.”⁷ Moreover, 1 Timothy 5:22 suggests that elders as a rule received the laying on of hands: “Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands” (in the context of instructions about elders) (NIV).

Even if there is an emerging pattern in Acts 14:23, 1 Timothy 4:14, and Even if there is an emerging pattern in Acts 14:23, 1 Timothy 4:14, and 5:22, the induction rites of the early church were probably simple in comparison to present practice. No concrete evidence can be generated to suggest that the ecclesiastical officers of the primitive church were inaugurated in any particular fashion or ceremony. This is not to suggest that elders and deacons were just announced without formal installation. The same diverse vocabulary that suggests absence of specific ceremony probably implies some public act of recognition and consecration.

First Timothy 4:14, as well as its probable parallel passage in 2 Timothy 1:6(“... fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.”), seems to have little connection to such events as those recorded in Acts 8:17, 9:17, 19:6, in which the laying on of the hands is associated with the impartation of the Spirit. Ronald Y. K. Fung notes that the experience of Timothy is more closely paralleled by the experiences recorded in the setting apart of the seven (Acts 6:6) and of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:3). He concludes that Timothy’s experience was tantamount to ordination but also notes that the conferring of a charisma is exceptional in this case.⁸ C. K. Barrett also sees 1 Timothy 4:14 as “ordination”

The Pastorals are not inconsistent with Paul’s teachings, though they probably mark a later stage of development. It was under the guidance of prophecy (cp. 1:18) that Timothy was selected for ordination (cp. Acts 13:1 ff.); that is, it had been ascertained so far as was possible that it was God’s will that Timothy should be ordained to the work of ministry, and in the bestowal of the endowment for this work God’s will was the cause, the laying on of the hands of the elders as a body being an accompanying act—not a means, for “through” is a mistranslation (*meta* with the genitive must mean “with,” not “through”).⁹

F. J. A. Hort recognizes the unique character of this event in Timothy’s life, concludes that a prophetic oracle had singled Timothy out as Paul’s chosen colleague, and hints that this precise event would probably not be duplicated.¹⁰ But Bultmann views the incident more as the establishment of a pattern of ordination of elders based on practices known to exist in Jewish synagogues of the first century. While Bultmann suggests that this act did constitute the passing on of the pastoral office, he also acknowledges that the one being ordained was identified by “prophet-voices from the congregation” and that, based on 1 Clement 44:3, the congregations

had to give their approval.¹¹

First Clement may not sustain Bultmann's thesis of the role of charismatic prophets in the early church, but the idea of congregational ratification of the appointment of elders seems clearly to be present.

We are of the opinion, therefore, that those appointed by them, or afterwards by other eminent men with the consent of the whole Church, and who have blamelessly served the flock of Christ in a humble, peaceable, and disinterested spirit, and have for a long time possessed the good opinion of all, cannot be justly dismissed from the ministry. For our sin will not be small, if we eject from the episcopate those who have blamelessly and holily fulfilled its duties. (1 Clement XLIV.2-4)¹²

Venturing no judgment as to whether contemporary ordination procedures are good or evil, it is sufficient to stress that no clear pattern or procedure for ordination is discernible in the New Testament. Neither can it be established that the various words translated "ordain" in the *KJV* mean anything more than "appoint." Insofar as the New Testament is concerned, ordination is not a major issue, if it exists as such at all. Most churches and denominations have developed ordination beyond New Testament precedent in both its form and its significance.

However, this is not to say that the New Testament does not recognize ecclesiastical offices. Furthermore, these officials were probably given formal recognition and installation. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, bishops, elders, and deacons all are clearly recognized in Acts and the epistles. Whatever the case may be regarding apostles and prophets,¹³ it seems clear that pastors, bishops, elders, and deacons were names used for continuing offices in the churches.¹⁴ The question for evangelical Christians who feel bound by the testimony of Holy Scripture then becomes not, "Who can be ordained?" but, more simply, "Who is qualified to serve in ecclesiastical offices?" More specifically, in light of the present debate, are women free to be appointed to the office of elder? And, if not, do elders have authority to authorize a woman to teach men? In fact, just exactly how much authority did elders wield in the primitive church?

