

# A COSMIC DRAMA

*Men, Women & The Church*

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*Men, Women & The Church*

by Chuck Gianotti

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For additional copies of this book, contact:

Chuck Gianotti  
27 Watchman Court  
Rochester, NY 14624 USA  
chuckgianotti@hotmail.com  
(585) 429-5435

For other resources by the author, go to [www.bible-equip.com](http://www.bible-equip.com).

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To my wife and life partner, Mary.

Thank you for the joy of  
dancing through life together  
in the great Cosmic Drama,  
glorifying God  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The roots of this book began over fifteen years ago with a year long personal study on the subject of gender roles in the church. Beginning with a clean slate (as much as is possible), I desired to study afresh what the Scripture had to say about this important but fast becoming controversial and divisive subject. Churches everywhere were wrestling with it and in some cases dividing. Since becoming a Christian in 1972, I have fellowshiped mostly with conservative groups that have held a traditional view of the role of men and women. But for intellectual as well as spiritual integrity, I felt it important to study carefully all sides of the controversy. I sought out the best of writers of the main competing views, even those who held views different than my own, in order to make sure I was not being blinded by my own presuppositions or the “herd think” of those with whom I regularly fellowshiped. The result was a stronger than ever conviction for a somewhat traditional view of gender roles (with a few caveats), but also a serious and growing concern for the drift I see in evangelicalism, symptomatic of which is the egalitarian (or feministic) view of gender roles. So I appreciate all those who have gone before—both those with whom I agree and those with whom I disagree. My thinking has been honed on all sides.

Out of that original study, grew a series of sermons that I had the privilege to present at a variety of churches in Canada and the US, as well as lectures in contemporary theology at Kawartha Lakes Bible College in Ontario. This has been subject to continual feedback. Over the last 15 years, there has been a steady stream of literature on this subject from just about every imaginable perspective, and I have followed it sometimes closely, sometimes from a distance. Having served as an elder and in pastoral ministry in various churches for over 20 years, I have gained a sense of the importance of this subject, not just for the sake of right doctrine, but also because it touches every man and woman in the church. Ultimately, it affects the very heart of the body of Christ. Thanks go to the many women and men who

have interacted with me, challenged me and put up with my feeble efforts to articulate the perspectives written herein.

The work on this has been tedious and long. I have been sustained by my wife, Mary, who has shared this journey with me, patiently interacting with just about every detail of what is presented here. Nothing here is written without the good conscience of knowing she stands together with me and celebrates with me our “differences.” Thanks is given to my students at Kawartha Lakes Bible College who have given valuable feedback on the various drafts and lecture notes. Not to forget, thanks go to my son Jason and daughter Shannon, who have demonstrated that children can grow up in a complementarian household and church and become well-adjusted, committed followers of Jesus Christ. One of my greatest joys, now that they are adults, is having them both as my friends. Jen, my new daughter-in-law, also has spent hours reviewing and editing the draft—thanks. Thanks also to Ruth Rodger, dear friend and meticulous editor. Ron Brancato has added his editorial skills and once again has lent his artistic talents to the Lord for the cover—thanks. Many others have interacted with me at various times over the years to help hone my understanding of this subject. Thanks to you all. Your help has been immeasurable.

There will inevitably be some omissions and oversights, all of which are solely my responsibility. My prayer is that this book will not add fuel to the controversy, but rather provide light for those who seek to enjoy the differences between male and female in the church.

To God be the glory.

Chuck Gianotti

# ABBREVIATIONS

cf.	“see further”
f.	“and following verse”
ff.	“and following verses”
OT	Old Testament
NT	New Testament
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NIV	New International Bible
KJV	King James Bible
NKJV	New King James Bible



## READ THIS FIRST!

Perceptions and images abound on the subject of gender-based roles. Abuse, privilege, power, oppression, culture, archaisms, sexism, patriarchal, freedom, empowerment, feminism, liberal, accommodation—these are all emotive words involved in heating up the discussion. The issue of gender in the church has long been debated and many books have been written on this subject. So why another book? What would possess this author to step into the line of fire and potentially take shots from all sides? The answer is that the subject will *not* go away; as long as there are men and women striving to understand this wonderful subject, there will be discussion and debate. Scholarly and popular works have proliferated, roughly lining up on one of two sides: the complementarian viewpoint and the egalitarian viewpoint<sup>1</sup>. Complementarians are those who see male and female as equal but different, having some distinct roles in church, home and life. Egalitarians are those who view male and female as equal and their roles largely interchangeable in social, spiritual and familial contexts (except for the obvious roles related to physiogeny such as ability to bear children). Much of what has been written remains inaccessible to the average Christian because of 1) the technical or voluminous nature of some writings, 2) the sectarian or pejorative flavor of some writings, or 3) the shallowness of some writings. Few are prepared to do the required work to sort through both the rhetoric and the passion presented by both sides.

It would be arrogant of this writer, to say the least, to think that I have discovered the final or clearest word on the subject. In fact, I do not lay claim to high scholarship that will compete in the learned and academic circles with what has been written before. Indeed, many great minds have wrestled with this subject and with each other over this subject. But having studied and preached on this issue over the past 20 years, and having been in church leadership, on the front lines of implementing my

convictions, I can say clearly that the subject is still front and center in the minds of many people who sit in the pews Sunday after Sunday. In addition, I believe the position any given church takes on this issue will have an impact on that church's ministry and how people view and relate to the opposite sex. How the church deals with this issue will also have a direct affect on the health and welfare of the Christian family.

In terms of interactions with the larger church body, we dare not let ourselves be satisfied with "agreeing to disagree" on this subject, because it cuts to the core of who we are as individuals. Sexuality is essential to our nature as human beings created by God. Within our churches, we must be clear about what we believe and straightforward in how we teach it, for the roles of God's people, whether men or women, really *do* matter to the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ. We dare not glibly follow a favorite teacher or denominational perspective without embracing the Berean mindset. Remember, the Bereans were commended by Dr. Luke in the book of Acts for,

*Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. (Acts 17:11)*

In our sexually confused society, the non-believing world needs to have a clear compass from Christians who not only have a cogent, biblical perspective on the sexes, but who can provide a demonstration of the beauty, satisfaction, practicality and sexual affirmation of that biblical lifestyle.

My own sense is that there is need for a defense of a conservative viewpoint on the subject of the sexes, which *also* recognizes and corrects the faults of what I would call a *wooden* conservatism. Too often unbiblical extremes have been codified beyond scriptural warrant. Likewise, the role of men and the concept of authority has been distorted to the point of causing unnecessary tension and burden on women. I believe a proper biblical understanding of the sexes leads us to celebrate the differences—not to be embarrassed by or fearful of them. As men and women discover God's wonderful variety and glory in their lives

and ministry together, the Lord will indeed be glorified, for we grow in our understanding of His magnificent creation.

I submit this book for the glory of God and for the encouragement of men and women to enjoy the differences and the balance of their roles in ministry.

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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> While we recognize that labels can oversimplify a discussion, these descriptive terms are generally accepted as helpful in referring to the two main views of this subject.

# WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

## Chapter One

The subject of masculinity and femininity is one of the most fascinating teachings in Scripture. God's diversity in creation is nowhere seen more poignantly than in this wonderful area, touching the very core of our being. Male and female sharing humanity—yet every cell of our bodies unmistakably proclaims either maleness or femaleness.<sup>1</sup> The Scripture declares God's delight when after He<sup>2</sup> created man and woman on the 6th day, He “...saw all that he had made, and it was *very good*” (Gen 1:31 emphasis mine).

The *mystery* of sexuality is for us to enjoy, with all its attractions, intrigues and delights. Many have found through God's grace the rich, relational “dance” that takes place when men and women embrace their differences and see their divergences as complementary, healthy and enjoyable!

Yet there is another sense of mystery concerning the sexes: few issues have spawned the plethora of books, debates, laws, policies and feelings (negative and positive) as the issue of the relationship of the sexes? Forces pull in different directions—feminism, homosexuality, bi-sexuality, “political correctness,” widespread acceptance of pre-marital sex—and shout from every direction. What God has designed as *very good* has become a source of intense conflict today.

If ever there was a time to let the Creator and Author of our very existence speak, it is now. His Word addresses the nature and the relationship of the sexes! And who better than Christians to study carefully what God has to say about this subject and then to share this with (and demonstrate it to) the world. If lived out well, this truth will provide both men and women the personal *satisfaction* and *sense of fulfillment* in the masculinity or

femininity for which they were respectively created. God's design for the sexes, if followed in the spirit which God intends, leads toward healthier marriages and families which, in turn, helps provide children with a real sense of who they are as God's ultimate creation.<sup>3</sup> Further, God's design will lead to healthier churches.

Human civilization has failed in this essential aspect of life—the relationship between the sexes. World history is stained with conflict, wars, hardships and evils of every kind, including the conflict of the sexes. Women have often been suppressed, oppressed and abused by men in a power struggle through the ages.<sup>4</sup> Analyzing the reasons for this would consume volumes. Physical size may have something to do with it, although that cannot be the only reason—unless one is a strict evolutionist or materialist. The *power* of men over women and the associated exploitations must find their source in something other than just anatomy. Women have often been denied rights and have been considered “lesser” beings than men. Even in the “noblest” of times gone by, women were to be protected and cared for, but not given “fully equal” status.

Even in our present day, the cacophony of voices cry out that gender discrimination is not just a thing of the past, but an ongoing reality. Feminism has failed to provide the promised *equality*. Instead, premarital sex, extra-marital pregnancy and abortion have become more prevalent along with their psychological difficulties—more so for the women than for men it seems. This is hardly a success for feminism, despite the most rigorous claims for “freedom of choice.” Sex apart from a committed relationship seems to take a harder toll on women than on men. Divorce is seen as normal and almost expected—for how could two people be expected to stay “trapped” for their entire lives in an unfulfilling relationship and keep promises made in youthful naiveté?

Many marriages that have stayed together have not fared very well either, as two people live dissatisfied lives going in parallel rather than in unison. Often wives feel unappreciated, men feel hindered. The push now is to redefine marriage and related laws so as to include all the same benefits for two unmarried people

(heterosexual or homosexual) without having to make a covenantal commitment. Relationship without persevering loyalty is the result. God did not have this in mind when He created the sexes.

In Christendom, Scripture has been interpreted and reinterpreted, often perverted or ignored. On the one hand the pendulum swings to the extreme where men are given a *privileged* status, entitling them to hold what are considered positions of “power.” This should not be surprising for two reasons: 1) the relationship between the sexes has come to be seen in terms of power and 2) certain roles in the church have erroneously been seen and treated as power positions.

At the core of this conflict, in the heart of each individual, whether male or female, there *is* a power struggle. But this polarity is not so much between the sexes as it is between each individual and God. The church, including both those in *power* and those marginalized away from *power*, has been guilty of the politics of power, that is, control by the individual (self) rather than control by the Holy Spirit of God. The propensity of our own sinful hearts toward selfish attitudes is great!

The pendulum also swings to the opposing extreme, reinterpreting God’s Word in attempts to be compassionate, enlightened and relevant. Commitment to Scripture as having authority *over* the Christian is in danger of becoming a casualty. In the 1960’s and 70’s, charges of the New Testament writers’ chauvinism, limitations and even error initially shocked the evangelical community. Yet metamorphosing into seemingly less dangerous forms such as new hermeneutics (the science of biblical interpretation) and faulty exegetical methods, the boundaries of evangelical thinking have expanded precariously. Theologies have arisen that either outright dismiss long-held orthodox truth about God or introduce new, confusing and manipulative terminology and schemes of interpretation.

One example of a recent, innovative attempt to construct a new hermeneutical approach is exemplified by William Webb in *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals*. He calls his approach the “redemptive-movement hermeneutic,” which anticipates the trajectory of biblical thought in regards to cultural issues such as gender roles. In other words, clues are sought in Scripture to deter-

mine that while, in this case, there are indeed distinctive gender role differences taught in Scripture, there is purportedly a movement toward a more egalitarian view. While Webb admits Scripture does not “yet” present the egalitarian perspective, he tries to show that Scripture is moving in that direction. One can, ostensibly, plot the trajectory or movement of the application of redemptive truth to foresee that egalitarianism is the logical conclusion to the intent of Scripture. Apart from a detailed response to his book (some of which is inherent in later chapters herein), his approach seems so hopelessly confusing, that it puts the study of this subject completely out of reach of the average layman. It leaves the average reader of Scripture at a complete loss as to know what in Scripture is solidly taught and what is on some trajectory, the goal of which can only be a guess at best. By analogy, in the science of mathematics, one can interpolate within the data with some degree of accuracy, but extrapolation becomes a very risky proposition, particularly the farther you get from the data. The same would be true of trying to plot the trajectory of Scripture in the “redemptive-movement” hermeneutic. Once you move beyond Scripture, interpretation becomes risky, especially when it contravenes what is clearly seen on the surface of Scripture. One must be very careful about such new hermeneutics.

The product of this ongoing wrestling has brought confusion and a division among Christians. Who's to blame? Some blame the women, others blame the men. Some feel men are not qualified to address this issue objectively because of a conflict of interest. But that charge cuts both ways, for women too have a vested interest which can render them non-objective. Emotions rage intensely. The predominant world view in North America shades people's thinking, namely that self-centered personal autonomy is a basic right in our society. The ultimate good in the world's thinking today is personal freedom, and that mantra trumps objectivity—it blocks out the voices of reason.

To make matters worse, stereotypes are often applied, and then reasoned discussion ends amid *ad hominen* judgments. For example, the debate is sometimes emotionally cast alongside the slavery issue of years gone by. When such happens, second guessing one another's motives is rampant—men really just want

the economic advantage of having women in “subjection.” But we must insist upon the truth in this area as we should in all important areas of human relations. Only the truth will set us free from either extreme of negative chauvinism or feminism—to be all that God intends us to be, male and female—to attain, as Elizabeth Elliot says, “...the true liberation that comes with humble submission to God’s original design.”

We believe a fair and honest study of God’s Word reveals a genuine solution to the problem of the sexes, the *complementarian* view of the roles of men and women in the church and home. By this is meant that men and women are equal in value and essence, both being made in the image of God; at the same time, our human sexuality is to be expressed in complementary ways—equal but different.<sup>5</sup>

While I believe that God originally created male and female in this way, the fall in the Garden of Eden distorted His design. The ensuing struggle between the sexes distorted and consumed the beautiful God-created pattern. Redemption in Christ, thankfully, restores the relationship to its place of dignity and fulfillment and enables men and women to finally enjoy their complementary differences. It remains for people of faith to embrace God’s design and will for this.

We believe strongly that resisting God’s design will not bring the emancipation feminists want (pendulum to the left), nor the control that chauvinists desire (pendulum to the right). John Piper puts it well: “Confusion over the meaning of sexual personhood today is epidemic. The consequence of this confusion is not a free and happy harmony among gender-free persons relating on the basis of abstract competencies. The consequence rather is more divorce, more homosexuality, more sexual abuse, more promiscuity, more social awkwardness, and more emotional distress and suicide that come with the loss of God-given identity.”<sup>6</sup>

Elliot concurs: “For years I have noted with growing disquiet the pollution of many Christians’ minds by the doctrine of feminism. I believe it is a far more dangerous pollution than most have realized, and I (with what seemed to me pitifully few others) have tried to sound the alarm in every way I could.”

We approach this subject with a certain amount of fear and trepidation. On the one hand, one can very easily marginalize himself by failing to conform to the myriad of modern-day shibboleths<sup>7</sup> and to cultural elitism. On the other hand, embarrassment grips many in the anticipation of accusations such as *fundamentalism* or *backwardness* or *sexism*. Understanding and obeying God's Word has never been popular in our modern culture which at one time proclaimed, "God is dead" and at another time asserted, "God is whoever or whatever you want or need him, her or it to be." How ironic that such a culture, confused as it is on the existence of God, should consider believers in the God of the Bible to be socially and intellectually challenged individuals, particularly as it relates to the sexes. The fact of the matter is that modern solutions to the problem of the sexes have just not produced a credible validation for themselves, and thereby have rendered the modern culture socially and intellectually *challenged* itself.

Most in our culture, it would seem, think the question of gender roles is now a moot one, having been settled by accepted public opinion—the answer is a given, only the application of which needs to be consistently worked out. Certainly, the dominant media and current political activists would make us think so, but as every kindergarten child learns, "The majority is not always right."

This book primarily concerns how the sexes are to relate in the church, and not about roles of husbands and wives in the home<sup>8</sup>. It will, however, touch on aspects of masculinity and femininity in family life insofar as this will help us understand our subject in context of the church. Our main point is that, "*you should know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of truth*" (1 Timothy 3:15).

For every one of us, our individual perspectives are shrouded in a background of personal experiences. Consequently, clear and objective thinking on this subject is difficult. The person who superficially dismisses any honest, thoughtful discussion of the matter makes a gross misjudgment. We cannot simply capitulate to the status quo (whether to the left or to the right), for this is neither intellectually sound nor spiritually safe.

Socially, individually and spiritually, the ramifications are enormous. For as the church goes, so go the Christians. Above all, it is dangerous thing to dismiss, bend or handle carelessly the Word of God and His design for the sexes.

***How should we begin?***

Many have undertaken a study of this subject beginning with very specific passages such as Galatians 3:28, 1 Timothy 2:11-12 or 1 Corinthians 11:1-16<sup>9</sup>. The choice of a starting point certainly has a large influence on the direction of the discussion and, for the less astute, can predispose the conclusion. But the interpreter must be aware of the consequent danger of attempting to explain away passages that do not fit with his or her declared *first* or *clear* passages. We must beware of those who say, “*The* key verse is ...” then declare their interpretation of the whole subject based on that verse alone, and go on to force all other verses to fit with that one verse. Regarding a passage that seemed to disagree with his perspective, I heard someone once say: “The way I get around that verse is ....” One should not *get around* God’s revealed Word! One may study it, wrestle with it, ponder it and submit to it, but one does not *get around* it. Such thinking is sloppy at best, dangerous at worst. All Scripture is inspired and weighty<sup>10</sup>. We *must* account for each verse that addresses this subject.

We should be quick to admit that we may never, this side of heaven, completely understand everything Scripture has to say about the subject of God’s design for the sexes. His diversity is marvelous and incredibly profound. It makes sense that at least some aspects of this study may challenge our limited intellect. As with all theology, we err when we try to over-simplify.

However, we ought not fear that which we do not understand. This study should leave us praising God for His complex yet fascinating handiwork, with an incredible sense of awe. Indeed, most of us *do* find the opposite sex a mystery. While this *mystery* may provide the grist for much humor, it nonetheless makes life much more interesting than a unisex humanity. I believe our Lord meant sexuality to be an attraction, something to be relished and enjoyed. A title of one book on the subject captures it well: “Men and Women: Enjoying The Difference.”<sup>11</sup>

In discovering just what these differences are, the appropriate starting point to start is at the beginning, namely to discern the basic ideas revealed in the creation of the sexes. It seems intuitively obvious that God has built sexuality into our very existence, and it makes sense that we would find foundational insights into the relationships between male and female by studying the creation accounts—the biblical understanding of how the sexes came into being. Therefore, we start our biblical study with Genesis chapters 1-3.

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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Every cell in the male body has an “X” and “Y” chromosome, whereas every cell in the female body has two “X” chromosomes.

<sup>2</sup> Although the NIV version of the Bible uses capitalization of the first letter of pronouns referring to God, the original Greek did not use this convention for distinguishing between pronouns referring to God and pronouns referring to others. In text of this book, the reader will notice that I *do* use capitalization of divine pronouns. The reason for this is that I believe it sets apart references to God in a more readily recognizable fashion and also because it shows deference to or respect for God. Regrettably, this results in some inconsistency between my text and the text of the NIV Bible quotations.

<sup>3</sup> As in all discussions of this nature, bad examples can be found on both sides of this issue, where people give “lip service” to the truth, but live out manipulatively for their own benefit. This does not invalidate a viewpoint, but simply shows that knowing the truth and living the truth are two different things.

<sup>4</sup> In fact, men also have often been suppressed and oppressed by other men!

<sup>5</sup> Many today inconsistently reject such a notion of equal but different in relation to the sexes, but accept it in most every other area of life, for example, in employer/employee, parents/child, landlord/tenant and coach/player relationships.

<sup>6</sup> John Piper, “Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1991), p. 27.

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<sup>7</sup> This term is taken from the account in Judges 12 where the men came up with a plan to identify those foreigners who could not correctly say the word “shibboleth.” It was a kind of “litmus” test to determine “who is with us and who is against us.”

<sup>8</sup> An excellent book that deals with the practical side of this is, *Rocking the Roles: Building a Win-Win Marriage*, by authors Robert Lewis and William Hendricks.

<sup>9</sup> See the extensive bibliography at the back.

<sup>10</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16.

<sup>11</sup> Larry Crabb, *Men and Women: Enjoying the Difference* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan).

# CREATION

## Chapter Two

*G*enesis is the book of “Beginnings.” Here, in the first book of the Bible, we are introduced to the origins of all God’s work: the beginnings of creation, of mankind, of sin, of God’s plan of redemption, and of His people Israel. Chapter one contains the time table of creation, six days culminating in the formation of humanity. Chapter two then retells the story of God’s creation of humanity, providing additional and crucial details.

In the initial telling of the story, after creating the land creatures, God said,

*Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule ... all the earth, and over all the creatures ...* (Genesis 1:26).

In this very first reference to humanity, the English word *man* is a translation of the singular Hebrew word form ‘*adam*. Clearly the passage refers not just to the single male, Adam, but to the whole of the human race, because the next phrase refers to this ‘*adam* with the plural pronoun, *them*. Humanity, called ‘*adam*, was made in God’s image and was to rule over the rest of God’s creation. Therefore, being created in God’s image and *ruling* applies to humanity as a whole, without respect to gender.

*So God created man [‘adam] in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them* (Genesis 1:27).

Notice, the verse refers to ‘*adam* here with both the singular *him* and the plural *them*. The sexes are distinguished, *male and female*, yet both are encompassed in the singular ‘*adam*.

Therefore, *maleness* and *femaleness* were built in at the time of creation. Now this may seem like an obvious point, but let me put it another way. It is true that we are all humans. But it is manifestly obvious that a person is created as a male human or a female human. One cannot speak of his or her humanity without also taking into consideration his or her maleness or femaleness.