II. Authority of the Elders

The picture of early church government that emerges from the New Testament presents elders as church leaders with substantive, but not unlimited, authority. A brief analysis of the extent of that authority will be followed by an assessment of the limitations of authority. The initial passage that suggests authority for elders is 1 Timothy 5:17-22:

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages." Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning.

I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism.

Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure. (NIV)

Elders who rule well are worthy of double honor, especially if their labor is in the Word and in doctrine.¹⁵ Elders are subject to rebuke only if two or three witnesses are available; but if found guilty of sin, they are also to receive public rebuke. "Direct the affairs of" in verse 17 is a translation of *proistēmi*, a term with a variety of possible meanings. Here, however, it almost certainly indicates the being set over or being the head of something. Liddell and Scott cite multiple uses of the word in this regard, especially in Herodotus and in Xenophon's *Anabasis*.¹⁶ Reicke agrees with this sense of the word and stresses that in the New Testament the idea of "leading" or "caring for" is the more prominent one (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 3:4-5).¹⁷ The emphasis of the word is that of decisive leadership undergirded by generally recognized authority.

C. K. Barrett is unsure that these "elders" have yet evolved into official status, suspecting that the word is still being employed here to denote the elderly men of the church.¹⁸ But Hendriksen is almost certainly correct when he notes that instructions about wages (verse 18) and laying hands on future elders (verse 22; cf. 4:14) make clear that we are dealing here with officials.¹⁹ Elders, therefore, are leaders who perform at least three functions: laboring in and teaching the Word of God, ruling or providing decisive leadership to the church, and presiding over the setting apart of future elders.

In Hebrews 13:7 and 17, the author uses a stronger term for "leader," namely *begoumenos*:

Remember your *leaders*, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. [verse 7, NIV]

Obey your *leaders* and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. [verse 17, NIV]

Not only are those who have the rule over the recipients of this epistle to be remembered, followed, and obeyed, but also their lifestyle is to be contemplated. They are not only described as ruling, but also charged with "watching

for the souls” of God’s people and being accountable for that responsibility. F. F. Bruce sees the leaders in verse 7 as distinct from those mentioned in verse 17. The former are those who had originally brought the gospel to the Hebrews, whereas the latter are the current leaders.²⁰ Regardless of who the leaders in verse 7 are, near unanimity seems to prevail regarding the identity of the leaders in verse 17:

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. (NIV)

Johannes Schneider was both representative and explicit when he wrote:

The bearers of the congregational ministries bear a specially heavy responsibility. They are accountable to God for the souls entrusted to their care and vigilance. But they can perform their ministry properly only when their God-given authority is fully acknowledged. The church of Jesus, like every other community, depends on officers and orders. It is expected of the members of the congregation that they do not obstruct the work of the leading men loaded down with heavy responsibilities, but rather that they lighten their burdens. In the church of Jesus no ministry ought to be performed with sighing. It is unsound and unworthy of the Christian brotherhood when discord or even unpleasant quarrels arise between congregation and the office holders. The latter have a claim to obedience. That is the clear directive of the Letter [to the] Hebrews. This sentence has proven an absolute necessity in the history of the Christian churches. It has as much validity today as then.²¹

The Ephesian elders are designated “overseers” and charged by Paul with feeding the church of God (Acts 20:28). In 1 Peter 5:1-4, an almost identical mandate appears:

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed. *Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers*—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. (NIV)

Like Paul, Peter unites the function of oversight with shepherding or feeding the flock of God. Moreover, he cautions that this oversight should be by way of example rather than acting as lords (*katakuriuontes*) over God’s heritage.

Finally, some attention must be devoted to the exceptionally difficult quotations from Jesus in Matthew 16:19, 18:18, John 20:23. In the NIV they read:

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:19)

I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 18:18)

If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven. (John 20:23)

The technical aspects of the exegesis of this passage lie beyond the scope of this

inquiry.²² As the passages relate to the subject of the authority of the church, it scarcely can be doubted that Jesus invested His followers with significant authority. Whether the binding and loosing herein enjoined be understood as a rabbinic phrase involving excommunication or, as by many evangelical exegetes, as use of the keys of understanding, followed by confident declaration of the effects dependent on the response of hearers, obvious exercise of derived authority is in view.

Even if Peter is singled out as the recipient of this authority in Matthew 16:19, that is surely broadened to include a larger group in both Matthew 18:18 and John 20:23. If the commission is extended to others besides the elders, then the “binding and loosing” and the “remitting and retaining” must also be the responsibility of the church as a whole. Worth noting is the fact that the final step in church discipline in Matthew 18:15-20 is not “tell it to the elders” but “tell it to the church.” This is, of course, not to be indiscriminately practiced, but rather as Westcott says:

At the same time the exercise of the power must be placed in the closest con-nexion with the faculty of spiritual discernment consequent upon the gift of the Holy Spirit. Compare 1 John ii.18ff.²³

We may, therefore, conclude that Jesus gave authority to the church, even if that authority is limited to announcing a decision that had already been rendered in heaven. While that decision may be announced by the elders, it seems in reality to be the prerogative of the church as a body.

Summarizing the situation as it existed in the New Testament era, Ronald Y. K. Fung notes:

The existence of some kind of specialized ministry, or more specifically of church officers, is attested for the primitive church in Jerusalem, for all the Pauline churches with the sole exception of Corinth, and for some of the churches in the General Epistles (1 Peter, James). If a different picture obtains in the Gospel and Epistles of John and Revelation, this suggests only that church organization was still fluid during the New Testament period, that ‘there is no such thing as *the* New Testament Church order,’ and that different lines of development are discernible; the existence of an organized and official ministry remains unaffected.

Further, it is possible, and perhaps even likely, that varying nomenclature used of church leaders refers basically to the same group, so that while “functional” terms are sometimes employed to emphasize that aspect of the ministry, they point to the same “functionaries” who are elsewhere described with a more official title; here we think especially of those who are referred to as *proïsta-menoi*, 1 Thessalonians 5:12, *poïmenas*, Ephesians 4:11, and *hegoumenoi*, Hebrews 13:17, 24, all of whom may well be identical with those designated elsewhere as elders and overseers. In any event, there is ample evidence which more than suffices to show that the early Christian communities were not amorphous associations run on haphazard lines; on the contrary, most if not all of them had at least a rudimentary, and some had a more advanced, form of church organization—although, on the other hand, there are no grounds for thinking that the monepiscopate is to be found within the pages of the New Testament.²⁴

Fung may overstate the case for “fluidity” in the ecclesiology of the New Testament. What is remarkable is that elders existed in all the New Testament

churches for which we have evidence: “in every church” (Acts 14:23); “in every town” (Titus 1:5); “let him call for the elders of the church” (James 5:14—written to *many churches*); “The elders which are among you I exhort” (1 Peter 5:1—to many churches). The elders of the churches, however formally or informally, exercised a teaching and governing authority throughout the New Testament churches. Nevertheless, as we will see presently, they were not the final authority in the local church.

Limitations placed on the authority of elders begin with the authority of the Scriptures, and authority is further restricted by the concept of the priesthood of believers. At no point could elders in the churches supersede the authority of the apostles or the apostolic testimony preserved in Holy Scripture. For example, the Corinthian church demonstrated little concern for the purity of the body, tolerating a man who maintained an incestuous liaison with his father’s wife. In 1 Corinthians 5:4-5, Paul urges immediate action involving at least the offender’s expulsion from the fellowship.²⁵ Worth noting is that the prescribed action is apparently the responsibility of the entire gathered assembly.

When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. (1 Corinthians 5:4b-5, NIV)

This constitutes significant evidence of congregational polity. Equally obvious, however, is the fact that Paul’s apostolic authority (which is equal to the present-day authority of the apostolic writings, the New Testament Scriptures) prevails in the church, since the church is to proceed with this action based on Paul’s having already adjudicated the matter (1 Corinthians 5:3).