Maleness or femaleness is at the core of who we are as created beings in the image of God! I, for example, am a male human being, my wife is a female human being. In our creation, we are equal in that we both reflect God's image and are to rule over the rest of creation; but also in our creation, we are different in that we were created as male and female.

This account is reaffirmed a few chapters later:

*... When God created man ['adam] he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them 'man' ['adam] (Genesis 5:1-2).*

Here, *'adam* clearly includes male and female—both were created in God's image, yet both are distinguished in their creation.

Now this raises two obvious questions: 1) In what way are both men and women similar? and 2) In what way are men and women different?

### **THE SIMILARITY—BOTH REFLECT THE IMAGE OF GOD**

The meaning of this concept—being created in the image of God, or the “Imago Dei”—has challenged the minds of many. The full understanding of this is beyond the scope of this study,<sup>1</sup> but we can make a few observations. We can be certain that the image of God does not refer to physical characteristics, for God is not a physical being, but is spirit<sup>2</sup>—He does not have sexual anatomy. In our physicalness, we are like animals; we share our earthiness with them. Therefore, like animals, we have brains, blood, bones, appendages, sex organs, etc. Obviously, in some attributes we are more like some animals (such as the primates) than other animals (sponges).

But God has given to mankind<sup>3</sup> the image of God, which distinguishes us from the rest of the animal world. The image of

God is that which makes humans more than just animals. It is what makes us like God.

But just what does this image of God entail? We can see as the Genesis account unfolds that the first humans were given the responsibility over (to tend) God's creation<sup>4</sup>:

*The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it (Genesis 2:15).*

Responsibility implies volition or *will*: the ability to choose. This is different than in animals which respond by what is commonly called *instinct*. Animals are never judged for their choices, whereas humans are held responsible for following God's will. And His will is that we be His delegates, looking after His creation. Therefore, the image of God involves having a will, the ability and responsibility to make choices.

*Intellect* is another aspect of God's image. God's instruction to care for creation requires intelligence, the ability to be aware of needs outside of oneself, to evaluate and communicate. Certainly, animals have a certain amount of this, but in humans this faculty includes the ability to reason, to be self-aware.<sup>5</sup>

Mankind was given the command to be *creative*<sup>6</sup>—to create more human beings (traditionally called *pro-creation*). Whereas animals have this ability, they do so by instinct. We humans not only have the ability (and the drive), but by virtue of our will, we do this by choice—albeit one that is strongly encouraged by hormones. We can choose to create or not to create.

In all these things, mankind is like God, which leads to an inference about our relationship with God. We are to *represent* the Creator, acting in His place, taking care of all that He has created, willfully sharing in His creativeness. This does not mean we are all to be farmers or zoo keepers. But it does suggest that we are to act like God would act toward that which He has created, whether in the environmental sense or in the social sense. We are to responsibly take care of ourselves, our neighbors and the world—to make sure that we carefully represent God in all of our dealings. In so doing we reflect well the likeness of God. Theologians put it this way: that we are His vice-regents, speaking and acting on His behalf.

The Scripture reveals another insight into the image of God. After Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the fruit from the forbidden tree they, “... *heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day ...*” (Genesis 3:8).

God desired fellowship with His creation, that which was made in His own image and likeness. He wanted to enjoy their companionship. Certainly, the Lord can enjoy the animal world in that it reflects His handiwork—like an artist who admires his own painting. However, in mankind God admires not just His handiwork, but also His own reflection—and He desires fellowship with, or *to walk* with, the bearers of His image. It seems safe to conclude that the image of God involves also the capacity *to relate to God* in an intimate way.

In all these ways, we are like God. We (male and female) can rule, choose, think, create and relate. Men and women together are equal in value and worth and are equally like God. Together we are to represent God on the earth.

### **THE DIFFERENCE**

While Genesis chapter one simply identifies maleness and femaleness as essential aspects of our creation as human beings, chapter two reveals a differentiation between the sexes. A number of specific observations are instructive. The two creation accounts of mankind are brief—five verses in chapter one, and twenty-five verses in chapter two. Such a concise rendering of God’s supreme creation does not permit us to take the details incidentally.<sup>7</sup> The economy of words used by the Divine Author indicates that each word is carefully included for a reason. If the only difference between Adam and Eve (male and female) is biological or anatomical, then the details of Genesis 2 are superfluous and simply add color to the story. This is highly unlikely in such a foundational passage to the entire Bible.

The very idea of differences beyond the physical, though, causes a strong reaction in some, as Clark H. Pinnock points out: “[Some] feel considerable hatred (not too strong a word) for any suggestion that God might have created the sexes with an important role differentiation.”<sup>8</sup> Yet the inspired New Testament writers, as we shall see shortly, assign great significance to the distinguishing details of the creation account, in regard to the sexes.

Therefore, the specifics are *not* superfluous, but are meant to convey important distinctions.

What then can we say about the differences in the sexes? Let's turn to the evidence.

***Humanity was created with individual sexuality.***

*The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being (Genesis 2:7).*

That this passage refers to Adam alone is clear from the context and the singular *living being*. The creation of the woman follows:

*So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man (Genesis 2:21-22).*

The Lord did not create a generic, sexless human being, and subsequently divide *it* into a *him* and a *her*. Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*, misunderstood this in 1963 when she wrote “[A girl] must learn to compete ... not as a woman, but as a human being.” I wonder what this sexless human being is that Miss Friedan wants women to be like. God, however, created a male human from the *dust of the ground* and then He created a female human from the male. Sexual differences are built in from creation. We were created differently—to be different. Even Paul Jewett, an early, self-avowed feminist<sup>9</sup> admitted, “Sexuality permeates one's individual being to its very depth; it conditions every facet of one's life as a person. As the self is aware of itself as an ‘I’, so this ‘I’ is always aware of itself as himself or herself.”<sup>10</sup> Margaret Mead, the well-known anthropologist, adds: “We know of no culture that has said, articulately, that there is no difference between men and women except in the way they contribute to the creation of the next generation.”<sup>11</sup> Our North American popular culture is desperately trying to be the exception!

***The man was created first, then the woman.***

The order of creation (i.e. man created first, then woman) is crucial to our understanding of the sexes. How do we know the order is theologically significant? One fundamental of hermeneutics is to let Scripture interpret Scripture. In other words, one basic rule of interpretation is to ask, "How do the later writers of the Bible interpret the earlier writings of the Bible?" The apostle Paul was an expert in Jewish understandings of the Scriptures<sup>12</sup> and was inspired by the Holy Spirit.<sup>13</sup> He treated the order of creation as important when he validated an instruction to Timothy about teaching roles in the church by saying, "*For Adam was formed first, then Eve*" (1 Timothy 2:13). He echoes this in his letter to the Corinthians where he points out that:

*... man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man* (1 Corinthians 11:8-9).

The order of creation, by later Scripture's own inspired interpretation, is therefore significant!

What, then, is the significance? Apart from what the apostle Paul says about this in the New Testament (we will look at this later), the idea of being first created, in the Hebrew mentality, follows closely the concept of *firstborn*. The first male child born into a family inherited a double portion and the blessing from the father:

*... he [i.e. the father] must acknowledge the son of his unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double share of all he has. That son is the first sign of his father's strength. The right of the firstborn belongs to him* (Deuteronomy 21:17).

This also meant the son who had the right of the firstborn had, in the absence of the father, the responsibility and authority over the household. Most commentaries recognize this distinction in the meaning of the firstborn. For example:

As the first strength of his father, he became the next head of the family (or clan or tribe), and embodied the soul and character of the social group, becoming responsible for its

continuance and welfare. As such he acted with a certain authority, felt a greater responsibility....”<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, the NT uses the term *firstborn* in this manner in reference to Jesus Christ to stress His sovereignty over all creation.<sup>15</sup>

This understanding is in keeping with Paul’s use of this passage in his instruction about men and women:

*I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve (1 Timothy 2:13).*

Adam was not *firstborn* (in the normal sense of the word) but *first-created*. By analogy, however, his being first created would be understood to the Jewish mind as being significant on the same level as being the firstborn.

I can sense, as I write, that some reading this may begin to bristle with this thought. It may seem that I am implying Adam was more valuable or more important than Eve in the grand scheme of things. This, however, is not the case. For example, in our North American culture we can easily see that the CEO of a company has a different role than the middle management individual, yet both are of equal value and worth as human beings. In their relationship within the company, their roles have differing significance and responsibilities. The barber and the one receiving the haircut are equal individuals in value and worth, but have differing roles. And so also with the teacher and student, doctor and patient, salesperson and client, coach and player. Michael Jordan, one of the greatest basketball players to play the game, revealed in an interview that he had a paid, private trainer, under whom he placed himself for guidance in his physical development. Both are of equal value intrinsically as human beings, but in their relationship, the player submitted to the trainer’s *authority*.

Permit one more analogy. I know of a man who is part of a family-owned business and sits on the board of directors. As such, he has authority *over* the president of the company. But this man also works for the company as the director of public relations. In this second role, he serves *under* the authority and direction of the president of the company. In the different roles, his relationship with the president functions differently. The two

men are of equal value as human beings, though they relate to each other differently based on which “hat” is being worn.

A more compelling analogy is a theological example of the trinity. James Oliver Buswell says it well:

...the divine Sonship designates a relationship of absolutely essential equality ... all references to the subordination of the Son to the Father signify a functional subordination in the economy of the divine redemptive program. It is of utmost importance that we distinguish between ... functional subordination, and essential equality.<sup>16</sup>

In other words, the Father and the Son are equal but function in different roles. This analogy has become so poignant today that some, in their efforts to maintain an egalitarian viewpoint, have begun an assault on this long held understanding of the trinity. Yet Scripture is clear about this: God the Father and God the Son are equal but different.

*The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his Being (Hebrews 1:3)*<sup>17</sup>.

... [Jesus] was heard because of his reverent submission (Hebrews 5:7).

Wayne House has warned of the inevitable attack on long established doctrines of the Christian faith:

The ways in which many evangelical feminist scholars and authors have sought to justify their interpretations of specific biblical texts, however, is disturbing. Their methods of interpretation—adopting novel views of the meanings of words and of grammatical and textual factors—if used in other areas of theology would probably be considered forced, if not clearly erroneous.<sup>18</sup>

Unless we are prepared to depart from long established Christian doctrine, we are compelled by theological analogy that it is indeed possible for two entities to be equal, yet different. Jesus and the Father are both equal, but different in roles. Therefore, in similar fashion, while men and women are equal in value and worth, there is a difference in priority by virtue of him

being created before her. The significance of this will be seen as we continue our observations.

***God gave instructions to the man before the woman was created.***

Three instructions were given to the man *before* the woman was created. First, he was to take care of the garden, as implied in the narrative: “*The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it*” (Genesis 2:15). Second, he was to get his nourishment from the trees of the garden: “*And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden...’*” (Genesis 2:16). Finally, he was told not to eat of the forbidden tree: “*...but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die*” (Genesis 2:17). These three represent his responsibility, his freedom and his limitation.

There is no record that Eve received these instructions from God directly. We will see later in Genesis 3 when the man and woman disobey God, that Adam had a greater responsibility before God for not keeping these instructions. Since she had received her life through Adam after the commands were given, it is entirely possible and probable she had received the instructions through him as well. Adam apparently had the responsibility to convey to her God’s desires in these areas of responsibility, freedom and limitation. It would be difficult to support a better, more likely interpretation.

***Man by himself had a need for woman.***

Adam’s need was recognized by God: “*The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him’*” (Genesis 2:18). Interestingly, the Lord follows this by parading all the animals and birds by Adam, “*to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.*” The reason for this becomes evident a few verses later when it is noted that “*... for Adam no suitable helper was found.*” The parade of animals was not for God’s benefit, but for Adam’s. Probably watching the animals paired up as male and female, may have given rise in Adam to a sense of aloneness. Apparently God was showing Adam his

need. It may be noted that the need was for a female, not another male.

***The man, not the woman, named the animals.***

The very first recorded activity of Adam was to name the animals (Genesis 2:19-20). The inspired author, Moses, recorded the creation account using terms and concepts familiar to his immediate audience, that is, the Hebrew people of his time.<sup>19</sup> When an individual named something, this meant he had a certain authority over it.<sup>20</sup> Even in today's psycho-therapeutic language, when a person names something, he or she is taking a certain control or power over it. The implication here is that Adam was given responsible authority over the rest of God's animated creation. It was a privilege, but also a responsibility. He was operating under the command of God and was responsible directly to Him. This was a responsibility God gave to Adam, not to Eve, for she had not been created yet. If she shared in that authority, it was not by direct command from the Lord, but indirectly, by virtue of her being created out of Adam and becoming one flesh with Adam (Genesis 2:24).

***Adam was created from the dust, Eve was created from Adam.***

God, in a process unknown to modern science, took dust from the earth, formed a body and breathed into this body the breath of life and the man became a *living being* (Heb. *nephesh*) (Genesis 2:7). He was alive and earthy—creation animated by the Creator's breath; God exhaling into the man—truly an intimate intercourse between Himself and His creation. The result was life! This was absolutely unique, enormously different from the rest of God's handiwork.

The material from which Eve, the first woman, was created was not dust as was the case for Adam. Rather, God used Adam's substance to create Eve. The breath of God is not mentioned in the creation of Eve, so it presumably came by way of Adam. It would seem altogether too casual to assume that God breathed directly into her the breath of life, But failed to record it for us. The woman was created by the Lord into a living being through the medium of the man. She was created in relationship to him, not independently of him. Yet the first man was created independently of the first woman.

Now it is true that every subsequent man is taken from a woman (that is, born of a woman) and the apostle Paul points this out “...as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman” (1 Corinthians 11:11-12). Therefore, the man is not independent from the woman either. Each is dependent upon the other. But this dependence finds expression in different ways. In talking about different expressions, we must step back to appreciate this magnificent picture.

A beautiful pattern is beginning to emerge: the relationship between man and woman glorifies God in that it reflects the relationship between God and His creation. As God gave of Himself (His breath) to man, the man in similar fashion gives of himself (his rib, his substance) to woman.<sup>21</sup> To put it another way, something of God was given to man, and something of man was given to woman. As man received from the Lord, the woman receives from the man. The pattern is so obviously parallel to that of God and His creation that it forms a pattern for the man giving and moving toward the woman, just as God did with His creation.

What does this really mean? On the one hand, for God’s glory to be seen, there needed to be something other than God to see it and receive it. That something had to be a creation of God, for there could be nothing else that exists that has not been created by God.<sup>22</sup> So He created and then proceeded to *show His glory* to this creation of His. Of course, this would imply a creation that could appreciate and enter into God’s glory. Further, He created everything to *reflect His glory* as well. In the first case, therefore, He shows His glory *to* His creation—and in the second case, creation reflects His glory *back* to Him. Through His handiwork, His glory is seen as the work of a Master Designer, Architect and Artist.

Now follow closely. One of the supreme ways in which creation reflects God is found in the unique image of God that men and women together emulate. When a man moves toward a woman, giving of his life, exhaling (as it were) his “being” into hers, he dramatically reflects the work of God towards His creation. Indeed, I believe this is what Paul was getting at in Ephesians 5:26-27 when he speaks of the man treating his wife the way Christ treats the church by “*mak(ing) her holy, cleansing ... to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or*

*wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*<sup>23</sup> When a woman receives this life movement, as it were, this exhaling from a man, she dramatically reflects creation's response to God's glory by receiving it freely and joyfully. Paul writes of this responsive role of the woman to her husband:

*Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord ... Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands ... (Ephesians 5:22-24).*<sup>24</sup>

The way men and women relate to each other mirrors the way God and His creation relate to each other. The man giving, initiating, moving toward the woman and the woman receiving from, responding to and accepting the man's movement toward her. The sum of this is that men and women reflect back to God what He is like through dramatically demonstrating God's relationship with His creation. Man by himself cannot do it. Woman by herself cannot do it. Both are needed to make this reflection.

Is this far-fetched? What does the rest of Scripture say? Interestingly, the Bible often uses gender<sup>25</sup> metaphors to reflect God's relationship with His people. Israel is often alluded to as God's *wife* (for example, see Hosea 1). Israel's frequent idolatry is often referred to with terms such as *adultery* or *prostitution* (for example see Judges 2:17). The church is Christ's *bride* (Revelation 19:9, 21:2). In Ephesians 5:22-33 (as already noted above) husbands and wives are instructed to pattern their relationship after Christ and the church. In all these examples, God is masculine toward His people, and the people of God are feminine toward God.<sup>26</sup> Even 1 Corinthians 11, when Paul deals with the headcovering (which will be discussed below), the glory of God, of man and of the woman is very much part of the discussion. We can see, then, that the man/woman relationship is a common metaphor or picture of God's relationship with humans and contains deeper insights into both the gender issue as well as the relationship between God and humans.

In this view, homosexuality is a complete perversion of the biblical picture. Is it any wonder that in the apostle Paul's classic description of the downward spiral of hardened hearts away from God, the lowest point in the descent is homosexuality (Romans

1:21-27)? It is a complete corruption of the image of God, the Divine analogy, as displayed in human relationships.

All we are seeing so far are simple, foundational concepts. How do these flesh out and what implications do these have for married people or for single people? This will be addressed later. At this point, suffice it to note that the order and mode of creation suggests that masculinity includes the notion of a man giving, imparting of himself and that femininity includes the notion of receiving, responding (whether actively or passively) to that which the man gives.

***Woman created for man as a helper.***

Adam needed help! He could not fulfill God's purpose alone: "*The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone, I will make a helper (KJV helpmeet), suitable for him'*" (Genesis 2:18). The passage doesn't say he needed a slave or a lesser human being. Some today would denigrate the term *helper* as reference to an inferior being. But it is a good word and is used to describe God Himself: "*Behold, God is my helper; The Lord is the sustainer of my soul*" (Psalms 54:4 NASB).<sup>27</sup> The underlying Hebrew term in both cases is *'ezer*. Carl Shultz, in the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, points out that this word occurs approximately eighty times in the OT and that it "generally indicates military assistance." The underlying concept refers to one who rescues or saves.<sup>28</sup> It is used when an individual of strength comes to the aid of another. It does not have the sense of slavery, nor does it imply inferiority in the strict sense.

The passage (Genesis 2:18) infers that the primary responsibility for looking after creation lies with Adam, but he cannot do it alone. The woman was created to help him—and to do this in a unique way. No animal could fulfill this role, nor could another man.

The woman was not *just* a helper, she was *meet for* (KJV), *comparable to* (NKJV) or *suitable for* (NIV/NASB) him. Literally, the Hebrew word means *corresponding to*<sup>29</sup> and has the sense of supplying that which is lacking, like two pieces of a puzzle that are distinct, yet fit perfectly together. None of the animals were found *corresponding to* him. Rather, the man and woman were made to be a matching pair. Two men or two women do not make a match that God intends.

Concerning the man and the woman, the text clearly indicates: “*The two will become one flesh*” (Genesis 2:24). Together, they make a corresponding whole, while maintaining their individual sexuality. It is not a matter of the two becoming twice what they were before, but rather the two becoming a complete one. God presents a picture of man and woman as complementary partners united in serving and representing God. Some might say at this juncture that the *correspondence* refers only to the anatomical differences between male and female. But the order of creation and the expressed intent of God in designing woman from man to be his helper suggests otherwise.

The book of Genesis is given so we can understand God’s design in the beginning, which sets the foundation for understanding His design for the present as well. What is true of the first man and woman becomes true for all who come from Adam and Eve—all of us!

But what does this say about single people? We live in a fallen world in which none of us fully enjoys God’s grand design for creation. Many individuals suffer the pain of singleness, both in the failure of relationships to materialize or the pain of relationships failed. Yet this pain only validates the natural draw inherent to the built-in correspondence between the sexes.<sup>30</sup> This, however, does not relegate single people to a lesser status. Given the fall of man (which we will look at shortly), only by God’s grace can anyone experience a healthy, godly relationship with the opposite sex or a fulfilled life as a single person.<sup>31</sup>

***Man named the woman.***

The man was given responsibility for naming this new creature taken from his side. He recognized that she was physically taken from him and asserted his essential unity of *substance* with her:

*The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman.’ For she was taken out of man” (Genesis 2:23).*

Here, the second word for *man* in the Hebrew is ‘*ish*’ rather than ‘*adam*.’ This term ‘*ish*’ is used most frequently in the OT in reference to an individual male or to a husband. Of significance here is that Adam refers to the woman as ‘*ishah*’ and explains this as

relating to the fact that the woman was “*taken out of the man.*” In the same way that the term ‘*ishah* derives from ‘*ish*, the woman derives from the man, clearly meant to be a play on words.

As mentioned above, to name something is to have responsibility for authority over it. Adam was to be responsible for Eve, to have a kind of authority over her. Because of our present day over-sensitivity to this word *authority*, many reject this notion outright. Yet in God’s original design, authority was a responsibility not a privilege or a right. Too often the tendency is to read our current culture back into the biblical text—however nothing in the passage suggests that the man is to be a controlling master or tyrant. And nothing suggests there is a hierarchy of relative worth between the two. However, everything in the text here does suggest that he was to have responsible leadership and she was to help him as she responds to him. C.S. Lewis put it this way:

I don’t think that equality is one of those things which are good simply in themselves and for their own sakes ... I don’t think ... authority ... [is] in itself a degrading or evil thing at all. I think it was intrinsically as good and beautiful as the nakedness of Adam and Eve.<sup>32</sup>

The greater emphasis for “tending the land” in Genesis chapters 2 and 3 is clearly placed on Adam, therefore, it may be inferred that the man has the greater responsibility in *work*. Further, just as it would be natural to see that Adam should have protected his wife by leading her away from the tree (we skip ahead for a moment), a man’s responsible leadership today would seem to include a protecting aspect as well. Although the text here doesn’t detail this idea, Peter in his first epistle picks up on the thought in directing a husband to treat his wife considerately as a *weaker partner*:

*Husbands, 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 ... (1 Peter 3:7).*

Whatever this means (see later), the concept of the man protecting would fit quite nicely into such a relationship of responsible leadership.

Jesus Himself ruled out self-aggrandizing authoritarianism or a disdainful condescension in the abuse of authority (Luke 22:26). Even Peter, that converted, crusty fisherman said, as noted above, that a man should treat a woman as an honored, respected individual, someone not to be patronized. This authority is a trust, not a right for men to exercise for their own self-centeredness or ego-satisfaction. Indeed, when understood rightly, men have a very difficult assignment, as C.S. Lewis self-consciously observes:

*It is painful, being a man, to have to assert the privilege, or the burden, which Christianity lays upon my own sex. I am crushingly aware how inadequate most of us are, in our actual and historical individualities, to fill the place prepared for us.<sup>33</sup>*

***They were both naked.***

One of the most profound verses on this subject of male and female relationships is found in the next verse: “*The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame*” (Genesis 2:25). Most commentators agree that this speaks about an open, transparent relationship that the first man and woman had at the beginning. There was perfect harmony with no conflict, nothing to hide. On the one hand, the man presumably showed responsible leadership and initiative. On the other hand, the woman came alongside, responsively and in perfect harmony. At least at the beginning there was no power struggle or demands for one’s rights. There was no shame or repression or conflict.

Unfortunately, this was not to last because sin crept in and destroyed the wonderful relationship they had. Openness gave way to shame. Harmony twisted into acrimony. Peace turned to conflict. Submission to God was supplanted by a power struggle between the two. It takes no scholarly research to observe this condition in many relationships today.

To find a correct solution to a problem, one must determine what the real problem is. Genesis presents a hierarchical relationship of responsibility, where the man provides responsible

leadership and the woman comes along side, responsive to that leadership. This hierarchy as presented in the first book of the Bible is not the cause of today's problems among the sexes. The trouble lies in the sinful hearts of men and women, which distorted God's original design. It all began at a tree in the garden, when Adam and Eve determined to contravene God's pattern in their rebellion against the Creator.

### CONCLUSION

The depth of God's wonderful artistry goes far beyond the physical. If He were interested only in biological differences, the creation account would be completely out of balance and the details superfluous. Yet every word, jot and tittle is important and inspired (Matthew 5:18), so journalistic flare does not suffice to explain the minutiae contained in the account. If the only difference between the sexes were biological, why create sexual differences in the first place? Asexual reproduction would have been much more efficient. If someone says efficiency is not the issue, then we ask what *was* the issue in recording the detail? Was it simply God's wonderful and varied creativeness? If that were the case, why not simply describe a beautiful sunset or lush valley full of fruit? The answer entails far more.

In concise, tightly written prose, the Divine Author of the creation account exalts the sexuality of male and female, whose differences go well beyond the physical. While both men and women reflect God's image individually, male and female together reflect God's relationship with His creation. What a privilege we have to participate in this grand drama that reflects the eternal, ever-existing God and His superb creation!

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### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, G.C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1962).

<sup>2</sup> John 4:24.

<sup>3</sup> We use the traditional term *mankind* when referring to this 'adam', to preserve the interplay of that word in reference to both the man Adam, as well as to the human race.

<sup>4</sup> Initially, the only creation Adam and Eve knew was the garden.

<sup>5</sup> Much has been made about the ability of animals to “think,” but these findings fall far short of human intelligence and are greatly debated.

<sup>6</sup> Historically, theologians have identified “emotion” to be one of the three defining characteristics (along with intellect and will) of being human. But we are specifically limiting ourselves to the question of the image of God as revealed in the text of Genesis 1 and 2. Certainly, in Genesis 3 we find the emotion of guilt and fear.

<sup>7</sup> In fact, all of God’s Word is important, even to the smallest letter or part of a letter—jot and tittle (see Matthew 5:18).

<sup>8</sup> Clark Pinnock, in *Woman, Authority and the Bible* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1968), 57. [This reference is hereafter referred to as WAB]. Pinnock also comments, “The delicate interplay, the give and the take between man and woman—a mirror of the redemptive relationship between Christ and the church—speaks nothing of superiority and inferiority, but only of a vastly fulfilling love that welcomes the differentiations God has assigned” p. 68.

<sup>9</sup> The word “feminist” can be applied to any one, male or female, who asserts there is not distinction to the roles of men and women. The term itself simply refers to the movement to supposedly raise the status of women to that of men.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Jewett *Man as Male and Female: A Study in Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1975), 172. Jewett goes on to skirt the issue of what really is the difference, indicating he is not so sure what they are! He speaks of partnership, minimizing the differences, but he does not give us to understand the nature of this partnership that makes them complementary.

<sup>11</sup> Margaret Mead, *Male and Female: The Classic Study of the Sexes*, (Quill, 1996 reprint).

<sup>12</sup> In his own words, Paul states: “I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers” (Galatians 1:14).

<sup>13</sup> Some, in the effort to wrestle with the problem of the sexes, have dismissed certain of Paul’s writings as being the opinions of a chauvinistic man who was conditioned by his times. Yet Paul himself claimed divine authority in his writings as an Apostle (1 Timothy 1:1) and claims to be sent by God, not by men (Galatians 1:1). See 2 Peter 3:15-16 where the Apostle Peter refers to Paul’s writing on the same level as Scripture.

<sup>14</sup> *The Interpreter’s Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Firstborn”. See also *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v. “only begotten.”

<sup>15</sup> Romans 8:29, Colossians 1:15, Hebrews 1:6.

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<sup>16</sup> James Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, Zondervan, 1973, p. 106.

<sup>17</sup> See also Hebrews 1:3, Colossians 1:19; 2:9, John 10:30, John 14:28; 5:30.

<sup>18</sup> H. Wayne House, *The Role of Women in Ministry Today*, p. 29, hereafter referred to RWMT.

<sup>19</sup> While the creation of Adam and Eve took place long before the Hebrew nation and culture came about, the story was given to Moses to record and to communicate in the context of the Hebrew culture. So we believe, God used terms and concepts that had meaning within that culture, even though the events themselves occurred long before. The facts are historical.

<sup>20</sup> Sigmund Mowinckel, in talking about the name of God says, "A name may have a deeper meaning than the one discernible at first glance and recognizable to everybody ... a man who knows the 'real' deeper meaning of the name of a god (sic), really 'knows the god' in question." *The Name of the God of Moses*, HUCA 32 (1961):126, quoted by Charles R. Gianotti, "Christ's Usage of 'I Am' In Light of the Divine Name" (Th. M. Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminar, 1983). No man has named God, but when a man names an animal or another human being, there is a sense of defining the qualities that are to be embraced or known about that individual correlating to the meaning of that name. To do this, that is give a name, then means that a person has the authority or prerogative to do so, and is recognized as such. For example, when John the Baptist was born, it was Zachariah who had the authority to name him. In fact, his authority was superseded by angelic proclamation. See Luke 1:13, 62-63.

<sup>21</sup> Adam, of course, was passive in this "giving" for he had nothing to say in the matter of Eve's creation. His only conscious role was in seeing his need.

<sup>22</sup> John 1:3, Colossians 1:16.

<sup>23</sup> We will address Ephesians 5 in more detail later.

<sup>24</sup> In Ephesians, Paul refers to the church, rather than creation, because the church is now the responsive one to God, rather than all creation, which was God's intention before the fall.

<sup>25</sup> Some purists argue that using the term "gender" in this discussion is incorrect in that the term is primarily a grammatical category used in the analysis of nouns, pronouns, etc. Yet it is commonly used today to refer to sexual identity and is so listed in *The American Heritage Dictionary* as a valid use of the term.

<sup>26</sup> Now we realize that occasionally Scripture presents God in feminine images such as when Jesus used the following analogy, "...how often I

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*have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings...*" (Matthew 23:37). Yet the preponderance of references to the masculinity of God toward us is abundantly evident in Scripture. The rare exceptions do not negate the general truth.

<sup>27</sup> See also Psalms 72:12; 10:14; 28:7; 22:11, etc.

<sup>28</sup> *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s.v. 'ezer.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v. *neged*.

<sup>30</sup> Though this is true, it is also true that when people reject God, the door is open to the slide toward depravity, at the extreme end of which men and women become attracted to others of the same sex. See Romans 1:18-32.

<sup>31</sup> We will look at the effects that the fall of man have on the man/woman relationship in the next section.

<sup>32</sup> *Present Concerns: Essays*, quoted in *The Quotable Lewis*, Tyndale, 1989.

<sup>33</sup> *God in the Dock*, quoted in *The Quotable Lewis*, Tyndale, 1989.

# DIGNITY, SEXUALITY AND ROLES

## Chapter Three

**B**efore we move to the topic of the sexes in Genesis 3, some comments need to be made about the concept of *dignity*, because this is a sensitive issue which clouds the discussion of gender roles. God's original design for the sexes inherently brings dignity to their respective roles—for ultimate dignity comes in fulfilling God's purposes in our lives. Yet we live in a fallen world, where God's original design has been distorted and abused, and people often look for things outside of God's plan to define life for themselves. As a result, emotions run high, especially in our current North American cultural and religious climate.

In the mind of some people, the suggestion of role distinctions is tantamount to an assault on the dignity of women. However, just the reverse is true. To *deny* the biblical, God-created differences in men and women, in the end denigrates women, removing them from the pinnacle of dignity and honor that God desires for them—and this despite what the culture says about dignity to the contrary.

In the first place, a woman's role being different than a man's role does not mean she is any less human or important. After all, in the parallel situation, the role of Jesus as responder to and follower of the Father's will does not mean the Son is any less dignified than the Father. It is true that He humbled Himself to become human and die on the cross (Philippians 2), but that was a voluntary act—and it was an act that brought great dignity to sacrifice, suffering and dying. Indeed, His role as the sacrificial lamb was absolutely important to God's great plan of redemption. Dignity is not found in some external cultural reference point or standard of treatment. Rather it is found in fulfilling

God's purpose for our lives, which Christ did supremely in His life and death.

Let's look closer at the concept of dignity. There are two main thoughts encompassed by the term<sup>1</sup>. First, it can refer to a "high rank, office or position." In this case, the dignity resides not with a person, but with the office. We use the term *dignitaries* when referring to such persons. Technically speaking, someone devoid of dignity can hold an office of dignity and be called a dignitary—yet this does not necessarily make them dignified.

Now it would seem apparent that striving for dignity through holding an office is superficial, like a person who buys a Ph.D. certificate from an online "diploma mill" without ever studying, and expects everyone to address him or her as "Doctor." He may use the dignified letters Ph.D. after his name, but he lacks credibility and true dignity. Dignity does not come from titles, pieces of paper or positions. Yet many people lay great importance on the *dignity* associated with certain offices or functions in the home or church and hold that any role distinctions based on gender deprive women of the *position* of dignity that men "enjoy." But this betrays a very hollow sense of dignity, the kind our world espouses—and it appeals to the pride in individuals.

The second and more significant sense of the word dignity refers to the "quality or state of being worthy of esteem or respect. Inherent nobility and worth. Poise and self-respect."<sup>2</sup> In this sense, a person's dignity does not depend on external circumstances, roles or positions. Dignity finds its ultimate source in the virtue of one's character. Therefore character, not position, determines true dignity—something one has regardless of whether the world around sees or recognizes it.

For Christians, we can walk tall and confident, knowing who we are in Christ. We have the Son of God dwelling in us and therefore God esteems us as co-heirs with Jesus (Galatians 3:29). We walk dignified when we take on the character of Christ in our attitude and response to our circumstances. Jesus maintained His dignity as He was tortured, mocked and spit upon, because His dignity did not depend on His *position*. Indeed, He encouraged His followers to eschew the false dignity that comes from positions of power and to instead humble oneself as a servant.<sup>3</sup>

As we identify with Him in His character, we join Him in the dignity accorded Him by His father.

The story was told years ago of a woman imprisoned in China because of her husband's political activities. Subjected to cruel, humiliating and debasing treatment, she refused to hate her jailers. In this attitude, as she relates, she found dignity, something her tormentors could not take away from her. The most dignified person is one who, though the world treats cruelly, finds his or her dignity drawn from inner character. The world cannot take that dignity away. On the other hand, the most undignified person is one who holds a position the world calls dignified yet does not demonstrate true dignity.

When thinking about dignity, certain individuals from Scripture come to mind. Moses had been ridiculed, challenged and even prevented from entering the promised land. Yet he appeared with Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus in His glory (Matthew 17:3). King David had his sin with Bathsheba exposed to the world (2 Samuel 12) and was later run out of Jerusalem by his own son who then raped the women of his (David's) court (2 Samuel 15). Despite this humiliation, Jesus accepted the esteemed title, *Son of David*. The woman of John chapter eight was caught in adultery and her sin was paraded in front of the people. The Holy One, Jesus, said a few words which scattered the shame-faced, finger pointing, self-righteous holders of high office, the "dignitaries." In contrast, He treated the woman of low esteem with great respect when He said, "*Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more.*"

Many people, who have been overlooked by the world but have gone about faithfully living for the Lord, without recognition or accolades or positions of authority, will one day hear their heavenly Master proclaim in front of all: "*Well done, good and faithful servant.*"<sup>4</sup> Such treatment, such esteem from the only One whose opinion really counts—now that is dignity, *par excellence!*

Efforts to remove distinctions between men and women by focusing on a so-called dignity attached to a position or office fail by misunderstanding the profoundly greater sense of dignity that is inherent in reclaiming true God-created sexual differences. In our present-day western world, masculinity and

femininity seem to have been cheapened to mere biological or chemical processes. Human behavior has been reduced to scientific study. I agree there is a place for psychology, that is, the study of human behavior. But when our human perceptions and scientific investigations become the controlling factors in determining what is or is not right or acceptable behavior in the area of sexuality, we have lost the God-given dignity of the sexes!

In the following chapters we will see that in regard to masculinity this means aspiring to be godly leaders, protectors and examples of right living—taking moral and material responsibility. In regards to femininity, this means aspiring to provide nurture and support, coming along side of masculinity and working together in line with his leadership (as we have seen in Genesis and will also see later).

If, as contended earlier, there is dignity in the God-given distinctions between masculinity and femininity, then why are there problems today? The *evidence* of the problem has been well identified: men to a large extent have treated women badly and assaulted their dignity in many ways—both historically and presently. Women often suffer silently or express their anger or frustration through marital strife or through political and social movements. Yet at the same time, men often are frustrated, confused and defensive, and live with a nagging sense of failure in their masculinity. Unfortunately, for both men and women, many miss out on the wonderfully exquisite dance between the sexes, relating in healthy, wholesome and enjoyable ways—all things that God intended.

To deal with the contemporary tension between the sexes, though, we must identify the underlying issues so that the correct solution will surface. It is precisely at this juncture that our culture diverges most from God's design. Modern fixes fail due to their inability to accept the fact that sin has perverted the good relationship that God intended in the complementary design of men and women. To understand this better, we now turn to the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

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ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> See American Heritage Dictionary, s.v. “dignity” where various shades of meaning are found, but these can be grouped into two general senses.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> See for example, Luke 22:25-26 “*Jesus said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.’*”

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 25:21

# DISTORTION SETS IN

## Chapter Four

Sexual differences of mankind were affected by the fall in the Garden of Eden. This was the first and archetypal entry of sin into the world, the consequences of which would be passed on to every human being from that point forward. The conflict of the sexes today is due not to a problem with the hierarchical design, but to ascendancy of sinful hearts in both men and women!

When the serpent, that is Satan, came to the Garden, he first seduced Eve to sin against God, and then she seduced Adam to join her in disobedience. The American Heritage Dictionary defines seduce as “To lead away from duty, accepted principles, or proper conduct.” Eve followed Satan’s lead and then in turn led Adam away from God’s command. In a modern day sense, Eve exercised a certain power over Adam in drawing Him away from loyalty to God.

The apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, interprets this event as being crucial in his instruction concerning leadership and teaching roles in the church:

*For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived, it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner (1 Timothy 2:13-14).*

Paul identifies Eve’s problem as one of deception, whereas, Adam’s was not. This difference somehow affected women’s suitability for certain roles in the church.

Some, though, immediately discount the significance of this passage since the deception of Eve was part of the fall. Our redemption in Christ, they say, restores us to the pre-fall condition; the role relationships came in after the fall and therefore since

we Christians are redeemed, the effects of the fall are reversed. After all, in Galatians 3:28 Paul asserts that “... *there is ... neither male nor female ... for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*”

However, the apostle Paul should be taken as his own best interpreter. He wrote his letter to Timothy (A.D. 62-64) later than his letter to the Galatians (A.D. 48)<sup>1</sup>. Assuming that he was not contradicting himself, his application in 1 Timothy is most reasonably taken as a qualifier for his general statement in Gal. From Paul’s inspired perspective, the order of creation and the order of the fall reveals something that is important in New Testament teaching about the roles of men and women—yet at the same time, this does not negate the essential equality of women and men before Christ.

The fall did not introduce male leadership—rather the fall distorted it! We will look at the NT passages in more detail later, but suffice it to say at this juncture that the NT writers saw the details of the fall as essential to this discussion about the sexes. Therefore, we must examine more closely what exactly happened.

### **SIN IN THE GARDEN**

Satan, in his craftiness, went after the woman first, not the man—which is in stark contrast to God giving the instructions to the man first, rather than the woman. Satan, the one who, before his own personal fall, was the “*model of perfection, full of wisdom ...*”<sup>2</sup> turned his wisdom to cunning in order to distort the perfection of God’s order. He apparently (and shrewdly) saw the woman as the more advantageous entry point for his purposes. This again may help us understand Peter’s perspective on women when he instructed:

*Husbands ... be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner...(1 Peter 3:7a).*

Like a lion seeking out a weaker animal in the herd, Satan exploited the weaker member of the “human herd”, as it were. By using the term *weakness*, we refer to that which one sex does not have that the other sex is to provide. Man was *weak* in that he needed a helper. The woman was *weak* in that she needed a leader. She had a propensity to be a follower, a responder. They both, in this sense, were *weak* and needed each other. It was

Eve's unique weakness, a propensity to be a follower, however, that provided the entry point for Satan.

Eve responded openly to Satan's advances, and in so doing she was outmaneuvered by him. How so? Notice in her defense of God's command, she changed the wording of the Lord's instruction. She knew enough that Satan got it wrong when he said, "*Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'*" (Genesis 3:1b). God had not prohibited all trees in the garden! However, in trying to correct Satan on this point, she herself noticeably added something that God did not include:

*...but God did say, "You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die..."* (Genesis 3:3 emphasis mine).

Though it may seem like a sensible corollary to the command, God never said to Adam that they could not *touch* the tree. Also, God had originally told Adam, "*you will surely die...*" Eve misquoted, "*...or you will die*", leaving out the critical word *surely*, she de-emphasized what God had specifically emphasized—thus minimizing the consequences. One wonders whether the fact that Eve did not personally hear the instructions of the Lord may have contributed to the carelessness with which she quoted God's words.

When Satan contradicts what God has said, he puts the word *surely* back in: "*You will not surely die,*' *the serpent said to the woman.*" (Genesis 3:4 emphasis mine). Insignificant changes? Not likely, especially when you observe her weakening resolution. Eve mishandled the Word of God and this led her to respond, in essence, to Satan's "leadership." At this point, Satan knew he had her and boldly castigated God's motives in the whole matter. Beyond this, he needed not to say another word. She caved in to the seduction, ate the fruit and encouraged her husband to do likewise. Satan, through his craftiness, *led* her into sin. The fall of Adam was even swifter and without immediate commentary: "*She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.*" (Genesis 3:6b)

If our suggestion earlier is true that Adam's and Eve's relationship was to be a kind of drama reflecting the picture of God's relationship with His creation, then we could say that

Satan attempted to rewrite the script. The magnificent picture of God and His creation was commandeered by that forger and distorter of all that is true and beautiful. Instead of the man leading the woman and the woman responding to his leadership (which reflects God and His creation), the reverse is now true, namely, the woman acted independently of the man and then led him into sin as well. Note it well that the drama now depicts exactly what Satan himself did prior to the fall of mankind. He acted independently of God and has been trying ever since to rule over God—as ludicrous as that may seem.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, humanity, male and female, has submitted to the seduction of one of God’s creation (that is, the serpent which represented Satan’s presence). This directly contradicts what God intended when He instructed mankind to rule over “*every living thing that moves on the ground.*” (Genesis 1:28)

The dramatic unfolding of sin in the garden mirrors on one level the rebellion of God’s supreme creation against the Creator Himself on another level. The woman removed herself from the influence of the man (becoming independent of his leadership) and raised herself up to lead and influence him in the wrong way. But together, as God’s supreme creation, they removed themselves from the influence of God. In fact, this is the heart of the temptation from Satan: “*For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God...*” (Genesis 3:5). If this were true, then they, according to Satan’s trickery, wouldn’t need God. A distortion of God’s image has taken place! Their actions marred the picture; creation was now in rebellion against the Creator.

God created woman to be the responder, rather than the initiator—this is her propensity. Satan knew it and his strategy was effective—he worked through the responder rather than the initiator/leader. Instead of going to Adam for guidance, she responded to the tempter with her own erroneous view of God’s commands. It was Adam who heard the commands directly from the Lord, and not the woman. When she finally did go to Adam, there was not even a hint that she sought his guidance or clarification of the commands. She assumed what she heard from the serpent was better than what she had heard from Adam. She then became the initiator by leading him to disregard what God had

clearly told him—and he also ate the fruit. Adam, in turn, responded to and followed (*listened to* 3:17) Eve instead of obeying God. What he should have done was lead her away from sin.<sup>4</sup>

In graphic form, we can compare God's design for communication and leadership with the now perverted situation:

Influence/Leadership/Communication

God's design	God	→	Adam	→	Eve	Satan ignored
The perversion	Adam	←	Eve	←	Satan	God ignored

### THE CONSEQUENCES

It was Adam's sin, not Eve's, that caused what has been traditionally labeled *the fall*, which gave sin its entrance into the world:

*Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned ... Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses ... (Romans 5:12, 14b emphasis added).*<sup>5</sup>

The term *man* in this passage translates the Greek word *anthropos* which can refer either to a single male or to mankind as opposed to animals. However, Paul states that sin entered the world through “one” *anthropos*. His reference to Adam in verse 14 makes it clear that that one *anthropos* was Adam, and in particular, it was not Eve.<sup>6</sup>

This interpretation is supported by the unfolding consequences in the garden as we will see shortly. The initial outcome of both of their sin was immediate—their eyes were opened. They saw their nakedness and tried cover up with fig leaves (Genesis 3:7). Their pre-fall innocence and openness gave way to post-fall shame. Fig leaves were a poor, human-devised covering to hide themselves from God and each other. The Lord had never instructed them to wear *clothes*; there was no need prior to this. The trees were to provide fruit for food, not leaves for covering, a kind of protection. But now, Adam felt a need for protection from the very one who was his loving helper. Eve felt the need for protection from the very one who was to be her

responsible leader. The seeds of self-centeredness and self-protection were sown—two traits that continue to this day. Their own efforts could not hide the horror of their newly discovered insecurity. And this was a precursor to the power struggle that surfaced next.