Again, in 2 Corinthians 10-12, Paul devotes considerable attention to his own apostleship and authority. He pleads with those Corinthians who were his critics to alter their course so that he may not have to be bold with them when he personally arrives in Corinth (2 Corinthians 10:2). Again, in Galatians 1-2, Paul not only argues the heavenly origin of his apostleship but also demonstrates his equality with the other apostles through a rebuke of Peter when the latter erred (Galatians 2:11-12). Paul considers his apostolic teaching to be normative for the churches (1 Corinthians 14:37-38), and Peter puts it on a par with Scripture (2 Peter 3:16).

Abundant evidence pointing to the authority of the Scriptures over even the elders of the church is available. An example of this occurs in 2 Peter 1:19-21, in which the author informs his readers that they possessed a “more sure word of prophecy” that was not “loosed upon” the church as a result of some individual’s private decision but was rather the product of “holy men of God” who were “moved by the Holy Ghost.” If the objection is raised that this is surely a reference to the Old Testament,

the point may be conceded. However, in 2 Peter 3:15-16, Peter makes reference to the epistles of Paul, which he describes as subject to twisting in the same manner suffered by “the other scriptures.” Here surely is a clear evidence of the authority of epistles penned by the apostles.

The authority of the elders was also limited by the priesthood of believers. Although this popular concept is mentioned as such only five times in Scripture (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6) and is provided any sort of real explanation only in the 1 Peter passages, the idea does seem to be thoroughly ingrained in the New Testament. Jews, unless they were of Levitical lineage, were excluded from the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies no matter how devout they were. Gentiles were prohibited from entering even the Court of Israel. At the death of Christ, however, the veil separating the two inner chambers of the temple was torn in two, suggesting new and wider access for His people. The author of Hebrews leads his readers to believe that as a result of the rending of the veil of Christ’s body, they may all enter directly into the Holiest through the blood of Jesus (Hebrews 10:19-20). Thus, every believer becomes a priest.

The functions of the priesthood are “to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” and to “show forth the praises” of the One who had called believers out of darkness and into light (1 Peter 2:5, 9). Each believer possesses the Spirit of God (Romans 8:9, 14-15) and is endowed with certain spiritual gifts that are to be exercised in behalf of the whole body of believers (1 Corinthians 12:7-11). This authority of the Spirit, which manifests itself in the lives of the believers, operates with freedom in the assembly. This activity of the Spirit in the life of the congregation is not subject to the rule of pastors or elders. As Cyril Eastwood points out, the priesthood of believers is the doctrine that establishes the whole congregation as the ministers of Christ. “The first necessity, then, is to reinstate the general active part of the whole congregation in worship so that the members are no longer merely passive onlookers.”²⁶

Robert Saucy concludes:

The nature of the church yields that conclusion in that each member is endowed with the Spirit to express the living presence of Christ and to participate in His ministry with His authority. The practice of the church corresponds to that reality in that the New Testament, through various examples and instructions, places the final responsibility for doctrine and practice on the church collectively.²⁷

The picture of the primitive church appears to be that of an informal assembly of believers in Jesus, each of whom functions as a minister to the others through the Spirit-directed use of *charismata*. These congregations, however, are bound not to exceed or violate the authority of Christ as revealed through the apostles and the witness of the apostles contained in Holy Scripture. The congregation itself clearly

acts as something of an authority. Within that congregation, there are presbyters or pastors who exercise a restrained authority of general oversight and direction. In the earliest church, these presbyters may have come to office either by apostolic appointment or by congregational selection. The New Testament pattern is clearly one of ruling elders with substantive, but not unlimited, authority.²⁸

Today, whatever form of church government a church may have, the officers who have the highest governing authority in the local church (whether they are called elders, pastors, deacons, the vestry, the church board, the governing council, or any other name) are the ones who most closely correspond to the office of elder at the time of the New Testament. They do in fact have governing authority (of varying degrees) in their churches. The question now is whether women should be eligible to participate in that governing group, whatever it may be called.

III. Authority and Female Teachers

No legitimate question exists with reference to either the adequacy or the acceptability of a woman serving in some teaching roles. Apollos profited not only from the instruction of Aquila but also from that of Priscilla (Acts 18:26). Women are expressly commissioned to teach younger women (Titus 2:4), and Timothy, as a child and presumably even as a young man, was taught by his maternal mentors—Lois and Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14).²⁹ Neither should there remain any uncertainty about the opportunity extended to women to participate in public prayer or prophecy (1 Corinthians 11:2-16). Any suggestion of an ontological inferiority of women cannot survive the first declaration of Adam, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23), or the statement, “In the image of God created he him, male and female created he them” (Genesis 1:27).

Yet Clark Pinnock observed:

. . . I have come to believe that a case for feminism that appeals to the canon of Scripture as it stands can only hesitantly be made and that a communication of it to evangelicals will have difficulty shaking off the impression of hermeneutical ventriloquism. . . . If it is the Bible you want, feminism is in trouble; if it is feminism you want, the Bible stands in the way.³⁰

Why would a theologian of Pinnock’s stature and egalitarian sympathies arrive at such conclusions in light of the acknowledged truths stated above? The answer is that for many evangelicals the Bible is intractably hierarchical. It teaches definite role assignments, together with their corresponding mandates, opportunities, and limitations. Great scholarly efforts have been made to prove this, but—as with other crucial truths—it seems obvious to average readers.

Careful scholarly analysis of the concept of love, for example, benefits the church. Such arduous research and thought will inevitably enhance our understanding of the nature of God's love and the love required of believers. But even in the absence of such noble research, an obvious sense of the nature of love can hardly be missed by even a cursory reading of the Bible. The spiritual leadership role of men in both home and church is obvious to many average Bible readers in the same way.

Equally obvious is it that role assignments and submission to various authorities are demanded in Scripture with no essential estimate of worth or value implied for the one in authority or the one who is subordinate. For example, Christians, who are after all the salt of the earth and the light of the world, are instructed by Paul to submit to the authority of magistrates (Romans 13:1-5). This mandate is not designed to depreciate Christians, much less suggest that a humble believer is in any sense inferior to the civil authorities. Instead, it is a matter of the nature of an ordered society in which the magistrate is to be viewed in his role as minister (*diakonos*) of God. By the same token, children are not of less worth than parents; yet they are counseled to obey and to submit to their parents. Learning to relate in an appropriate manner to those whose role assignments make them "authorities" assists us in learning to relate properly to God. Accountability is generally healthy and order almost always is desirable in church and society.

The most helpful paradigm is that of Jesus. According to Philippians 2:6, Jesus "did not consider equality with God something to be grasped" (NIV). In John 14:9, the Lord informs Philip that if one has seen Jesus, he has seen the Father. Or again, in the Good Shepherd discourse of John 10, Jesus flatly declares, "I and my Father are one" (verse 30). Yet, in John 14:28, Jesus also announces, "my Father is greater than I," and elsewhere emphasizes the importance of the Son's obedience to the Father. Such passages must be judged either to be contradictory or to be clumsy redactional mistakes unless we accept the thesis that Jesus was drawing a sharp distinction between essence and office. Evangelicals have opted for the latter, understanding that Jesus is equal with His Father in essence but subordinate in His office. Such a paradigm properly applied should remove the stigma from role assignments in the domestic, civil, or ecclesiastical arenas.

Other writers in this symposium examine the specific questions relating to those role assignments and whatever limitations may be imposed on the service of women in the church. Like many other evangelicals, I am convinced that 1 Timothy 2:12-15 is normative for the church in every age. The three reasons provided by Paul (verses 13, 14) for his limitation on the ministerial activities of women are both historical-theological, not cultural or situational.³¹ The remaining purpose of this chapter is to determine, in light of the three restrictions of 1 Timothy 2:12 (and other supporting passages), whether a woman is to teach men or have authority over men

and whether it is possible for the church or the elders to authorize women to function in a teaching role with men.

A general answer to that question is possible based on data previously mentioned. To review, the pattern of authority in the primitive church is as follows: All authority in heaven and in earth the Father has vested in Jesus (Matthew 28:18). That authority has been passed along to the apostles and to the church (Luke 10:19), though with some limitations. The apostolic witness to Christ, as found in the New Testament, is conceived to be the voice of God through the apostles (1 Corinthians 14:37; 2 Peter 1:21; 3:16) and thus carries full authority for the church. Elders governing and leading at the will of the churches, therefore, have general authority to adjudicate matters that have not already been settled either by Jesus or in the Scriptures. They do not, under any circumstances, have the authority to reverse the Scriptures or make exceptions to the teachings of Scripture due to circumstance or culture.