It takes no great imagination to understand that the parts of the body covered by the fig leaf aprons were the very reproductive parts that differentiate male and female anatomy. The fact that Adam and Eve had children subsequent to the fall indicates that being without physical clothes in each other's presence was not the main issue here. Something deeper was involved, relating to that which set them apart in their masculinity and femininity. What was to be beautiful and wonderfully complementary, was now a source of insecurity. In their desperate attempt to hide themselves from each other, they also tried to hide themselves from their Creator. The One who came for intimate fellowship with them now became the One they feared.

### THE INTERROGATION

Unhindered by their feeble attempt at concealing themselves, God starts by addresses the man with the first of three questions: "... *the LORD God called to the man, 'Where are you?'*" (Genesis 3:9). As someone once said, God never asks a question for His own benefit. Rather He was enticing Adam to acknowledge his own predicament. Notice, God goes back to *His* order of address rather than Satan's—He speaks to Adam first. Then Adam, instead of answering God's question of *where*, blurts out his self-justification:

*He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; so I hid"* (Genesis 3:10).

God then responds with a second question: "*Who told you that you were naked?*" (Genesis 3:11a). The Lord certainly hadn't told him that. True, they had no clothes before they sinned, but they had not interpreted that as being *naked*. The Hebrew word *'erom* refers to "a state of not having adequate, or no clothing, as a state of desperate poverty."<sup>7</sup> Before the fall, Adam's and Eve's lack of clothing was adequate. It simply was not an issue—their differences were to be enjoyed. However,

now Adam used the term *naked* to describe himself, a term which has the sense of exposure. Their differences were no longer enjoyed, but became something to be kept from exposure. They now had the knowledge that God did not want them to have, and they couldn't handle it. He described that knowledge as *evil*. That which was good, now was seen as bad.

The third question follows immediately: "*Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?*" (Genesis 3:11). Both had sinned and both were hiding, but God still addresses only Adam at this point. He holds the man, first and foremost, responsible. The correct answer should have been *Yes*. But instead of accepting responsibility, the man blames the woman and, by implication, he blames God: "*The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it*" (Genesis 3:12 emphasis mine). In his pathetic effort to deflect judgment from himself, he admits to meekly following the woman's lead. In fact, the Scripture records not even the slightest resistance on his part to her influence. At her mere *suggestion* he took the fruit and ate it. Swift was his fall from God's pattern!

Following His interrogation of Adam, the Lord turns to Eve. He simply asks her, "*What have you done?*" (3:13a). In passing blame to the serpent, she makes an admission similar to Adam's: "*The serpent deceived me, and I ate*" (3:13b). She followed the lead of the serpent rather than looking to Adam for leadership—and being deceived, she did what God had commanded not to be done. She did not deny her guilt in leading Adam into sin.

Now let's compare their responses. Adam's excuse was that the woman gave the fruit to him to eat. There is no mention about his being deceived. He simply obeyed the woman's intimation, rather than God's command. Eve, on the other hand, admitted to being outright deceived (3:13b), presenting this as her only excuse. Adam's admission revealed that he made a clear choice of the woman over God, whereas Eve was drawn in by deception. Adam sinned with full knowledge and had no excuse that could mitigate his guilt—he had heard directly from God concerning both his responsibility to rule over creation (and not to be ruled by it) and his limitations (not to eat of that tree). Eve, while also guilty of breaking God's command, did not do so with

eyes wide open like Adam, but was tricked. This fact is noted as being critical to the apostle Paul's instruction about teaching and authority in the church (1 Timothy 1:14).

### THE RESULT

The outworking of God's death warning in Genesis 2:17 ("*you will surely die*") is found in the judgment laid out in Genesis 3:16-19. In one sense, this is the punishment for their sin, in that the consequences were designed to teach them the seriousness of disobeying God. In another sense, these are the natural or logical consequences of their sin. Once rebellion against God comes in, it must play its full hand. That is why God warned them against disobeying—it would not be good for them.

The judgment for Adam and Eve, however, had different applications and the difference corresponds to their individual identities as male and female. In judgment, God reverses the order He used in questioning the principle figures in the story and addresses first the serpent (3:14-15)<sup>8</sup>, second the woman (3:16) and finally the man (3:17-19).

For the woman, her consequences are twofold. The first has to do with her role in bearing children: "*I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children*" (Genesis 3:16a). Up to this point in the narrative, the woman's childbearing role is assumed. But now, due to sin, her uniquely feminine role in the creation of new life is greatly hindered by pain. That which was to be a wonderful experience of mothering new life, now would become difficult.<sup>9</sup>

The second consequence for the woman has to do with conflict in her relationship with the man: "*Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you*" (Genesis 3:16b). Some interpreters feel this means that the woman will have an attraction to her husband, possibly in an unhealthy sense, and the husband would take advantage of that desire and rule over her. But this does not capture the real sense of the word *desire*.<sup>10</sup> The same Hebrew word for *desire* is used in Genesis 4:7 where God warns Cain, "...if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it" (emphasis mine). The words *to have* in the NIV translation is not in the original Hebrew. A more literal translation would read, "...it desires you, but you must master it." The word *desire* is put in

opposition to the word *master*. Clearly, the overriding issue here is one of control: will sin control Cain, or will Cain control sin?<sup>11</sup>

It is in this sense that we understand Eve's desire: she would desire control over or to dominate her husband. But these efforts to control her husband will fail, for he will *rule* over her. This is the same word in 4:7 where Cain was to *master* sin. It was also used for Adam *ruling* over creation (1:28) where the command was given to mankind, male and female, in relationship to the rest of creation. Before the fall, however, the word *rule* was not used of the relationship Adam was to have with Eve. Differing roles of leadership and responding were laid out before the fall, but that did not include man *ruling* or *mastering* woman!

But now, as a result of the fall, there is a competition between man and woman, a power struggle. She would try to dominate him, but he would control her. This was a direct hit on her femaleness. Femininity originally was created to help masculinity fulfill the purpose of God—she was to respond to his leadership and he was to provide responsible leadership. Instead, he now *dominates* her—despite the efforts she mounts to continue the *control* she gained over him in the fruit incident. This has been the sad propensity of men and women ever since.

Some might see this as an unfair consequence to women, in that it leaves men with the upper hand. Looked at another way, the man suffers from this as well—she who was to be a helper has now become a competitor. Though he has *ruled* over her since the fall, his *ruling* and his *leadership* have been and will be resisted.

There are direct consequences that affect man's ruling over creation (Genesis 3:17-19) and how that ruling is misapplied to his relationship with the woman. First, this rule was originally to reflect God's benevolent character in watching over the earth. Now after the fall, the earth itself suffers because of man's rebellion, as both the New and Old Testaments testify:

*To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat 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 (Genesis 3:17-18).*

*For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it ... (Romans 8:20).*

It was not Eve's sin that affected creation, but Adam's:

*...through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned (Romans 5:12).*

Second, man's work, as a result of the fall, was now going to be characterized by hard labor and sweat. Originally, this was not the case. Creation would now resist him. God proclaims:

*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" (Genesis 3:19).*

This was a direct hit on his masculinity, in that while he was made to rule over all creation, now creation rebels, making life difficult for him. And finally, his physical body will end up as part of inanimate creation, as he returns to the dust from which he was taken.

#### **THE AFTERMATH**

Following God's declaration of the consequences, "*Adam names his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living*" (Genesis 3:20). While the term '*adam*' here refers to the first man, he calls the first woman *Eve*, which as the text indicates, means *mother of all the living*. Further, God refers to the man when he says, "*...the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.*" Though obviously Eve went with him, the emphasis focuses on Adam because of the function of work that (in this narrative) is more closely identified with him and with the ground.

The difference in the consequences of their sin suggests not only that God views their sin differently, but also that He views their sexuality differently. The penalty of sin was targeted where it mattered the most: for the man it was his work and his leadership; for the woman it was her childbearing & nurturing. In one area they shared the consequences: both were now to endure conflict between the sexes.

Unfortunately, some have justified a male *dominating* attitude by appealing to the biblical concept of headship. However, a selfish domineering attitude and behavior reflects the fall, not God's original intention for the sexes. The creation account paints a beautiful picture of male leadership and responsibility along with female responsiveness and help. The account of the fall shows how the power struggles between the sexes are rooted in the results of self-centeredness and rebellion against God.

### CONCLUSION

Scripture teaches that the roles of men and women were built-in at the creation and are functionally different, while at the same time men and women are equal as human beings before God. It is the fall that introduces the distortion, the power struggle, and the self-centeredness—all of which are still evident today. In the same way that a play with poor acting does not make the script bad, so also the failure of men and women in their relationships does not make the divine script bad.

The similarities with today's debate about sexual roles parallels this story. Satan was craft in the garden (Genesis 3:1) and he is still crafty today. In fact, Jesus put it this way:

*He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44).*

Could it be that Satan is trying to deceive the people of God today, whispering that there really is no difference between men and women. This reflects Satan's own struggle in that he wants to remove the differences between himself and God—in fact he wants to be higher than God!<sup>12</sup>

The true solution to the present day problems is not found in throwing out God's original design for complementary roles of the sexes. On the contrary, we should seek the redemption of the hearts of men and women back to God's original design.

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ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Some would date Galatians as late as A.D. 58, but even this places it earlier than 1 Timothy.

<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel 28:12b, widely recognized by scholars to refer to Satan.

<sup>3</sup> See Isaiah 14:12-15, Ezekiel 28:12-19 for a background on Satan's fall and his desire to rule over God.

<sup>4</sup> The Scripture is silent about what would have happened if Adam had refused to eat.

<sup>5</sup> See also 1 Corinthians 15:22.

<sup>6</sup> See Walvoord and Zuck, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Romans 5:12.

<sup>7</sup> Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)* (electronic ed.) (HGK6567). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>8</sup> The consequences to Satan are beyond the scope of this book.

<sup>9</sup> See 1 Timothy 2:15 where Paul refers to "*women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety*" which in some way may relate back to the curse. This passage will be discussed later.

<sup>10</sup> It would seem natural that both the man and the woman had an attraction to each other before the fall, so it would be unlikely that the judgment against the woman would include having an attraction to the man.

<sup>11</sup> The only other place in Scripture where the word *desire* (translating the same Hebrew word *teshuqah*) is used occurs in Song of Solomon 7:10 and there it means simply the attraction that the man has for the woman. But sound hermeneutics would lead us to use the nearer context rather than the farther context for informing our interpretation of Gen 3:16. In this case, Gen 4:6 is very near in terms of being in the same book and written by the same human author.

<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 14:13-14.

# GENDER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

## Chapter Five

Much debate has been fostered in Old Testament (OT) studies concerning gender issues, but generally all sides recognize the patriarchal tenor throughout. Some have tried to highlight the exceptions to this in order to build a case for equality of roles. However as in all disciplines, exceptions normally do not dictate the rule. Of importance are two questions: what is God's perspective in the OT and how does that affect our understanding and application for today? Even if many OT situations do not apply to our present situation, God essentially does not change and so we can learn valuable lessons about His perspective on gender issues.

### GENERAL ATTITUDE TOWARD WOMEN

By present notions of *equal rights*, Israelite women seem to have been treated as inferior to men. However, Jewish women were treated better than women of other cultures in the Ancient Near East. The Mosaic Law raised the value of women through many institutions that were to be equally applied to women, and some laws were designed to protect women. For example, in many ancient cultures a woman could be passed around from man to man, but God ensured that would not happen in Israel:

*If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends*

*her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the LORD. Do not bring sin upon the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).*

For Israel, nothing would be tolerated that was designed which would unfairly take advantage of women.

### **POLYGAMY**

God's original design was one man and one woman in marriage:

*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh (Genesis 2:24).*

That this refers to a one-man and one-woman arrangement is affirmed by Jesus Christ Himself:

*Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning (Matthew 19:8).*

God (through the Law of Moses) at times did allow men to have multiple wives without bringing judgment. A cursory reading of OT Scripture shows that even godly men like King David had multiple wives. How do we understand this?

God (and only God) can at times permit a variance in His design or a relaxation of his mandate. But why would He permit something like polygamy that today would seem to degrade women?

Before superficial judgment is made, take note of the context of when this variance occurred. Though Scripture does not specifically detail an explanation, there is a possible reason that makes some sense out of the rationale given by Jesus "*because your hearts were hard.*" On the one hand, Jesus could mean that God allowed that there were other things more important than polygamy to emphasize, so He overlooked the inequities of the marriage situation that Jewish men with their hardened hearts imposed upon women. One would have difficulty seeing Jesus

going soft on this when He staunchly defended women who suffered at the hands of men, such as the one caught in adultery.

On the other hand, there is another possible explanation that makes sense. The harsh ancient world of the OT was a hard place in which to live, with constant warfare taking the lives of many men. In the book of Judges, for example, the frequent enumeration of deaths presents a horrific tale. In one inter-tribal conflict alone, 42,000 Israelite men died in a single battle!<sup>1</sup> War is symptomatic of hardened human hearts that resort to violence to dominate others.

Since it was the men who waged the battles, war resulted in a huge imbalance of women to men. In addition, when fighting other nations, the foreign women were often saved from the destruction while the men were put to death. A single battle could leave thousands of women as widows or otherwise unmarried—both Israelite women as well as those from the enemy's ranks.

What would become of these women when there were not nearly enough men to “go around?” A woman who had no protection or support from a husband, brothers, sons or a father was at the mercy of anyone. The natural physical limitations of women and their maternal involvement in child-bearing and nurturing were clearly disadvantages in those brutal, ancient times, in terms of personal well-being and security. There were no institutional systems like the YWCA, women's shelters, etc. In this sense, because of the hardness of men's hearts in waging war in a sin-cursed world, women suffered the consequences in the hardships of life.

I suspect God made the allowance of having multiple wives to help compensate for this disadvantage—to allow more than one woman to be attached to a man in marriage and to benefit from the protection that marriage affords when there were relatively fewer men. Polygamy under these conditions would provide protection for a woman who would otherwise be left to fend for herself in a violent world. Clearly, if this line of reasoning has any merit, the cause of this temporary variance to God's original mandate was the hardened hearts of men—it was not God's original plan. The one-man, one-woman design remained and still remains God's ideal, as Jesus emphasized.

When seen through the eyes of those times, women were more highly valued in Israel and to be protected, even if it meant polygamy to provide that protection.

### **HOMOSEXUALITY**

The fact that God forbids homosexual behavior in the Old Testament indicates that male and female sexual behavior are not interchangeable. Why do I say this? A male is not to have sexual relations with a male, whereas a female may have sexual relations with a male (Leviticus 18:22, cf. Leviticus 20:13).<sup>2</sup> The New Testament continues this prohibition, stated in a variety of ways. For example, the inspired author of Romans presents homosexual behavior as epitomizing the fitting wrath of God in giving over humans to their lustful wanderings from Himself (Romans 1:26-27). Despite the protestations of many voices both inside and outside of the church today, homosexual behavior is explicitly condemned in Scripture.

Further, if the only difference between male and female were simply biological or anatomical, then homosexual behavior would just mean sexual activity that could not possibly lead to procreation. It would seem rather capricious of God to condemn something on that basis. That would be like arguing that since eating ice cream doesn't result in procreation one shouldn't eat ice cream. Therefore, homosexuality cannot be condemned just because it doesn't lead to procreation. There must be more to the problem than whether procreation is possible.

The thrust here is that prohibition of homosexuality and differentiation of gender roles go hand in hand.<sup>3</sup> If there are no distinctions between male and female on any level except the biological level, then sexual activity is only a physical act of enjoyment and nothing more. In that case, sex is simply a pleasurable activity, similar to any other pleasurable feeling. However, Scripture does not present things that way. Becoming "one flesh" takes in far more than a momentary uniting of two bodies sexually.

We conclude, therefore, that God's attitude toward homosexuality in both testaments reveals that there must be more to the male/female distinction than simply the physical/biological differences.<sup>4</sup>

### **CIRCUMCISION**

The sign of the Mosaic covenant that God instituted was distinctly masculine in nature, not feminine (Genesis 17:14, 17:23). Circumcision was a rite whereby the foreskin of the infant male's penis was cut off shortly after birth. Certainly, the Lord could have selected a sign that would have been evident in both male and female. But as it was, the woman's relationship to the symbol was through her husband. In particular, the symbol would be visible during the act of sexual intercourse. The very act of propagating the covenant community of God would bring this unique symbolism to the fore as a reminder of a couple's commitment to God's law. In addition, when sexual relationships were enacted with non-Jews, the symbol or lack thereof would remind any woman or man who engaged in such, that she or he was becoming *one flesh* with someone who was not part of the covenant people of God.

It should not be casually overlooked that the symbol was in the man's body, not the woman's. Her symbol was in being related to a man who was circumcised.

### **TEMPLE WORSHIP**

The Levitical priesthood was exclusively male (Leviticus 6:22, 29) and there are no recorded exceptions in Scripture. But interestingly, many opportunities existed for women to serve around the temple worship of Israel. They served (Hebrew: *saba*), for example, in the doorway of the Tabernacle (Exodus 38:8, 1 Samuel 2:22). Though little is detailed about their work, the same word (*saba*) is used to describe the work of the male Levites. In addition, many women sang in the temple choirs (1 Chronicles 25:5-7, Nehemiah 7:66-67). While pagan cultures often had women serving as temple or shrine prostitutes, such practices were prohibited in Israel (Deuteronomy 23:17). God did not allow the women of Israel to be debased through sexual perversion as in other nations.

### **WOMEN AS PROPHETS, JUDGES AND RULERS**

It is obvious even to the superficial reader of the Old Testament that the leaders and the mouthpieces of God (i.e. prophets) were predominantly men. But there were some notable exceptions which need to be examined.

Miriam, the sister of Moses, was a prophetess (Exodus 15:20), and apparently had some leadership role along with Moses and Aaron (Micah 6:4). Due to paucity of biblical data on this, we know little of what her leadership entailed. Some would be quick to assert that these statements *prove* that women had the same full access to leadership and prophetic ministries as did men. But this is stating too much without biblical warrant. Indeed, to use an analogy from the NT, elders and deacons in the church both may have leadership roles, but that does not mean their roles are the same. So identifying Miriam as a prophetess or having a leadership role does not necessarily mean she functioned in the same way as Moses and Aaron.

As Moses' older sister, she may be given credit for her role in rescuing Moses by putting him in a basket—which ultimately led to Moses being raised in the house of Pharaoh and his subsequent growth and development. She may possibly have had some influence on him later in life, as a confidant or advisor (though we have no biblical record of that). Probably her leadership and prophetic ministry were expressed among the women of Israel in matters pertaining to women—this kind of leadership role would be quite natural and is common today in many churches. This understanding is supported by the biblical data found in Exodus, where she “... took a tambourine in her hand and all the women followed her with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them ...” (Exodus 15:21).

The one time we do see Miriam in a definitive leadership role in relationship to men was in an attempt to usurp Moses' authority and leadership (Numbers 12:1-15). Though Aaron was an accomplice, Miriam's name comes first in the account, indicating she probably took the lead in this reprehensible act. And it was Miriam who was struck with leprosy, not Aaron. This would hardly constitute a biblical precedent for an equal leadership role of women with men!

Another notable exception was Deborah, who was a prophetess and a judge (Judges 4:4), though she was the lone woman to occupy this latter position. The biblical author does not pass negative judgment on Deborah for being identified as a judge—in fact, God uses her leadership to bring victory to Israel. We should note, however, that the book of Judges characterizes the

time period in Israel when: “... *everyone did as he saw fit*” (Judges 17:6, 21:25 NIV). The KJV puts it this way, “*Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*” This is not a flattering statement in light of the fact that the book presents the Israelites as continually doing evil in the eyes of the LORD. It was only during times when God raised up a judge that people ceased doing what was right in their own eyes and followed the Lord—but these times were minimal compared to the general flow of Israel’s wandering from the Lord. One must be careful not to draw precedence from Israel’s behavior during this time period.

God used Deborah as a judge, despite the fact that she was a woman. This does not mean that God approves of women in leadership over men, as some would assert, anymore than that God would approve of morally corrupt men in leadership, like Samson. When God uses an individual, that does not mean He approves everything about that individual.

In every other case of judges except Deborah, the ones raised up were men, unafraid to lead the people into battle. Yet the whole story of Deborah portrays weak men, afraid to lead the people into battle. Barak the commander of the army, for example, was a cowardly man. Even though God had made clear that Israel would win the battle against a nearby Canaanite nation, Barak was reluctant to enter the fray without Deborah! This is not because of a feigning humbleness and deference to God’s representative. Deborah roundly rebukes him for this and declares that the honor of victory will not be his, but will go to a woman (Judges 4:4)! That is exactly what happened when the opposing commander, Sisera, fled to the house of Jael, whose wife drove a stake through his temple while he slept. Clearly, the fact that a woman had the *honor of victory* was significant precisely because she was a woman and Barak was a man. Gender roles tones are undeniable in this story—the implicit recognition that Barak had failed in his masculine role of leading Israel in battle, and therefore was dishonored. For a woman to have the honor, symbolic as it may have been, was a slam to his masculinity—as it should have been.

In God’s later denunciation of Israel’s backsliding, He poignantly identifies women leading the nation as one consequence of straying from God as a people: “*Youths oppress my people,*

*women rule over them. O my people, your guides lead you astray; they turn you from the path*" (Isaiah 3:12).

While God clearly raised up Deborah, it cannot be concluded that this sets a precedent that God desires women in leadership over men. Rather, it would be better seen as setting a precedent that God will judge His people when men are not providing strong leadership. This incident provides an exception rather than a rule. Indeed, where men are weak, God will bless the influence of women leaders. In fact, He will often raise up women to lead when men are passive or weak.

Another woman of note was Huldah, a prophetess, who gave God's Word to Hilkiyah the priest for the young king Josiah (2 Kings 22:14-22, 2 Chron 34:22). There is nothing in the text that expresses God's disapproval, but her story is simply presented as a matter of fact.

Isaiah's unnamed wife is mentioned as being a prophetess in Isaiah 8:3. One commentator puts it this way: "Isaiah's wife is called 'the prophetess' because she was his wife or because, as the one who bore children with prophetic names, she became involved in the communication of the message of God."<sup>5</sup> Again, very little is said of her ministry.

Noadiah in Nehemiah 6:14 clearly was a false prophet, who acted in concert with Sanballat and Tobiah against the godly Nehemiah—Noadiah is certainly not a legitimate model for women in leadership.

Finally, note the woman, Athaliah, who ruled over Judah for 6 years. She was the mother of King Ahaziah who reigned in the line of David. When Ahaziah died, she usurped the throne (2 Kings 11:3). While Israel did have this one woman leading as a "king surrogate," she clearly was not sanctioned by God.

While the above observations are not in any way exhaustive, there are a few generalizations that can be made about women in the Old Testament. First, a woman in a leadership or even a prophetic role was not the norm. Second, when it did happen and it was sanctioned by God, the woman was normally identified in relationship to the man or men in their lives. Miriam was the sister of Moses, Deborah the wife of Lappidoth, Huldah the wife of

Shallum, and Isaiah's unnamed wife. Clearly, Athaliah was out of order and Noadiah was a false prophetess. Third, at times God raised up women to lead, because the men were weak or lacking. Finally, women in leadership was the rare exception rather than the rule.

### CONCLUSION

We conclude that women were to be treated much better under the Old Testament than in the surround nations of the time, when understood in the context of the ancient near East. However, there were still distinctions maintained in gender roles that coincide with the creation account of the sexes and leadership.

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### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Judges 12:6.

<sup>2</sup> My point here is not that having homosexual *desires* means that a person is under God's wrath, but that homosexual *behavior* is judged by God and is symptomatic of a generation that has completely rebelled against God. God's love extends to homosexual individuals in the same way it extends to all sinners.

<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, many radical feminists *do* embrace homosexuality. In radical feminist thinking, it matters not, then, whether sexual activity is with a member of the same or opposite sex. For an example, see *What God Has Joined Together? A Christian Case for Gay Marriage* (Harper San Francisco), Letha Dawson Scanzoni and David G. Myers.

<sup>4</sup> We are not here presenting a full treatment of the subject of homosexuality, but only that aspect of the subject which helps us understand God's thinking on the differences between the genders.

<sup>5</sup> "Isaiah" in *Expositor's Bible Commentary, Old Testament*" Frank E. Gabelein, ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan), CD version.

# GENDER IN THE GOSPELS AND ACTS

## Chapter Six

**B**efore turning to the New Testament *teaching* on this subject of gender, we now will take a look at the historical record of the Gospels and the Book of Acts. Here we simply want to observe the primary data of what actually happened, then we will turn to the teachings of the epistles.

### THE GOSPELS

The genealogy of Christ in the Gospel of Luke traces His *blood line* to David through His earthly mother Mary. The genealogy of Christ in the Gospel of Matthew traces His *legal/kingly* lineage back to David through His adoptive father Joseph. Jesus' right to the throne of David had to be both by blood *and* by kingly right, and is always traced through the male lines (except in the final link with His mother, Mary). In fact, His genealogy is traced all the way down from Adam, through Abraham and David—through the males.

However, four women are mentioned in Matthew's genealogy, whose involvement played important roles in the descendency of Christ: 1) Tamar (Matthew 1:3) gave birth through prostitution and incest with her father-in-law, Judah. The offspring of this union was in the direct line of promise to Jesus. 2) Rahab (1:5) was the Canaanite prostitute who saved the Israelite spies and was later saved by Israel during the conquest of Jericho. She is mentioned in the genealogy as the ancestor of Boaz in Jesus' ancestry. 3) Ruth (1:5) the Moabitess woman (and therefore a Gentile) was husband of Boaz who gave birth to the

next one in the Messianic line. 4) And finally Bathsheba (1:6), referred to only as Uriah's wife in Matthew's account, was the woman David stole from Uriah the Hittite (Uriah had converted to Judaism). She became the mother of Solomon.

These four women had peculiar circumstances about their role in the lineage of Christ, yet God elevated them in His grace and felt it supremely worthwhile mentioning them in Matthew's line of kingly heritage.

Actually, there is a fifth woman in the genealogy of Christ, of which we know a fair amount. Her circumstances were also peculiar. While the other four women were identified in relationship to their husbands, this woman's husband was identified in relationship to her! In the final link of the Messianic chain, God chose a virgin girl through whom to send His Son—her name, of course, was Mary. Now God certainly was not limited by first century science; He could have cloned a man just as easily as cause a virgin to conceive. The fact remains that no human male was involved in the conception.

Aside from the theological ramifications of this cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith, the virgin birth speaks to our subject of gender—God came into the world through a *female*. At the very least, the Lord *highly favored* Mary (Luke 1:28). To be sure, in the text she is most favored and blest among women (1:42), but the Son of God who was truly human as well as supremely God, came through a woman who was made in the image of God. He did not need or use human masculinity to grace us with His presence. The world received the God-man through the woman and she accepted. Such a notion speaks highly of femininity!

In terms of Jesus' attitude toward women in general, He felt fully free to break with the social customs and pressures of His day. He spoke with and taught women often. In John 4, for example, both the woman at the well<sup>1</sup> and also the disciples<sup>2</sup> were surprised by His talking with a woman, and a Samaritan one at that. This was not customary!

The Lord permitted Mary, Lazarus' sister, to sit at His feet and learn<sup>3</sup> even though the privilege of in-depth learning from a rabbi was granted only to men at that time.<sup>4</sup> In fact, men were generally discouraged from even speaking to women in public.<sup>5</sup>

A loyal group of women accompanied Jesus and served Him on His ministry tours.<sup>6</sup> Women touched by Jesus' healing hand were found praising God publicly in the synagogue.<sup>7</sup>

While a woman's testimony in those days was not admissible in a court of law, Jesus appeared to the women *first* and entrusted them to be the *first* to share the good news of His resurrection. In fact, they had the privilege of telling the disciples<sup>8</sup> and specifically Peter.<sup>9</sup> While the other disciples refused to accept their witness,<sup>10</sup> Peter and John responded and ran to check it out for themselves.<sup>11</sup>

We conclude that Jesus accorded great dignity and status to the women with whom He came in contact. He highly esteemed them.

Jesus nonetheless maintained important gender distinctions, particularly in His selection of all male apostles. Some have tried to assert that He was submitting to the patriarchal bent of His times. However, His willingness to teach contrary to the rabbis of His day and His frequent attack on the hypocrisy of the religious leaders (i.e. the opinion makers and "politically correct" police of his day) renders such a notion patently absurd. Christ, being fully aware, selected only men as apostles, to be his authorized propagators of all He taught while on earth.<sup>12</sup> If God's ultimate design was to remove the male/female role distinctions instilled in creation, then Christ committed a monstrous injustice to women in this very act. This, however, is not the case.

Some have argued that this gender selection is insignificant in that there was also a lack of Gentiles among the apostles. The fact of an all Jewish band of apostles does not exclude Gentiles from leadership in the church. Therefore, it is argued, an all male band of apostles does not exclude females from leadership in the church. But this reasoning is not valid, on a number of accounts. First, the role of apostle was not the forerunner of church leadership, such as elders and deacons. Secondly, the Jewishness of the apostles was intrinsic to Jesus' mission, for the outworking of the Abrahamic covenant would bring blessings to the Gentiles through the Jews. Paul reflects on this in Romans 1:16 when he says, "... *the Jews first and then the Gentiles.*" Further, the selection of the apostles goes far beyond the first century milieu and into the future. In fact, the apostles will be ruling on thrones in

the coming kingdom.<sup>13</sup> Jesus' selection of Jews as apostles was for a very specific reason, due to the Jewishness of the future kingdom and the Abrahamic promises.

In the same way that the Lord wanted specifically Jewish individuals to be His *authorized agents* (i.e. apostles) for establishing His message for the post-ascension people of God, He wanted these individuals to be men, not women. This is the most natural way to understand the selection and is consonant with what we have seen throughout the Old Testament, beginning with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

In summary, Jesus' actions show that He held women in high regard with great dignity, but there is nothing in His actions to indicate He was removing role distinctions between male and female established from the time of creation.

### THE BOOK OF ACTS

The book of Acts comprises an historical record of what happened in the early church after Christ ascended. As such, it does not provide teaching, per se, about how to structure the working of the church. This record helps us, nonetheless, to see how things unfolded in practice.

The apostle Peter in his first recorded sermon on the day of Pentecost quoted the prophet Joel in saying that "*your sons and daughters will prophesy.*"<sup>14</sup> While there seems to be some fulfillment of this prophecy in the events of Pentecost and thereafter, it is important to note that *not all* of Joel's prophecy was fulfilled at that time:

*I will show wonders in the heaven above, and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord (Acts 2:19-20).*

This prophecy pertains to the end times surrounding the return of the Messiah. Indeed, the Messiah Jesus had entered the city riding on a donkey<sup>15</sup> and the people hailed Him as their deliverer in a clear attestation of Messianic fulfillment.<sup>16</sup> Jesus foretold that "...you will not see me again until you say, '*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord*'" (Matthew 23:39). Had they accepted Christ as a nation, the end times would have

commenced. However, Israel rejected her Messiah. Some 50 days later, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter proclaims to Israel another opportunity to repent and come to faith in Christ the Messiah. This is why Joel's prophecy was quoted in his speech, for if Israel accepted at that time, the end times would have begun. But this was not to be, for despite thousands repenting and believing the good news, the nation as a whole rejected her Messiah again. Therefore, Joel's prophecy has been put on hold until a future date, when Israel is ready to accept her Messiah.

Since Israel is still rejecting her Messiah—this passage is really not much help in the discussion of gender roles in the church today. This does not mean that women have never prophesied along with men, but it means that this verse does not provide a determinative factor.

As for the rest of Acts, there is some evidence of women fulfilling various roles of ministry. The Holy Spirit fell on men and women on the Day of Pentecost.<sup>17</sup> Women prayed with men.<sup>18</sup> Women had various ministries of hospitality, service and good works.<sup>19</sup> Priscilla with her husband Aquila took Apollos (a man) aside and explained the way of God more accurately.<sup>20</sup> The Holy Spirit used women prophetesses, namely Philip's four daughters.<sup>21</sup> Phoebe was a *servant* of the church.<sup>22</sup> Although the word used here is the feminine form of the word that is elsewhere translated as *deacon* or *servant*, it is not at all clear that an *office* of deaconess is in view here.

In all of these incidents, the lack of divine commentary leaves us with no clear mandate on how to understand these activities, other than that they simply occurred. For that we turn to the epistles.

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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> John 4:9.

<sup>2</sup> John 4:27.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 10:42.

<sup>4</sup> "It was unusual for a Jewish teacher to converse with a woman in a public place. Women were not to be saluted or spoken to in the street, and they were not to be instructed in the law." Freeman, J. M., &

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Chadwick, H. J. (1998). *Manners & Customs of the Bible*. "Rewritten and updated by Harold J. Chadwick, Rev. ed.". North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos Publishers. p. 514.

<sup>5</sup> In reference to John 4:27, Carson says, "Jewish rabbis were not permitted to speak to women in the street and considered any conversation with women to be a hindrance to the study of the Torah. The reluctance of the disciples to ask questions shows how embarrassed they were over Jesus' actions." Carson, D. A. (1994). *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*. Rev. ed. of: *The New Bible Commentary*. 3rd ed., edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. (4th ed.) (John 4:27). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 8:1-3, Matthew 27:55, Mark 15:41.

<sup>7</sup> Luke 13:13.

<sup>8</sup> John 20:17.

<sup>9</sup> Mark 6:7.

<sup>10</sup> Luke 24:11.

<sup>11</sup> John 20:1-8.

<sup>12</sup> John 14:26; 15:27; 16:13, Acts 1:8, 21.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 19:28.

<sup>14</sup> Acts 2:16-18 cf. Joel 2:28-32.

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 21:4-5, see Zechariah 9:9.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 21:9, see Psalms 118:26.

<sup>17</sup> Acts 2:1-4—note there were both men and women in the upper room 1:14, and the Holy Spirit apparently came upon *each of them* 2:3.

<sup>18</sup> Acts 1:14, 12:12.

<sup>19</sup> Dorcas in Acts 9:36; the mother of Mark 12:12; Lydia 16:14-15.

<sup>20</sup> Acts 18:26-28.

<sup>21</sup> Acts 21:8-9.

<sup>22</sup> Romans 16:1.

# EQUALITY BEFORE GOD

## Chapter Seven

The apostle Paul presents the wonderful truth of equal standing before God among men and women in the book of Galatians:

*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 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 (Galatians 3:26-29).*

The book of Galatians itself has been aptly called the Magna Carta<sup>1</sup> of the Christian faith. There are no longer any boundaries between us and God, regardless of ethnic, economic or gender status. Men and women can approach God on the same basis, along with Jews and non-Jews.

All agree that this passage applies to our *vertical* relationship with God, that God sees us all as equal in His eyes. But not all agree whether this passage also applies to *horizontal* relationships, that is, to role relationships between men and women in life, family and the church. Can women be leaders over men in the church? Are the roles in marriage interchangeable? Does a woman have the freedom to marry another woman in the same way as a man has the freedom to marry a woman?

We believe that when correctly understood, this passage refers only to our equal standing as men and women before God and does not speak directly to our role relationships in life. Clearly, the statement "... neither ... male nor female" cannot be taken as a stand-alone, absolute dictum without consideration for the wider context in which it is found. An unqualified equality is

not in mind, because obviously men and women are still biologically different. So we ask, “What kind of *equality* is being taught in this passage?”

Some see the *equality* in this passage as being the starting point for understanding other New Testament passages dealing with gender.<sup>2</sup> They would assert that this passage is *more important* or *more pure* than other passages on the male/female issue, even pitting Paul’s writings in Galatians against his writings in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy. C. Letha Scanzoni arbitrarily alleges: “Of all the passages concerning women in the New Testament, only Galatians 3:28 is in a doctrinal setting; the remainder are all concerned with practical matters.” Another writer is correct when he objects, “But to assert that Paul must be interpreted against his own writings elsewhere is to assume that he misinterpreted the Old Testament in practically all of his writings on women except for Galatians 3:28” That writer goes on to say that the reason why the passage is so important to egalitarians is that it is the only real passage that *might appear* to prove their view. One writer puts it this way, “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.”<sup>3</sup> All Scripture is inspired<sup>4</sup>, and in particular the passages on gender relationships are all weighty in this discussion.

Therefore, we should be careful about the meaning of Galatians 3:28 as understood within the context and intention of the original author, so that we can arrive at a hermeneutically sound interpretation. In other words, we should let Paul speak for himself as to what this verse means.

### **THE CONTEXT OF THE GALATIAN LETTER**

First we need to look at the whole-book context and consider what the overall message to the Galatians is. The background of book is Paul’s first missionary journey. Having evangelized the areas of Asia Minor (southern Galatia) during his first missionary journey and having established a number of churches in that region (Acts 13-14), Paul’s mission was not without controversy. The letter itself was an obvious doctrinal polemic<sup>5</sup> against the

legalizers who had infiltrated the new churches and caused much confusion after Paul left. Paul quickly addresses his concerns:

*I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ (Galatians 1:6-7).*

False Jewish believers (Galatians 2:4) were set on trying to merge the new faith Paul was preaching with the legalistic requirements of the Law of Moses. In their erroneous teaching, faith alone was not to save; keeping the law was also required. Paul counters that the way to salvation does not involve exterior rituals (“...*God does not judge by external appearance ...*” Galatians 2:6b) nor does it require the law (“...*by observing the law no one will be justified.*” 2:16). It is not simply that keeping the law is unnecessary to being saved—it is a *deterrent* to being saved. One cannot be saved by the law, nor can one be saved by faith *plus* the law. One can only be saved by faith *alone*!

*All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law. Clearly no one is justified before God by law, because “The righteous will live by faith.” The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, ‘The man who does these things will live by them’ (Galatians 3:10-12).*

Now the sign of the law was circumcision, so Paul attacks that practice head on:

*Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace (Galatians 5:2-4).*

He goes on to give the positive side of this doctrinal coin, as well:

*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the spirit (Galatians 2:13-14).*

The core issue under assault is the central truth of the gospel. Paul is quite emphatic about this from the beginning:

*But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! (Galatians 1:8-9).*

The Greek word Paul uses is the word *anathema*, which means "Let someone be placed under the curse of God." Strong words! There is absolutely no mixing law with grace. To borrow a phrase, "This was the hill on which Paul planted his flag." It was his "go-to-the-wall" issue. His adamancy shows on every level. He even rejoins with satire (in referring to the rite of circumcision): "As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!" (Galatians 5:12).

In the end, Paul brings the subject to a conclusion:

*Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh. May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world (Galatians 6:12-14).*

The point of this brief survey is to demonstrate that the overriding theme of Paul's letter has to do with defending the one and only way to a right relationship with God, that righteousness with God comes by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone, and not by keeping the requirements of the law. There is

no other basis. This is what theologians call the doctrine of justification.

This sets the *book-level* context for the passage in question. Now we will examine the more immediate context surrounding verse 3:28.

### **THE CLOSER CONTEXT**

Since he is making such a strong doctrinal statement in his letter, Paul naturally anticipates that his authority will come into question. The first two chapters are spent in defending his apostleship, specifically that his authority is independent of the other apostles. But he also points out that he nonetheless enjoys full fellowship with and support from the other apostles. Paul's point is important, because the false teachers tried to pit the leaders at the Jerusalem church, especially James, against Paul.

Following this defense of his apostolic authority, he moves into an exposition of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith and not by law—which comprises the middle two chapters of the book. The final two chapters contain the outworking of that truth in the lives of the believers. So the core of his *theological* teaching is found in the middle chapters dealing with the pivotal truth of justification before God, with 3:28 at the center!

### **CERTAIN DISTINCTIONS ARE ELIMINATED**

Paul addresses three categories of people: ethnic groups (Jews and non-Jews<sup>6</sup>), socio-economic groups (slave and free) and finally gender groups (male and female).<sup>7</sup> The word *equal* does not occur in this passage;<sup>8</sup> this is important to note because that word is laden with emotional and political connotations and colors the discussion. Having said that, it is clear that this passage *is* intended to remove certain distinctions. The things that separate these groups have been broken down in Christ—but in what way?

Total equality with no distinctions would be patently absurd. Jews and non-Jews continue to be different races. For dispensationalists, there continues to be a difference between the two in God's eschatological framework. The church is not Israel, and has not replaced Israel in God's plan.

Few in non-socialistic societies would advocate leveling all incomes and social status. In Christ, some may be rich by the world's standards, while others may be poor. These distinctions continue to exist.<sup>9</sup>

For the gender couplet, a number of distinctions do continue to exist:

***Men and women continue to differ biologically and in child-bearing distinctions.***

This would seem obvious, but it demonstrates that Galatians 3:28 does not present an unqualified equality of the sexes. The fact of anatomical differences hardly needs mentioning.<sup>10</sup> The man's and woman's roles in procreation (intercourse, pregnancy and child-nurturing, breast feeding, etc.) are clearly different. Some would say that, "Of course, it doesn't refer to physical differences, everyone knows that." I would respond, that while I agree, this opens the door that Paul's comments do not give a blanket equality, that there may be other exceptions. A blanket assertion that in all other areas there is *equality*, simply will not do—there must be a contextual rationale supporting such a statement. In fact, there is such a rationale.

***Marital distinctions continue.***

A man is free to marry a woman, but a woman is *not* free to marry a woman. A woman is free to marry a man, but a man is *not* free to marry a man. Paul asserted that homosexuality is a symptom of people who have spiraled away from God in ingratitude, faithlessness and darkened hearts (see Romans 1:26-27).<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, some feminists have followed the logic of their reasoning to the extreme, embracing homosexuality as a natural extension of the move to equality.

***Clear teaching elsewhere on role distinctions.***

If Paul were meaning a total equality in role relationships, then his other writings on the subject would be grossly misleading. We will address these in other chapters of this book. Suffice it to say at this juncture, there are clear indications elsewhere in the New Testament that some role distinctions are taught by Paul. These stand in contrast to the passage in Galatians which does *not* clearly address the removal of role relationships.

If Paul was not making a blanket statement on relationship equality among the sexes, then what distinctions are removed in Christ?

### **EQUALITY IN OUR STANDING BEFORE GOD**

Paul himself is clear about what the removal of distinctions refers to. In this same letter, he points out that we all:

- Have the same belief (1:26)
- Have been baptized/clothed with Christ (discipleship?) (1:27)
- Belong to God as sons (verse 26)
- Are related to Abraham (his seed by faith) (verse 3:29, 3:9)
- Have an inheritance (heir to the promise) (verse 29)
  - Have full rights as sons (4:5b)
  - Are freed from the curse of the law (3:13)
  - Have present righteousness (3:21)
  - Are freed from demands of the law (4:5a, 5:1)
  - Have the Holy Spirit (internal law) (4:6)
  - Have a hope of future righteousness (5:5)

In all these things, there is no distinction between male and female!

H. Wayne House puts it this way, "...Paul is teaching here that no areas of discrimination exist in reference to heirship in the Abrahamic covenant to all those who have faith in Christ."<sup>12</sup> He goes on, "The context of Galatians 3:28 has Paul dealing with the nature of justification and how a person may be included in the Abrahamic covenant. He insisted that entrance into the covenant is by faith (v. 22), not works . . . The factors of age, wealth, or color are immaterial to the inheritance since the position is based on faith, not on physical or social considerations."<sup>13</sup>

At the time of Paul's writings, the three couplets mentioned in Galatians 3:28 (Jew/non-Jew, slave/free, male/female) constituted huge class distinctions in relating to God. Jews clearly had the inside track to God, and Gentiles had to become proselytes (converts to Judaism) in order to relate properly to God. The cross of Christ removed that distinction, breaking down the *wall* between them in "*one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.*"

(Ephesians 2:16).<sup>14</sup> Christ was the great equalizer in making the way to God available to all.

As for the slave/free couplet, this seems to appear abruptly in Paul's argument, although he could be picking up the image from 3:17 where he speaks of the Egyptian captivity, much of which time Israel spent in slavery. This slave/free connection may also set the stage for the grown son/free man comparison in chapter 4.