More specifically, the churches appear to have the authority and perhaps even obligation to encourage women to participate in the worship of the community of the saints with certain restrictions. Women, for example, are to keep silent in the churches according to 1 Corinthians 14:34. That this cannot mean “total silence” or mere passive participation is clear from the permission granted to pray and prophesy in chapter 11,³² and from the verse itself when it is added that women are to be in submission “. . . as also saith the law.” James Hurley is probably correct in rejecting interpretation of the phrase “. . . as also saith the law,” which attempts to find some specific law of the Old Testament as one to which Paul refers.

Paul's appeal to “the law” need not have any particular text in view. It is enough that he reminds them that men were called to exercise authority and to render judgment in matters in the home and in the “church in the wilderness,” in the religious life of Israel. From his appeal, however, we may deduce that he considered that the Old Testament pattern of male headship in religious matters should continue in the church alongside the new freedom of women to participate in the worship.³³

The appeal to “the law” settles the issue for Paul. And the appeal to “the law” also suggests strongly that at least the mandate of submission in the passage removes the passage from a merely temporal or cultural delimitation. Hence, elders, churches, or even apostles are not free to give directives that are contrary to the intent of the law of God.

Calvin properly interpreted 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in a similar fashion.³⁴ He acknowledges exceptions to the general rule but argues that these exceptions pose no threat to the ordinary and constant system of government. As if anticipating the current debate, Calvin says,

If any one bring forward, by way of objection, Deborah (Judges iv. 4) and others of the same class, of whom we read that they were at one time appointed by the command of God to govern the people, the

answer is easy. Extraordinary acts done by God do not overturn the ordinary rules of government, by which he intended that we should be bound.³⁵

Paul's appeal to Scripture in 1 Timothy 2:13-14 makes clear the ultimate source of appeal: Scripture itself. Thus, for theological and historical reasons, the church or the elders cannot elevate women to a formal office of rule or instruction over men without violating the whole spirit of the law.³⁶ In no other area of life would we be willing to say that a church or its elders can give a woman (or anyone) permission to disobey the teachings of Scripture. It is difficult to understand why some have claimed that such permission is acceptable in the area of women teaching or having authority over men in the church.

IV. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to show that the life of the early church was not highly organized. Nevertheless, authorities did exist and were recognized by those early churches. While ordination as a formal ceremony, such as is commonly practiced today, probably did not exist, the setting aside of persons for special leadership tasks does seem to have been the prerogative of the churches. This was at least sometimes accompanied by the laying on of hands. These authorities or elders exercised considerable authority but had no authority to abrogate the clear teachings of Scripture. Hence, an elder or a church apparently does not have the authority to elevate a woman to a formal role of instruction or spiritual authority over men. There are gifts and roles by which women may impart to both men and women their wisdom and spiritual insight, but this is not through the channels of authoritative office and teaching in the church. Dorothy Patterson's thought is worth noting in conclusion:

The church has never sought to suppress gifts God has given but rather strives to ensure full and proper use of those gifts in a divinely given framework based upon natural order of creation and appropriateness of function within a master plan. One cannot accept the Bible as authoritative while rejecting its authority concerning home and church order. One cannot negate truths concerning the structure of church and home, such as the image of the relationship between God and Israel and between Christ and the church, just to satisfy cultural whim or to accommodate higher plateaus of education and opportunity. One cannot lift outward manifestations, such as a man's prayer posture or a woman's head covering (1 Corinthians 11), and use them to ridicule or belittle the timeless directives given to protect and edify men and women within the Kingdom.

Without doubt women did have a variety of positions of service, influence, and even leadership and teaching in the early church. The text of Scripture, however, bears witness that the functions they assumed were done with modesty and order (1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:40), and that they did not teach or exercise authority over men.³⁷