When Paul includes the male/female couplet, this seems completely out of the blue, so to speak. Contextually, why would he include it? Possibly it was because Paul had been talking about the law earlier in the chapter, that it did not supersede the promise to Abraham. This is significant because the difference between male and female was threaded throughout the law, particularly in the area of circumcision. To the Jews of that day, the difference between male and female went fairly deep, including ways the Lord never intended. Women were relegated a lesser status in relationship to God. So Paul asserts the unity of male and female in the same way that Genesis 1:26-28 emphasizes the unity of male and female made in the image of God.<sup>15</sup> Thus, just as in Genesis, there were distinctions between male and female, yet equality before God, Paul could likewise maintain, without hypocrisy or contradiction, the distinction of the sexes while asserting an equality before God.<sup>16</sup>

The point in Galatians 3:28 is soteriological in nature. It has to do with justification that is extended to all by faith, and does not depend on gender, ethnic or economic distinctions. Clearly, the cross should impact how we relate to one another across the couplets mentioned in Galatians 3:28. Paul does draw some implications from his statement elsewhere in his letter. For example, since there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile, he challenged Peter's double-standard in fellowshiping with Gentiles in a limited fashion. But to say that Paul removes all distinctions is tantamount to forcing on Paul something he just does not say! We must remember that justification before God is the center of the gospel message—the debate about role distinctions is not! The gospel of grace and not of law—that is Paul's passion. Granted, the truth of the gospel will transform

gender relationships. But we must look to other of Paul's writings to determine the extent or limits of that transformation.

### **EGALITARIAN ARGUMENTS**

#### ***Is Galatians 3:28 the only theological passage on gender issues?***

Some feminists insist that all of Paul's passages on women occur in practical contexts except for Galatians 3:28 which is theological. The fact is, however, that 1 Corinthians 11-14 and 1 Timothy 2 are very theological in nature. As is his normal custom, Paul uses theology to respond to practical problems, whether for the Galatians, the Corinthians or Timothy. To argue, as feminists do, is to pit Paul against himself. One ought to look at how the author applies his own teachings. In the case of Paul, there is abundant evidence in Scripture that he maintained the role distinction in practice.

#### ***Did Paul limit his teaching because of unwanted social upheaval?***

Klyne R. Snodgrass claims that Paul did not go further in spelling out implications for slaves and women for fear of social upheaval and the fear that the Christian movement would be seen as a political force and, as a result, would be stamped out.<sup>17</sup> However, the apostles introduced many other things that were culturally and socially unacceptable and *did* cause upheavals. For example, he taught that the Holy Spirit was for Gentiles as well as Jews, he had communion with Gentiles, etc. Jesus Himself broke the so-called Sabbath laws and He spoke with and taught women on a regular basis. So it cannot be maintained with any credibility that Paul limited his teaching out of fearfulness of social upheaval.

#### ***Doesn't equality before God translate into equality in roles?***

Some assert that equality in becoming right with God must translate into equality in roles, otherwise it is superficial equality. Some flatly assert that men and women cannot be both equal and at the same time have role distinctions. Longenecker, for example, asks, "How one can speak of a necessary subordination of status without also implying a necessary inferiority of

person.”<sup>18</sup> In essence, the argument is that where there are differing roles, there is inequality or inferiority of person.

However, the biblical tension in making such assertions is evident to anyone who wrestles with this subject. Clearly Scripture acknowledges differing roles for people who are otherwise equal. For example, parents and children are equal in God’s eyes and in terms of how to become justified by grace through faith; but clearly parents and children have different roles in their relationship to each other. Children are to obey their parents, while the reverse is not true. Elders and deacons have different roles, yet they are equal in the sense of Galatians 3:28. All have differing roles in the use of our spiritual gifts, yet before God we are equal as *sons of God*.

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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Magna Carta was adopted in England on June 15th, 1215, and has been hailed as the first legal document outlining the human freedoms.

<sup>2</sup> David M. Scholer (WAB, p. 213) admits that if 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is the starting point, the conclusion is inevitable! But who can prove that their favorite text is the starting point? Scholer refers to F.F. Bruce who feels Galatians 3:28 is the starting point! But F.F. Bruce is not the final word. Interestingly, Scholer, by quoting Bruce, seems to be trying to throw in false, but subtle, evidence before the opposing “attorney” can cry “Objection, your honor.” Yet the effort is obviously intended to prejudice the case.

<sup>3</sup> Klyne R. Snodgrass, WAB, p. 161.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16.

<sup>5</sup> The term “polemic” refers to “a controversial argument, especially one refuting or attacking a specific opinion or doctrine.” (American Heritage Dictionary).

<sup>6</sup> In this context, the term “Greek” refers to non-Jews (i.e. Gentiles).

<sup>7</sup> See parallel passages which also indicate the removal of distinctions: 1 Corinthians 7:17-27; 11:11-12; 12:13, Colossians 3:9-11, Romans 10:12-13. Of these passages, including Galatians 3:28, five mention that the Jew/Greek distinction is obliterated in Christ.

<sup>8</sup> The “Message” paraphrase does include the word *equal* in Galatians 3:28, but that is not in the original Greek. None of the main translations used the word *equal* in this verse.

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<sup>9</sup> Though some would argue that passages like Acts 4-5, James 2, etc. would support a more communal lifestyle among Christians.

<sup>10</sup> Not that we need Scripture to prove such an obvious statement (men and women are biologically different), but Jeremiah asks, “Can a man bear children? Then why do I see every strong man with his hands on his stomach like a woman in labor, every face turned deathly pale?” (Jeremiah 30:6).

<sup>11</sup> See also 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Leviticus 18:22-24; 20:13, Deut 23:18.

<sup>12</sup> House, RWMT, p. 101.

<sup>13</sup> RWMT, p. 105, 106.

<sup>14</sup> Ephesians 2:14-16.

<sup>15</sup> Also, in Genesis 5:1-2, God clarified that the creation of Adam in His likeness, included both male and female, and “...he blessed them and called them ‘man’ (lit. Adam)”.

<sup>16</sup> This kind of equality before God without reference to Jews and Gentiles occurs numerous times elsewhere in Scripture (see Romans 1:16, 10:13 for example). Yet there remains a difference between Jews and Gentiles as seen in Paul’s explanation of God’s plan for Jews and Gentiles as separate entities in differing roles (see Romans 9-11).

<sup>17</sup> WAB, p. 179.

<sup>18</sup> WAB, p. 76. Klyne R. Snodgrass writes: “I would argue that equality and hierarchy are not necessarily antithetical ideas. Nevertheless, what did change for Paul and must change for every Christian is the understanding of hierarchy. Christianity redefines hierarchy in terms of love, servanthood and mutual submission. If the new age has broken in, we cannot allow ourselves to continue to be determined by the old. Only Christ can legitimately determine our existence and our relationships.” This statement is interesting, coming from an “evangelical feminist.” Stanley says to use words like “economic subordination” is “unbiblical and unpersuasive evasion ... They are merely games played with words that still deny women the implications of their full humanity.” See also WAB, p. 62.

# HEADSHIP FOUNDATION

## Chapter Eight

A masterpiece hanging in the church sanctuary—imagine it. First time visitors notice it with puzzlement and intrigue. Some mistakenly think it a historic piece from a by-gone era, subject to the changing whims of artistic subjectivity. But interest is piqued and questions naturally follow. For those who have studied the Artist and His many other works, the telltale signs of the Master are present. What is unusual about this particular work is that the longer you study it, the more its exquisite meaning becomes apparent. Indeed, the image of the Creator becomes evident; the unmistakable picture of His people comes into focus as well. The picture moves from being static to becoming dynamic, living and active. For in time, the viewer can see that life itself is portrayed there.

In reality, God has given the church a work of artistry for our enjoyment and appreciation. It is not a painting, but rather more like a drama being played out every time the people of God gather for worshipping Him. We are speaking of the cosmic drama enacted by men and women in the local church, a drama intended to act out a great truth before the world, the angels and God Himself. This truth is foundational to God's relationship with His people and involves the relationship between God and Christ, Christ and mankind, and the way the sexes of mankind relate to each other. Instead of a painter's canvas or a playwright's stage, God uses the event of His people worshipping to convey these truths. And His one prop is a piece of cloth we call a headcovering.

Like many works of art, full appreciation comes from carefully studying both the Artist and His work. When attending a Shakespeare play, a beginner sees simply the stage, the layout,

the props. One may need to see the play repeatedly and take advantage of commentaries and overviews to gain a deeper appreciation of the work. Unfortunately, many dismiss great works of art simply because they lack the understanding or the patience to study the play. The result is that they do not understand the magnificence and intrinsic meaning of such works.

The same is true with God's drama in worship. The Bible teaches a beautiful concept that is hidden to many people. Worship is not only the pouring out of one's heart to God in extolling His worth, but it is also the stage on which we as the "actors" play back to God the timeless truths about His relationship with us. In fact, although God is the primary audience, others are also observing, namely the angels, as well as we, the actors ourselves.

### **OBSTACLES TO A FAIR HEARING**

To most people, wearing a headcovering as presented in 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 is foreign to their experience. For others, this drama has been reduced to conforming with the social or cultural practices around them. And to many, this practice symbolizes suppression of women. It has been the subject of misinformation, misunderstanding and even ridicule. Yet when understood correctly, the teaching is a wonderful opportunity to glorify God in a very unique and dramatic way. It portrays at the same time that which is stark, yet beautiful; that which is simple, yet profound; clear, yet mysterious. This tangible symbolism stands in the gap between that which is comfortable and that which challenges us.

The very nature of the practice of headcovering, being a visible and tangible activity, is from one perspective a black and white issue: either the covering is worn or it is not. As such, it can unfortunately lend itself to dividing Christians and giving cause for judging one another. In addressing this subject we recognize godly people disagree and we certainly aren't arrogant enough to think we have the corner on truth! In fact, taking the headcovering seriously is a minority view in modern day Christianity. Having said that, we remember what our kindergarten teachers drilled into us that, "The majority is not always right." This is a wonderful truth that has been lost to Christians for the most part. Even among those who practice it, often the beauty of

this picture can be lost in the obsessive *over*-focus on it or the tendency toward legalism concerning it.

In devoting a considerable section of this book to headcoverings, I do not want to convey that this is a watershed of doctrine. We simply want to help the reader learn to appreciate the underlying truth and the practice that portrays it—like a great work of art God has given us for both His and our appreciation and enjoyment. Very little is written on this subject in Christendom at large.

Probably the most glaring question that affects the study of headship and headcoverings is how Scripture written in one culture should be applied across various cultures. Some people dismiss the headcovering and/or headship as outdated and old fashioned. A second question has to do with making sense of the limited biblical data on the subject. Finally, the question of specific application has to do with when and how we can consistently apply this truth in real life situations. All these will be addressed this and the following chapters.

### **BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW**

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians contains some of the more controversial portions of Scripture having to do with the role of men and women in the church, particularly chapter 11. What to some appears to be irrelevant teaching about a hierarchy relationship between the sexes and a symbolic representation of that teaching with a headcovering, is in reality designed to give God's people an opportunity to glorify Him in a unique way.

A little background is in order first. The book of 1 Corinthians provides insight into a problematic church of the first century, where the believers had fallen into carnal living of all sorts, including sectarianism, arrogance, conflicts, law suits, gross sexual immorality, confusion of gender roles, abuse of the spiritual gifts, lack of discipline and order in the church, and rampant self-centeredness. Indeed, the teaching contained in this epistle certainly hits a responsive chord today among those who care deeply for the health of the local church. Plain and simple, the Corinthian believers were messing up in just about every area of life and service in the church.

The apostle Paul addresses all these issues in a systematic way, outlining both the relevant truths and how to apply those

truths in appropriate ways. Chapter 7 lays out, for example, principles for how men and women should relate to each other on a personal level. Chapter 11, which is our concern here, lays out corrective instruction regarding gender distinctions and roles in the church.

Interpretations of chapter 11 vary widely. Longenecker expresses a representative egalitarian view:

Apparently some women in the Corinthian church, in expressing their rightful Christian freedom, were flouting certain cultural conventions and in the process causing the Christian gospel to be confused with paganism. Perhaps their enthusiastic praying and prophesying with hair hanging loose was reminiscent of pagan prophetesses giving voice to their oracles in disheveled frenzy. Or perhaps their appearance in the congregation with hair cut short and heads uncovered suggested the styles of the city's prostitutes. Commentators vary widely in their understanding of the background of the problem. But the decorum of women in worship was obviously a real problem among Christians at Corinth, for they sought Paul's advice about it. The problem, however, arose precisely because women were taking a responsible[sic] part in the public worship of Christians at Corinth—evidently with Paul's blessing. So it was not a question of women praying or prophesying in the congregation, but rather the manner in which they did so.<sup>1</sup>

This view sees no gender role distinctions mandated by Paul; rather the idea of decorum (i.e. use of headcoverings) was simply a matter of cultural sensitivity, no more and no less. On the other hand those who hold a complementarian view do find that some gender role distinctions are present.<sup>2</sup>

There was indeed an impropriety in Corinth over the decorum of the women in church life, but it was not due to a flagrant disregard of social customs. Rather, it was due to a flagrant disregard of the doctrinal truth underlying the outward symbol. Paul reaffirms the doctrinal truth, a hierarchy of headship between God and Jesus, between Jesus and humanity, and between man and woman—and He gives an enduring symbol, the headcovering, to illustrate this truth.<sup>3</sup>

Some people feel Paul's teaching was applicable only to the Corinthians because of their special problems. However, he makes it clear that he is writing also to "... *those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...*" (1 Corinthians 1:2). Additionally, at the end of our passage under consideration, Paul states clearly that this practice of headcoverings was universally practiced by the other Christian churches, with the church at Corinth being the exception (1 Corinthians 11:16).

Speaking with apostolic authority and inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul teaches affirmatively the truth of headship and head-covering in this passage. There are no compelling cultural considerations to lead us to say that the headcovering is not relevant for Christians today. However, some people feel Paul was simply addressing something that was "traditional" with the first century Christians. Let's look at this further.

### **PAUL THE MAN**

Since much of the New Testament teaching is penned by the apostle Paul, we need to carefully consider his authority and the source of his teachings. Feminists in general malign his teachings as being somewhat less than divinely authoritative or at best somewhat humanized and culturally limited. It is important at the onset to understand clearly what the Scripture says about Paul himself and his authority to teach on this subject.

#### ***Paul was culturally cosmopolitan.***

Even a cursory reading of the New Testament shows that Paul was probably more aware of cultural differences than most people today. He traveled widely presenting the gospel to Jews, Greeks, Romans and pagans. He visited many countries and spoke with a wide variety of people. His traveling companions included both Jews *and* Gentiles, as well as some like Timothy who came from a mix of Jewish and Gentile stock. He himself grew up as a Jew in a Greek culture (Tarsus was an important city of the Roman Empire). He was, in fact, quite cosmopolitan and showed remarkable awareness of a wide range of cultures.

#### ***Paul's life was consistent with his teaching.***

The apostle Paul makes what seems to be an astounding statement in 1 Corinthians 11:1: "*Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*" On a number of other occasions and to

other audiences, he likewise offers himself as a model to follow.<sup>4</sup> This would be preposterous if Paul were not inspired by the Holy Spirit of God and if his statement was not included in Scripture. That he does not claim perfection is made clear in Philippians 3:12 “*Not that I have already attained ... or been made perfect ...*” He goes on to say that “... *but I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*” When the apostle sets himself up as an example to follow, he is not being arrogant or lacking humility. His writing does not reflect sub-spiritual or man-centered teaching. Rather, he conveys simply that his *walk* and his *talk* correspond. In fact, he teaches Timothy that the disciple of Jesus instructs others not only by his word, but also by his deed: “... *be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity*” (1 Timothy 4:12). What he taught Timothy, he practices himself—he is an example to believers.

Indeed, the apostle sees God’s work in his own life “*as an example for those who would believe on him (i.e. Christ) and receive eternal life*” (1 Timothy 1:16). While this pertains to his salvation, he sees his life as an example of God’s character being revealed. This should be true for all of us. In 1 Thessalonians 1:6, he closely identifies his own life with the Lord, “*You became imitators of us and of the Lord...*” What he puts into practice is a reflection of his following Christ. Essentially, he is God’s *audio/visual* on how to live the Christian life. In practice, he is simply doing what parents do when teaching a child how to tie his shoe: “Here, watch me.”<sup>5</sup>

Before we go on, we must deal with the nagging question: “Despite all the theologizing, is not Paul really a bit high minded, even ego-centric?” The answer is, “NO!” He recognizes exactly who he is, for later in this same letter he asserts:

*“For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God”* (1 Corinthians 15:9).

In his letter to the Ephesians, he states:

*Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ* (Ephesians 3:8).<sup>6</sup>

To the Christians in Rome he says,

*For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourselves more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you (Romans 12:3).*

Hardly could a man who uttered words like this be guilty of outrageous arrogance—unless one is prepared to charge the apostle with the most pointed of all criticisms: hypocrisy.<sup>7</sup>

***Paul's teaching is from God and is not limited by his humanity.***

Some try to challenge the authority of Paul's writing, saying that his teaching about gender roles is limited by his maleness and his culture. Yet no less than the apostle Peter himself, writing under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, asserted that Paul's writings were on the same level as Scripture:

*[Paul] writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16).<sup>8</sup>*

Concerning Scripture, Paul himself teaches:

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).*

Yet some will assert that Paul himself at times knowingly inserted some of his own personal perspectives, and that he did not consider them inspired—therefore, such things are not necessarily binding on believers. For example, earlier in this same letter to the Corinthians, he states, “*To the married I give this command, not I, but the Lord...*” (7:10). Then a few verses later he conversely says, “*To the rest I say this, I, not the Lord...*” (7:12). Did Paul signal to the reader that the latter teaching is human preference while the former is inspired? That is not the case, for that would pit Paul's teachings against the Lord's teachings in a way that God did not intend. The Lord personally commissioned Paul to be His spokesman<sup>9</sup> and he was designated by God as one

of His *official witnesses*<sup>10</sup>. Indeed, Paul begins his letter to the Corinthians by asserting his *apostleship* and therefore his *authority* (1:1). In fact, he makes it clear that his entire teaching to the Corinthians is authoritative and inspired by God:

*This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him ... (2 Corinthians 1:13-14).*<sup>11</sup>

So what does Paul mean in 1 Corinthians 7:12 (“*To the rest I say this, I, not the Lord...*”)? In verse 10 he refers specifically to teaching which the Lord Jesus gave during His earthly ministry, it was teaching from Jesus’ own mouth.<sup>12</sup> But in 1 Corinthians 7:12, the apostle speaks about something on which the Lord did not specifically comment during His three-plus years of earthly ministry; the teaching was new, albeit by direct revelation from the Holy Spirit. In other words, Paul simply distinguished the means of his inspiration, not the source. In one case, he was relaying the Lord Jesus Christ’s teaching, and in the other case he was providing new apostolic teaching (by direct inspiration from the Holy Spirit). In fact, most of what Paul wrote was of the latter sort.

Therefore, despite the challenge 1 Corinthians 7 or 11 presents to our cultural sensitivities, one thing we *cannot* say is that it was limited by Paul’s humanity, his maleness or his culture. Rather, our passage is of apostolic origin and therefore divinely inspired as the Word of God.

### **CULTURE AND FAITH**

Was Paul’s teaching on headship and headcovering limited to the first century culture?<sup>13</sup> Every student of the Word of God must wrestle with this question, particularly as it relates to this passage. To be sure, there has been much misunderstanding, misrepresentation, and repressive applications in the past. And there has been much thoughtless bowing to contemporary culture on the one hand, or to the culture of 50 years ago on the other hand.

The relationship between our faith and our culture is a perplexing study, even for the most astute scholar.<sup>14</sup> The question concerning the relationship between culture and faith

colors everything that is said about this passage. Some believe that Scripture accommodates the culture of the first century, and we must therefore understand it and apply it somewhat differently in our culture today. Since the culture of Paul's day was male-dominant, he accommodated his teaching to that culture's ideas about gender roles and symbolism.<sup>15</sup> But will this view hold up under careful scrutiny? I do not think so.

In 1 Corinthians 11:1-16, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul instructs the Corinthians believers that a woman should have a covering on her head during worship, while a man should not have a covering on his head during worship. Immediately, this begs the question of culture: does this apply to us today or is it outdated? Should we find a cultural equivalent (like wearing wedding rings) or should the whole idea of headship between men and women be disregarded as old-fashioned or as fundamentalistic?

Certainly not everything in Scripture is to be applied today in the same way as it was back in the time it was written. For example, Jesus, in the day of sandals, tells his disciples to wash one another's feet. Possibly we might offer a clean washroom to guests in our home before dinner.

First we need to deal with the more general issues of the relationship between culture and faith; then we will look more particularly at Paul's own explanation in 11:2.

For our purposes here we will consider four lines of reasoning to show that this passage is not bound by the culture of the first century.

**1. The apostle Paul was clear when he taught that certain cultural activities or ideas were relative.** A cursory reading of Scripture reveals that God's Word is drenched in the flavor of local customs and practices. For example, in the earlier chapters of 1 Corinthians, the apostle wrote about food offered to idols. While the prevailing cultural view was that idols did exist (and were real gods), Paul wrote that idols are nothing and therefore meat offered to them is nothing (10:19-20). He concludes, then, that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with eating meat offered to idols. This had very particular application to the culture of Paul's day. But he also presents a caveat, namely that if eating

such meat is done as an act of worship to the idol, then it is wrong (10:20-22). The point is that Paul unambiguously explained that his teaching about eating idol meat was relative to a person's viewpoint. However, in 1 Corinthians 11, when Paul talks about headship and headcoverings, he gives no such cultural caveat as in chapter 10. He does *not* say that the truth about headcoverings and headship is circumstantial or relative to one's beliefs or cultural viewpoint.

**2. The fact that Scripture sometimes made cultural applications does not mean that *all* biblical applications were limited to the culture of the day.** Most Christians today recognize some biblical references were limited in scope to cultural situations, for example, "*the kiss of love*" (1 Peter 5:14) and to "*use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses*" (1 Timothy 5:23). Most would apply this today to giving a good firm handshake or a hug for a greeting or prescribing medicine for illness. Why then, since headcoverings is so foreign to our culture, wouldn't we likewise find an application for today that is more culturally sensitive and relevant? The answer is this: Paul gives numerous reasons for the practice of headcovering that lift it out of the first century culture and links it to timeless truths (as we shall see shortly). With the case of the *holy kiss* and *wine for the stomach*, no rationale is given in the text whatsoever. In other words, one evidence that a cultural activity is meant to be enduring is the weight of supporting rationale given to it in Scripture. This is what separates the headcovering practice from what might otherwise be a cultural adaptation of truth. Simply put, comparing headcoverings with the holy kiss or wine for the stomach makes for a poor analogy.

**3. Paul sometimes taught truth and behavior that was counter to the culture of his day.** Some have suggested that Paul avoided an unnecessary social re-structuring of gender roles, for fear that he would risk sidetracking the gospel effort. But this doesn't square with what we know about Paul and his ministry. His treatment of food in chapter 10 demonstrates his willingness to take a risk with a more potentially explosive issue than male/female roles—that of foods offered to idols. His teaching there would have been tremendously offensive to Jews.

So much of what the early Christians taught and practiced was counter to the prevailing culture of their day. The belief in monotheism (only one God) was almost scandalous to the Romans. The idea that this supreme God came to earth as a man to die in our place for our sins was *counter-cultural* to most in those days and years. Paul was persecuted for contradicting the Jewish theological and cultural teaching about circumcision:

*“Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished”* (Galatians 5:11).

The Greek philosophers mocked Paul when he taught about Christ’s resurrection (Acts 17:32), giving evidence that he was certainly not reticent to teach or act contrary to cultural norms of his day. Paul never backed down from preaching the truth, regardless of the resistance. He did not shrink back in the least from proclaiming what the culture of his day considered extremely offensive. In the case of the Jews, they were so offended by his teachings about grace and circumcision that they were willing to kill him! If Paul would not shrink back from such offenses as these, it seems ludicrous to imagine him shrinking back from the cultural offense of trying to emancipate women (as feminists would view it). The truth, however, is that biblical teaching does frequently conflict with cultural values, and it does so in the case of gender roles.

**4. The Bible at times lifts customs from the culture of that day and makes it universal for all Christians everywhere.**

The precedent was set by the Lord Jesus Christ when He instructed about baptism. Historians tell us that the Jews of the first century practiced a kind of baptism (see Hebrews 6:2) and the pagan cults sometimes had water immersion as an initiatory rite. Jesus lifted this “cultural” activity and designated it to be a symbol for all Christians for all time (Matthew 28:18-20). The Lord’s Supper used the communal meal motif that Jews practiced (for example, the Passover Meal) as well as the pagan cults (see 1 Corinthians 9:8, 10:21). Jesus lifted the basic elements and designated them to be enduring symbols for remembering His death—to be practiced by all Christians of all cultures everywhere. Even the sacrifice on the cross clearly comes out of the

religio-cultural context of the Jewish sacrificial systems, where Jesus became the once-for-all sacrifice in place of animals.

Now how can we know in any given passage whether a teaching or an application of the truth is limited to the immediate culture in which it is found or is normative for all cultures and times? The answer is found in how the specific passage presents the truth in question. The operative question can be framed as follows, “Are *reasons* given in the passage that anchor the teaching to theological or culturally independent truth?” A careful analysis of 1 Corinthians 11 will show that hierarchal roles are presented by God as normative because theological and timeless reasons are given that lift the application and its symbol out of the immediate culture to be applied to all Christians everywhere.<sup>16</sup> This will become clear as we continue with our analysis of the chapter.

### **TEACHING ABOUT TRADITION (1 Corinthians 11:2)**

Paul continues his teaching with affirmative comments:

*I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you* (1 Corinthians 11:2).

The phrase “*passed ... on*”<sup>17</sup> is a translation of the Greek word *paredoka* which means to “hand down, deliver, entrust” in either written or oral form. This is precisely the same word used later in 1 Corinthians 11 in reference to the enacting of the Lord’s Supper:

*For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread ...* (1 Corinthians 11:23 emphasis added).<sup>18</sup>

What was *passed down*? The word translated in the NIV as *teachings* in verse 2 is translated in the NASB and NKJV as *traditions*. Now in our current, popular evangelical context, the word *tradition* often connotes man-made rules and regulations, to be disregarded in the quest for relevancy to our personal faith. However, that is not the meaning of what the apostle says here.

Before the books of the New Testament were written, God’s truth was passed on by word of mouth, beginning with the

apostles. The Lord Jesus did not write any books. However, He appointed the apostles to be His designated, authorized messengers to spread His truth after He had gone.<sup>19</sup> Jesus' teaching was initially conveyed orally by the apostles and passed around by word of mouth. The Divine writer in Acts 2:42 records that one of the four foundational activities of the early church was to meet for "*apostles' teaching (KJV: doctrine).*" Paul refers in 11:2 to this kind of *teaching* which the Corinthians had received at some previous time, and which he now is about to be reinforced.<sup>20</sup> Eventually these teachings, along with newer revelation from the Holy Spirit, were put into written form, under the authority or endorsement of the apostles—the eventual result being the canon of Scripture.<sup>21</sup>

Just as the Corinthians had accepted the apostolic teachings passed on to them, Paul is about to add to this corpus of knowledge. In the same way that he communicated God's truth about the Lord's Supper, he also communicated God's truth about headship and headcovering. Of particular note is that both subjects rubbed up against the cultural issue. Christendom has had no difficulty seeing the latter part of 1 Corinthians 11 as normative, but not the earlier part. Yet both are concrete applications of God's truth in a particular cultural context.

### **PRAISEWORTHY (2)**

*I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you (1 Corinthians 11:2).*

It seems Paul is speaking somewhat tongue-in-cheek to the Corinthian Christians. For if they had indeed held fast in *everything*, he would not have needed to rebuke them so often in this letter. His compliment seems best understood as laying down the gauntlet, a challenge to which they should aspire.

We turn now to an analysis of the main body of this passage concerning headship and headcoverings.

### **ISSUE OF HEADSHIP (3)**

Because the debate over gender roles has become so heated, this verse has risen to center stage among evangelicals concerned about these things:

*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 (1 Corinthians 11:3).*

There are two main interpretations espoused. One interpretation construes this to mean that men have a kind of *authority* over the woman, in a hierarchical sort of fashion. The other interpretation does *not* see this verse outlining any authority structure. In “Question of Canonical Interpretation,” J.I. Packer comments:

For the Christian, the question is whether the undisputed spiritual equality of the sexes before God and in Christ sanctions equality of function ... or whether God has ordained a hierarchical pattern whereby ... men are to lead ...

The answer to Packer’s question rests largely on the meaning of the Greek word *kephale*<sup>22</sup> in this verse. Normally, it is translated *head* both in its literal sense, meaning the “physical head of something,” as well as in its metaphorical sense. All would agree that *head* in this verse must be taken in a metaphorical sense—But what exactly is that metaphorical meaning?

Traditionally understood, the word, when used metaphorically, means one who is a “ruler, chief, in authority” as in “General Eisenhower is the head of the army.” The newer, egalitarian interpretation assigns to *kephale* the meaning of *source*. The issue is pointed: if *kephale* means *authority* then a hierarchy is envisioned in this verse; if it means *source*, then this passage does not support a hierarchy relationship between men and women. We now look at each alternative.

***Kephale as source.***<sup>23</sup>

Stephen Bedale<sup>24</sup> and subsequent authors who have relied heavily on his comments, claim *kephale* does not normally mean *ruler* and that the ancient world did not think of a head as *controlling a body*. They assert that *source* is the normal metaphorical understanding in ancient Greek usage and they compare it to the concept of the headwaters of a river being the source of the river. This meaning is even found in a few Greek lexicons as a possible meaning.

However, this viewpoint twists the linguistic facts. Let's look at the evidence. Linguists determine meaning by how a word is used. Since the meaning of *kephale* in the NT is debated, we must look to usage of the term in ancient Greek writings outside of the Bible. There we find that the word *kephale* occurs frequently with the meaning of *ruler* or *authority over* in ancient Greek.<sup>25</sup> For example, Plato, writing in the 5th-4th century BC referred to "... *the head which is the most divine part and which reigns over all the parts within us.*" Philo, a Jewish philosopher, (30 BC-AD 45) wrote in his work "The Life of Moses" that "As *the head in the living body is the ruling place, Ptolemy became the head among kings.*"<sup>26</sup> In both of these instances *head* is used metaphorically to mean one who is *over* others. Dr. Wayne Grudem, in an exhaustive word study covering 2,336 occurrences of *kephale* in ancient Greek texts, discovered 49 times where it was used to mean *one in authority, or chief*. He found no cases where it used in an unambiguous reference to a source of something.<sup>27</sup> He concludes:

...we are left with no evidence to convince us that "source" was a common or even a possible meaning for "kephale" in Greek literature. But there is abundant evidence that it could very well take the meaning of "chief, authority."<sup>28</sup>

Some claim *kephale* takes on the meaning of nourisher, originator or derivation. But these meanings are found in none of the major Greek lexicons whatsoever, and no one has yet produced a clear unambiguous case supporting these meanings.

In addition to the linguistic evidence, the contextual evidence weighs against *source* as being the proper understanding of *kephale* in this passage (1 Corinthians 11:3). Let us take a closer look. In the verse, whatever is true of the man/woman relationship must be true of the Christ/man relationship and of the God/Christ relationship. We would have:

God → is the source of → Christ  
 Christ → is the source of → man  
 Man → is the source of → woman.

But in what sense are the relationships parallel? James Hurley is convinced, and correctly so, that "There is no way to construct a

satisfactory set of parallels if we take ‘head’ to mean ‘source’ ...”<sup>29</sup> If by *source* we mean woman was physically made from Adam, this is patently false in the other two relationships described in verse three—man was not physically, or in any other sense, made or taken from Christ, and Christ was not made or taken from God. Certainly, man was created by Christ, but the parallels are not true, namely, woman was not created *by* man and Jesus was *not created* by God. Jesus proceeded from God, but was not made from God in any sense like Eve was made from Adam. To broaden the concept of *source* sufficiently to include all three relationships is to force the data to fit the theory. Yet to force three different concepts of *source* into this verse would render the apostle’s argument meaningless, which was clearly intended to be built on parallel reasoning.<sup>30</sup>

We conclude that the idea of *source* is an unlikely meaning of *kephale*, there being no solid lexical evidence or contextual rationale for understanding it in that way.

***Kephale as authority.***

The standard lexicons of the Greek language in New Testament times are virtually unanimous that the metaphorical meaning of *authority* was not *uncommon* in the ancient Greek; in fact, it was the normal metaphorical meaning.<sup>31</sup> Some claim this reflects a male bias of the lexicographers who lived mostly before modern feminism raised people’s consciousness about such things. For this allegation to stand requires an accurate rebuttal of their conclusions, complete with uncompromising, irrefutable evidence. It will just not do to dismiss the results of recognized experts in the ancient languages simply because their conclusions do not align with contemporary culture. How does the critic know that he or she is not the one who is unduly influenced by our modern culture against the true meaning of the word?

Walter Liefeld, an egalitarian, admits on the strength of Grudem’s research that “those who claim such a meaning [i.e. source] in the New Testament have to rely only on the context, not on any external evidence prior to the first century.”<sup>32</sup> He also asserts “... it is no longer possible, given Grudem’s research, to dismiss the idea of ‘rulership’ from the discussion.”<sup>33</sup> Ruth Tucker, another egalitarian, surveys the writings of the early

church fathers and admits that *kephale* generally was interpreted to mean “authority, superior rank or pre-eminence.”<sup>34</sup>

We conclude that *authority* is the unmarked or default metaphorical meaning. In fact, the context supports this interpretation, for the parallels make perfectly good sense and align with accepted biblical understanding:

Father	→ Head or authority over	→ Christ
Son	→ Head or authority over	→ man
Man	→ Head or authority over	→ woman

H. Wayne House rightly asserts “...it would be a mistake not to see the overall argument as a proof of hierarchical authority based on similar arrangements or models.”<sup>35</sup> There *is* a hierarchal relationship between those represented by the parallel relationships.

Does this mean that women are inferior to men in essence and value? Not at all, for the hierarchy has to do with role relationship, not essential equality. Jesus Himself is subordinate to the Father, but He is still God and as such is *not* inferior to the Father! Yet some feel so strongly that a hierarchy *does* imply inferiority of essence and value that the long held doctrine of the Trinity is now being called into question. In other words, since the relationship of male and female parallels that of the Father and Son, and since subordination implies inferiority (so it is argued), therefore Jesus could *not* be subordinate to the Father, since Jesus Himself is God. Yet the doctrine of Jesus’ subordination to the Father has been part of the Trinity doctrine from the early centuries of the church. The Father and the Son are equal in essence (deity and attributes) yet they are different in functional authority. The Father sent the Son,<sup>36</sup> the Son never did or said anything apart from the Father,<sup>37</sup> the Son was obedient to the Father<sup>38</sup> and the Son submitted to the Father’s will.<sup>39</sup> Yet the Son is fully God<sup>40</sup> and one with the Father.<sup>41</sup> In theological terms, there is “ontological equality with economic subordination among members of the trinity.”

When Paul says man is the head of the woman, he does not imply that women are inferior to men, anymore than he implies that Jesus is inferior to God. Different in roles, yes, but equal in essence. A boss is functionally greater than the employee, both

enjoying different privileges and responsibilities, yet, both are essentially equal in their humanity and being. The same is true of team members that have differing roles (such as captain, quarterback, running back, etc.).

Therefore, this passage *does* present a hierarchy of relationship between male and female that involves authority, patterned after the relationship of God/Christ and Christ/man.

***Servant-leadership.***

Using the concept of *authority* may sound repressive to 21<sup>st</sup> century, North American ears, because of the abuse that many women have experienced at the hands of authoritarian or abusive men, both in the home and in the marketplace. However, the biblical idea of authority differs greatly from that of this world, both the ancient as well as the modern worlds. Genuine followers of Jesus Christ cannot adhere to the picture of a man sitting on his emotional and verbal throne barking out orders to his women underlings. The Lord Jesus defined true authority in terms of servanthood:

*Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:42-45).*

Consider how Jesus, though He had authority over the apostles, stooped to wash their feet (John 13). In fact, the term today that probably conveys the idea best is *servant-leadership*. Men are to provide loving servant-leadership, and women are to join them, following in response and helping achieve God's desires in life. True, this kind of leadership may at times involve disagreement and unilateral decision making—but servant-leadership is a sacrificial lifestyle that puts the other person's needs and concerns ahead of one's own. The fact that some men have abused their leadership role, does not invalidate the biblical truth of headship.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 does not give details but sets out the general relationship for functioning in ministry. The authority for leading falls to the man as he takes responsibility and care for others. But keep in mind, this truth is encompassed within the larger truth of Christ being the *head* over man(kind) and God (the Father) being the *head* over Christ. So while the passage goes on to talk about men and women (and coverings), the larger truths are still in the picture.<sup>42</sup> Paul laid great stress on recognizing these relationships, and now goes on to illustrate his teaching with the headcovering practice.

### **CULTURAL ISSUES RELATED TO HEADCOVERINGS**

A popular view today is that the headcovering was a cultural application for the first century that does not apply today. It is asserted that in Corinth men customarily prayed with heads uncovered and women prayed with their heads covered.

However, the biblical context as well as the historical record suggest otherwise. In the first case, the fact that the Corinthians must be given instructions concerning headcoverings indicates that what Paul was instructing them was *not* part of the prevailing Corinthian church culture. Otherwise, why would he need to tell them to do it?

Second, there is much disagreement as to what exactly the cultural practice of headcovering in the ancient world was. J. Jeremias points out that in Judaism women were always veiled in public.<sup>43</sup> Yet other commentators like Hurley assert that this cannot be proved one way or the other. Biblical scholar E. Kasemann<sup>44</sup> claims that the covering Paul talks about would be a foreign concept to Greek women. Still others feel there was little consistency between the three dominant cultures of the day—Roman, Greek and Jewish. One researcher, after studying the Roman, Greek and Jewish cultures, puts forward some interesting conclusions:

The veiling of men in public was not practiced by any of the three cultures. Although veiling of women in public was common in all three cultures, it was practiced most consistently by the Jews. In Greek culture neither men nor women were covered in worship. Among the Romans, both men and women covered themselves when praying and sacrificing.

Jewish women would have been covered in worship and although it is not likely that most Jewish men would have been covered in worship, they certainly would not have thought such a practice was improper since their priest worshipped God with a covering. Paul's statement ... that men ought not to be covered while praying and prophesying and women ought to be, establishes a practice which is different than any of the three customs of his day ... in all three cultures men and women could be distinguished by the fact that the men wore their hair short while the women wore long hair ... loose, disheveled, or shaved hair were all signs of mourning or disgrace in all three cultures.<sup>45</sup>

In light of the ambiguous historical findings, it would be rather specious to argue that Paul was simply accommodating the culture in which the Corinthians lived.<sup>46</sup> We simply do not know for sure what practice in the culture was on this point.

Third, there is little evidence that wearing a veil in the first century outside of Christian circles had the meaning Paul assigns it in 1 Corinthians 11. However, attaching to the headcovering the symbolic meaning which Paul speaks of—that *was* new!

Fourth, there is nothing in the passage to indicate that the actual symbol can vary from culture to culture, so long as the underlying meaning is kept. Some suggest using a different but equivalent symbol today, one that is more culturally acceptable. If that were the case, then what modern day equivalent to headcovering would fit the application? Some have posited the idea that a wedding ring might serve in this capacity. But the ring in our culture has no sense of hierarchical relationships. In fact, both men and women wear wedding rings. Others suggest modest dress, but this does not convey the biblical meaning of headship in our culture.<sup>47</sup> One would be hard pressed to come up with a better symbol than the headcovering.

At the heart of the matter lies the question whether it is legitimate to universalize at least some scriptural symbolisms across cultures? The answer is yes. However, if we relativize *all* symbolism, we eliminate the mandate for symbolism altogether—it is then left up to the individual interpreter to determine his own symbolism. Where would that leave us when it comes to baptism or the Lord's Supper? These are both clearly trans-

cultural symbols for today and demonstrate a precedence in which God can invest other ancient symbols with trans-cultural meanings.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, a ceremonial meal with shared bread and wine, and a ceremonial cleansing were common activities in both Judaism as well as the mystery cults of the ancient world.

In the normal course of things, one generation of Christians will (should) explain the symbolism to the next, so that its meaning becomes apparent. We see this when Joshua commanded the people to set up a symbolic stone monument at the Jordan River and then instructed the Israelites to explain its meaning to succeeding generations (see Joshua 4:6). The fact that we need to explain a symbol does not lessen its value as symbolism, for once it is explained, the symbolism can now be appreciated. In fact, we find that most biblical symbols were to be accompanied by an explanation.<sup>49</sup>

In conclusion, there is nothing in this passage (1 Corinthians 11) or in our understanding of the ancient cultural context indicating that headcovering is culturally limited. The practice of headcovering is to be universally applied, even today.

In the next chapter, we will address the details outlining the wonderful, dramatic truth behind the headcovering, as well as how and when it should be practiced.

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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> WAB, 72.

<sup>2</sup> However, there is disagreement about the specific application of headcoverings for today among complementarians

<sup>3</sup> Suppose, for a moment, that God had in fact desired to convey the idea that there is, indeed, to be a role distinction between the sexes and that headcoverings were to be the enduring, normative symbol to be used in the church today. We ask: "How else could God have better stated this in the passage?" One would be hard pressed to state the matter more clearly, as we shall see.

<sup>4</sup> See 1 Corinthians 4:16; Philippians 3:17, 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2 Thessalonians 3:7,9.

<sup>5</sup> Paul was quick to point out when someone else's walk did not match his talk (see Galatians 2:11-14 where he confronts Peter over hypocriti-

cal behavior). So also he lays out his life for people's scrutiny. Integrity was essential to his ministry.

<sup>6</sup> See also 1 Timothy 1:13-14.

<sup>7</sup> Paul knew the dangers of opening himself to the judgmental eye of the Corinthians. In his second letter to them, he uses mock boasting (to his own chagrin and hopefully the Corinthians' as well) to shock his readers into seeing how ridiculous arrogance sounds (see 2 Corinthians 11-12). His mockery ends with his triumphal boast: "*I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.*" (2 Corinthians 12:9b, see also Galatians 6:14). No, Paul, confident though he may have been, was not arrogant—God made sure of that ("*To keep me from becoming conceited ...there was given me a thorn in my flesh...*" 2 Corinthians 12:7).

<sup>8</sup> The fact that even Peter found some of Paul's teachings difficult to understand should encourage us in our study of this difficult subject.

<sup>9</sup> Acts 9:15, Galatians 1:15; 2:7-8.

<sup>10</sup> Acts 22:15; 26:16-18.

<sup>11</sup> See also 1 Corinthians 2:4-7.

<sup>12</sup> See Matthew 19:3-12. Since Paul was not a follower of Christ during the Lord's earthly ministry, this teaching was probably relayed to him through one of the other apostles, possibly during his visit to Jerusalem to meet with Peter (Galatians 2:18). Though Paul asserts in Galatians 1 that he is not dependent upon the other apostles for his commissioning and basic understanding of the gospel of grace, he probably garnered much from them about the basic facts of Jesus' teaching in many other areas.

<sup>13</sup> The American Heritage Dictionary defines *culture* as "The totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought; The patterns, traits, and products considered as the expression of a particular period, class, community, or population...."

<sup>14</sup> See Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (HarperCollins) for an exhaustive treatment of the relationship between faith and culture.

<sup>15</sup> Some translations use the word *traditions* or *ordinances* in verse 2 where the NIV has *teachings*. On the one hand, some people dismiss *headcoverings* as simply traditional and therefore not binding. Others have gone in the other direction to see headcoverings on the same level as the Lord's Supper and Baptism. See below for further discussion on this term *teachings*.

<sup>16</sup> Note that Paul's model is that of the risen Christ (verse 11) who, being in a risen state and no longer relating on the physical level, is certainly above all contexts and cultures. His example is an enduring

one, and that is what Paul imitates. In fact, even churches in different regions were to imitate the ones in Judea (1 Corinthians 11:16, see also 1 Thessalonians 2:14). Certainly there were at least some cultural differences between the churches and the world—in fact, everywhere the early believers went they clashed with culture!

<sup>17</sup> Greek: *paredoka* - 1st aorist, 1st person, singular.

<sup>18</sup> For other occurrences of the word, see Luke 1:2, Jude 3, Acts 16:4.

<sup>19</sup> John 14:26; 16:13, Acts 1:8.

<sup>20</sup> F.F. Bruce in his monumental study of the life and teachings of the apostle Paul, in reference to Paul's fifteen day visit with Peter in Jerusalem (Galatians 1:18), says, "...Peter was a primary informant on matters which it was now important that Paul should know—the details of Jesus' ministry and the 'tradition' of teaching which derived from him." For an excellent study of Paul's knowledge of the teachings of Jesus and of the other Apostles, see F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1977), pp. 83-112.

<sup>21</sup> The full study of the way God's Word was put into written form is part of a larger study called *Bibliology*.

<sup>22</sup> Other occurrences of *kephale* are in Ephesians 1:20-23; 4:15; 5:13, Colossians 1:18; 2:10, 19.

<sup>23</sup> This is the view commonly held by feminist authors who have somewhat set the tone for egalitarian viewpoint (Berkeley Mickelsen and Alvera Mickelsen, Margaret Howe, Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty). C.K. Barrett and Colin Brown agree (in relationship to 1 Corinthians 11:3). They say Ephesians 4:23, Colossians 2:10 and Colossians 1:19 all used *kephale* as meaning *source*. Most of these writers refer back to Bruce or Bedale (see bibliography).

<sup>24</sup> Stephen Bedale, "The Meaning of *Kephale* in the Pauline Epistles" in *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 5 (1954): 211-15. F.F. Bruce's uncritical reference to him in his commentary on 1 Corinthians has carried weight among some people, but Bruce apparently gives no validation for concurring with Bedale.

<sup>25</sup> "Kephale" also occurs in the Septuagint (LXX), which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was probably the version used by Jesus and the Apostles.

<sup>26</sup> See Wayne Grudem, "Does *Kephale* ('Head') mean 'source' or 'Authority over' in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 examples." *Trinity Journal* 6 n.s. (1985) 38-59.

<sup>27</sup> In fact, in the one case where *kephale* is used in reference to a river, it could just as easily be used to refer to the extremities of a river, as with the mouth or with the headwaters!

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* p. 46.

<sup>29</sup> James B. Hurley *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1981), pp. 166-67.

<sup>30</sup> Certainly, the idea that Eve, as an individual, was created from a singular person whose name was Adam, is found in 11:9. But even there the concept of “source” is not singular. If “source” is indeed in mind, then the concept holds only for Adam and Eve, but not for every relationship among men and women. For no other woman finds her “source” in man in this sense. If the fertilization aspect of procreation is in mind, the source of both men and women is found in both men and women. In other words, the issue becomes a moot point, hardly worth mentioning. What, then, would be the point of the verse? Ruth Tucker (WAB, p.111) rightly asks that if “kephale” means source, then how does this apply to male/female roles in marriage and ministry?

<sup>31</sup> A sampling of some of the more standard lexicons will suffice: Bauer, Arndt & Gingrich (standard Greek lexicon) lists this meaning “In the case of living beings, to denote superior rank.” Then goes on to list 13 examples. Thayer’s Lexicon lists “Metaphorically anything supreme, chief, prominent; of persons, master, lord.” Several examples are listed. Creme’s Lexicon has “The head is that part of the body which holds together and governs all the out going of life ... and because of its vital connection stands in the relation of ruler to the other members.” TNIDNTT (The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology) lists it as in the Septuagint “kephale is used for the head or ruler of a society.” We must admit that in Liddell & Scott,<sup>31</sup> a standard lexicon for ancient Greek covering the time period of 700 BC to about A.D. 600, two passages are listed under the “kephale” entry as supporting the meaning “source.” However, in both instances, *kephale* occurs in the plural, and refers apparently to the extremity or farthest end. A river has many starting points, but only one ending point, yet the word is used for both extremities. Liddell and Scott list this meaning under the general category of “of things, extremities.” This can hardly be presented as proof of a common understanding of *source*. Based on the above, it would be extremely difficult to accept the charge that *kephale* did not mean *authority over* in ordinary Greek at the time of the NT.

<sup>32</sup> WAB, p. 139.

<sup>33</sup> Yet Leifeld goes on to completely ignore Grudem’s findings of concrete examples. He refers to a solitary instance from the late 2nd century in Tertullian. Leifeld concludes, “There is not much evidence for any single metaphorical use of kephale above the others.” This statement goes contrary to the data! House has an excellent analysis of kephale usage in the NT, as well as in the ancient, Koine and patristic Greek (House, RWMT, p. 34).

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<sup>34</sup> WAB, p. 112-117.

<sup>35</sup> House, RWMT, 110.

<sup>36</sup> Galatians 4:4.

<sup>37</sup> John 8:28.

<sup>38</sup> Philippians 2:8.

<sup>39</sup> Matthew 26:39.

<sup>40</sup> Colossians 1:19, 2:9.

<sup>41</sup> John 10:30.

<sup>42</sup> There is a very real play on words in this passage, or should we say a play on the “sense” of the words. In one sense, the Son is head over mankind (plural), and such is in view at times in the passage. But in another sense, the Son is the head of the man (singular), who then is head of the woman. This singular view is also present in the passage.

<sup>43</sup> TNIDNTT III:159 quoting “Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus,” p. 358ff  
<sup>44</sup> *New Testament Question of Today*, 1969, p. 210.

<sup>45</sup> Stephen Tulloch, “1 Corinthians 11:2-16: An Historical, Exegetical and Hermeneutical Study” (Th.M. Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1986).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. TNIDNTT. Colin Brown believes Paul was influenced by this Jewish presence in Corinth. But that would smack of Judaizers, those Jews who held to belief in Christ, but also kept the requirement of the law and circumcision. Certainly, Paul urged in 1 Corinthians 10:32 that no offense be given to the Jews, Greeks or to the church. But Paul never taught anything that was a compromise with Judaism. In the book of 1 Corinthians 11, he is quite emphatic. It would be hard to believe he was placating the Jews. It is true that Paul had Timothy circumcised at the beginning of his second missionary journey, after much contention with the Judaizers who demanded circumcision as necessary for Gentile conversion. Yet Paul vehemently argues against circumcision as a requirement for salvation (this is the message of Acts 15 and the book of Galatians). The point is that Paul had Timothy circumcised to avoid unnecessary contention, but he also made it clear that it was in no way required.

<sup>47</sup> See Daniel Wallace, who presents an excellent analysis of 1 Corinthians 11, but puts forward the idea for finding a modern cultural equivalent to the headcovering, such as a wedding ring or modest dress. See *Bible Studies Foundation*. Copies of his article can be downloaded at: [www.bible.org/docs/soapbox/covering.htm](http://www.bible.org/docs/soapbox/covering.htm).

<sup>48</sup> While we see the comparison in investing trans-cultural significance in the Lord’s Supper, baptism and headcovering, we do not invest the status of “ordinance” in the headcovering. The Lord’s Supper and baptism relate to our salvation (symbolizing it and remembering it), and

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the commands to practice these are classically located in the Gospels, Acts and the epistles. We do not believe the headcovering (as well as countless other NT truths) is elevated to the same status of the other two.

<sup>49</sup> We find many other good examples of God assigning symbolic value to cultural items, where such symbolism becomes trans-cultural. The tabernacle in the Old Testament, for example, was an elaborate Bedouin tent in its basic form, but God mandated its use through many generations to symbolize heavenly things, even up to the times of the New Testament where this symbolism is identified with Christological truth (Hebrews 8:5).

# HEADSHIP SYMBOLIZED

## Chapter Nine

We turn now to the symbolic representation of the headship principle, building on the foundation laid in the previous chapter. Relatively little has been written on this subject of headcovering, because many commentators and writers dismiss the covering as cultural or irrelevant. We dealt with the culture issue in the previous chapter. Our purpose in this chapter is to show 1) that the headcovering is both biblical and relevant for today and 2) that this symbol provides a wonderful opportunity to obey and glorify the Lord in showing our joyful embrace of God's order of the sexes.

We are quick to admit that this challenges the hermeneutic abilities of most anyone who attempts to sort it out. Our passage may be one of those that Peter had in mind when he referred to some of Paul's writings as *hard to understand*.<sup>1</sup> But we cannot in good conscience dismiss it simply because of its difficulties. To do so is tantamount to embracing the peculiar view that is common today—that it just doesn't really matter. That is a dangerous position to take. The difficulty of interpretation must lead us to grace toward those who disagree with us, but it should never lead to capitulation. Yes, grace must adorn our convictions, but convictions we must have—and these must be based on an honest wrestling with the passage.

What separates this symbol of headcovering from other cultural practices such as foot washing, the holy kiss and taking wine for the stomach's sake is the thorough explanation given for its practice. The apostle Paul outlines six lines of thought that explain the purpose and meaning of headcovering, encompassing a broad spectrum of reasoning—all of which move the practice beyond a localized application.

**THE PRINCIPLE OF HEADSHIP (1 CORINTHIANS 11:3)**

This is the theological reason for headcoverings. The head-covering symbol first of all points to the headship relationship between man and woman. Women should be covered and men should be uncovered, as a way to symbolize their assent to their God-ordained relationship to each other. That is, men are to be the *head* in whatever that entails and women are to come under that *headship*. Some might say that headcoverings do not convey that meaning today. The nature of symbolism is that it often needs to be initially explained. For example, Aslan the lion in C.S. Lewis' "The Chronicles of Narnia" series, is not readily seen as a "Christ-figure" to many. But once pointed out, the symbolism becomes clear. The same is true of headcoverings—once pointed out, its symbolic meaning can be accepted.

Clearly, the hierarchy applies to a husband/wife relationship (see Ephesians 5:21-27). But it also applies to unmarried women and men—the word *every* in verses 3-5 emphasizes the totality of all individuals, every single male and every single female. In the church there is a collective sense of men (regardless of marital status) providing headship and women (as a group including married, single and divorced women) coming under that headship.

**RIVALRY OF GLORY (1 CORINTHIANS 4-7)**

This is the doxological<sup>2</sup> reason for headcoverings:

*4 Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. 5 And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. 6 If 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. 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 (1 Corinthians 11:4-7 verse numbers are left in the quote for reference below).*

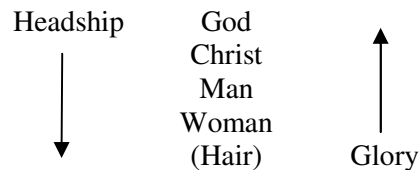
These verses lay out the basic symbolic practice: during certain spiritual activities, a man should have his head uncovered and a woman her head covered. Paul gives his rationale for this

in verse 7: "... since he [i.e. the man] is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man."

We must examine the two key terms in the passage. The word *image* translates the Greek word *icon*, which means "something that is like, similar." In essence, the word connotes that which represents something else.<sup>3</sup> The word *glory* translates the Greek word *doxa* which means "brightness, splendor, honor."<sup>4</sup> Glory is seen in terms of outward appearance. For man to be the glory of God means that he reflects outwardly how great God is!<sup>5</sup>

The passage mixes metaphor with concrete parallels. The male is the *image* of God in the sense that he represents mankind as a whole. In other words, his image-bearing function as *head* represents both male and female (as seen in Genesis 1-2). The female, whom we know from Genesis 2 was made in the image of God as well, does not function in the specific role of head in relationship to man.<sup>6</sup> Rather, the woman reflects man's glory, where man represents mankind, and therefore, woman reflects *mankind's* glory. We must keep in mind the overall intent of the author here: he is talking about the relational glory in the hierarchical scheme.<sup>7</sup>

Now relationship hierarchy comprises a two-way truth: In the scheme of verse three, any one individual is the *head* of that which is below as well as the *glory* of that which is above. This might be illustrated as below:



How does this relate to headcoverings? Looking back to verses 4-6, we must consider two key words: "Having something on" (which translates the Greek word *kata*) and *head* (*kephale*). The word *kata* has a somewhat strong connotation, the idea being "something *down on* or *against* the head."<sup>8</sup> A headcovering, in a negative sense, takes away something from the head upon which it is applied. This fits well with the idea of a covering over that which would otherwise be exposed or revealed. With the concept of *glory* being so visible in this passage, the covering

and exposure motif is strongly connected to glory being covered or exposed.

What makes this passage perplexing is the obvious interplay between the literal meaning and the metaphorical meaning of the word *head*. However, the argument of the passage could be paraphrased as follows:

- A man who covers his literal head, dishonors his metaphorical head (Christ)
- A woman who uncovers her literal head, dishonors her metaphorical head (the man)
- A man who uncovers his literal head, honors his metaphorical head (Christ)
- A woman who covers her literal head, honors her metaphorical head (the man)

The passage contrasts that which is to be given prominence with that which is to be hidden. The man being uncovered, symbolically exposes or gives attention to God, that is, he exposes God's glory, figuratively speaking. To cover his head is tantamount to symbolically covering Christ, keeping Him from being exposed, as though He were dishonored. For the woman to be covered, means she is symbolically covering or hiding her figurative head, the man—since the woman is the glory of man. She is symbolically keeping the glory of man from being exposed in God's presence.

It may be helpful to make a connection back to the Garden of Eden. Men and women were both created in God's image (see chapter 2 & 3 above). There is a sense in which all humans, whether male or female, reflect God's image,<sup>9</sup> yet, there is also a collective sense of reflecting God's glory in a complementary fashion. What do I mean by that? We need to expand on the understanding of the term *glory* given earlier. The word itself comes from the concept of "solid, weighty" and was sometimes used to describe ancient architectural columns. When applied to people, it came to have the sense of weightiness of character. It is but a short step in the evolution of the word, to see that to *glorify* a person would be to show forth the true weightiness of his character, or to put it another way, to show how great a person is. For God to be glorified, means that some thing or some person

shows, reflects or demonstrates what His character is like. Since He is great, then to glorify Him is to show how great He is. This can best be seen using an analogy from the world of drama.

***The drama analogy.***

Let me use the drama analogy referred to earlier. The dictionary defines a drama as “a prose or verse composition, especially one telling a serious story, that is intended for representation by actors impersonating the characters and performing the dialogue and action.” Imagine a drama in which there are two principle *characters*: God and a character named “His People.” The title role of God is played by a male *actor*, and the supporting role of creation is played by a *female* actor. The plot of the drama is all about the unfolding relationship between God and His creation. The ultimate goal of the play is to show how great God is in relationship to His Creation. God initiates and leads His people, and His people respond to His loving leadership. Man and woman, equally being actors of great skill, play their different roles to the best of their abilities, with the end result that God is seen to be glorified in His relationship to His people.

The teaching in Scripture on gender relationships in the church is the *composition* of the drama. Every man plays the *character role* of Christ, in this drama, and every woman plays the *character role* of God’s people. This is the portrayal Paul gives in Ephesians 5:21-33 where he compares the relationship of a husband and wife to the relationship of Christ and His church. In worship, the man who represents Christ dramatically remains uncovered, thereby exposing Christ (his figurative head), symbolically making Him prominent, because he (the man) is enacting the role of Christ. The woman, who is enacting the role of mankind, covers herself because she is the *glory* of the man, whose glory is to be given less prominence when God is being exposed in His glory. So using the drama analogy, the headcovering is used by the actors to symbolically make Christ more prominent and His people less prominent.

There are many, intriguing layers of meaning to this passage (1 Corinthians 11), a sort of drama within a drama. The interplay of the sexes in their *function* of worship also portrays the glory of God, as men “exercise” their headship through leading in worship and women follow their leadership.

At the most basic, physical level, it is not difficult to recognize how glory and a woman's headcovering are related. In terms of outward attractiveness and beauty, the woman is the more "glorious" side of humanity in comparison to man. And a woman's hair clearly enhances her appearance. We know this from common perception and even the apostle Paul refers to this: "... *if a woman has long hair, it is her glory...*" (verse 15). Does not our common word "attractive" mean "that which attracts attention?" This is precisely what Paul says a woman should not be doing in worship when attention should be on Christ. We humans have a powerful propensity to focus on our own selves and our accomplishments (i.e. works) when we approach God. Yet this teaching in 1 Corinthians 11 teaches us that only God is to receive the glory. The passage acknowledges an inherent rivalry between the woman and God when it comes to the attention of men. The natural tendency to enjoy the physical appearance of women is to be curbed in worship.

So at whatever level the analogy applies, we should be pre-eminently conscious of only One, the Lord Jesus Christ, during worship. So the headcovering in worship provides an interesting subjugation of the natural interplay between the sexes and between mankind and God.

To continue the drama analogy a bit further, who is the audience? First of all, the actors of any drama are often the most appreciative of the story. Both men and women are reminded of their roles before God in this drama. Both are reminded to focus on God and not mankind's glory. There is an additional audience, namely the angels (11:10). However the most important audience is the Author of the script, Who sees that we understand our gender distinctiveness and our relationship to Him. One might imagine the Lord breaking out in spontaneous applause at a presentation well done.

The godly woman who embraces this truth has an opportunity in worship to submit her beauty to the glory of God. This is similar to what one woman did for the Lord Jesus:

*Then Mary took a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume (John 12:3).*

She sacrificed that which enhanced her beauty, namely her hair, in service for Christ. The Lord considered such actions to be a *beautiful thing* (Mark 14:6). In the same way, during worship the woman sacrifices her beauty by covering that which is glorious to her so that all the glory goes to the Lord.

An appeal is made to shame: a woman uncovered is shameful, just as much as a woman whose hair is cut off! While exceptions can always be found in our contemporary culture, baldness in women even today is generally not embraced as beautiful! Paul in essence says a woman should be ashamed if she rejects the headcovering in order to maintain her own attractiveness (i.e. glory).

***Men in worship.***

This passage speaks also to men. They should *not* cover their physical head. Men symbolically reflect God in worship, and in life they should imitate God by initiating, loving, caring for and leading the woman. This emulates Christ's love for His Church, Yahweh's love for Israel, God's love for the world. The man who is *uncovered* is saying that he acknowledges Christ as his head and accepts his role enacting servant-leadership toward women.<sup>10</sup>

We conclude that one reason for the headcovering has to do with symbolically showing God's glory and hiding mankind's glory.

**ORDER OF CREATION (8-9, 11-12)**

The third rationale for the headcovering is the historical reason:

*8 For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; 9 for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake ... 11 However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. 12 For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man [has his birth] through the woman; and all things originate from God (1 Corinthians 11:8-9, 11-12).*

Literally translated, verses eight and nine read: "*For man is not out (Greek: ek) of woman, but woman out (ek) of man. And man was not created for the sake of (dia) woman, but woman for*

*the sake of (dia) man.*” The apostle makes careful use of prepositions, keeping in line with his deliberate reasoning of the whole issue.

***Historical Sequence.***

The use of the preposition *out of* alludes back to the fact that Eve was taken *out of* man (source), a rib from his side. Male was created first, then female was fashioned from male. What was true outwardly in temporal sequence with Adam and Eve has become foundational for the teaching in this passage. To make sure this is clear, the apostle states the reverse is not true, namely that the man was *not* taken out of the woman! In other words, the sequence is not incidental, but important to Paul’s point—the sequence of creation affects all men and women. The headcovering should be practiced because of this order of creation, and this goes beyond the culture and historical time period of the first century Corinthians.<sup>11</sup>

***Intended purpose.***

“*Created for the sake of*” refers to the *purpose* of the female side of humanity. Femaleness was made for the sake of maleness. Paul is assuming what is written in Genesis: “*The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’*” (Genesis 2:19). Three reasons are given for the creation of Eve, the female side of humanity: 1) so that man would not be alone 2) provide him help and 3) that the help should be suitable or complimentary to him. Man by himself would experience a profound loneliness that simply another male can not meet. The helper was female, uniquely suitable and the right combination of God’s creativeness to provide for Adam’s need. This purpose has carried on to the present day.

Male and female are complementary in their relationship together, but the relationship is not equally reciprocal or interchangeable. Again, Paul states the reverse to make his point clear: male was *not* created for female. Femininity exists precisely because masculinity exists. What about single people? Paul lays out general truth here, not delineating every conceivable scenario. These particularly masculine or feminine reflections of God’s glory in His creation can be enacted whether in married relationships or as singles who relate to the opposite sex around

them. In principle, the church provides a wonderful context for expressing and experiencing this truth.

***Complementary interdependence.***

By way of providing balancing truth, Paul uses the word *however* to indicate that the reader must not carry the preceding truths to a wrong extreme. The sexes are not independent. Every male since Adam has been born of a woman, and so in this sense, there is interdependence. This, though, does not negate the truth underlying the headcovering symbol. Because of the order of creation, women should be covered, and men should be uncovered in worship.

**WITNESS TO THE ANGELS (10)**

The fourth line or rationale for headcoverings is the angelic reason:

*For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head* (1 Corinthians 11:10).

The headcovering should be practiced because the angels are watching. One popular, but shortsighted, view sees the headcovering as giving woman authority to pray and prophecy publicly. Literally, verse 10 reads: “A woman ought to have authority on/over her head.” In fact, the Greek word *exousia* (usually translated *authority*) by itself can be translated *right* or *freedom*. 1 Corinthians 9:1-12 uses *exousia* five times in the sense of *right*.<sup>12</sup>

However, Paul’s theology and his arguments about glory, shame and honor would be in vain if in the final analysis the woman could do as she pleases. Rather, one would expect the headcovering would relate to the woman’s relationship to the headship over her, since that is the contextual setting. A headcovering here symbolizes that the woman is *under* that which has authority *over* her—that is precisely what is symbolized by something being *on* or *over* her head. In the verse, *exousia* is followed by the preposition *epi*. When this combination is used in original Greek text it always means *authority over* or *power over* and not *empowering*.<sup>13</sup> How then does donning a covering symbolize authority? In this way—it

symbolically shows a willing submission to the leadership and authority of man as well as of God. It is a symbol that the body of believers in the church submits to God's authoritative order of things.<sup>14</sup>

What, then, is the role of angels here?<sup>15</sup> Generally, angels do observe God's people in action: they watch God's people like a crowd in an arena as an *official* audience<sup>16</sup> and appointed witnesses.<sup>17</sup> Angels desire to learn things the Spirit teaches Christians.<sup>18</sup>

Since angels have a relationship with the church in general and possibly the specific local church, they are presumably very interested in the proper functioning of the local church. They would learn from the symbolism, which indicates men and women gladly accept God's created order of things—things that angels, as sexless beings, can only appreciate by observation. Also, seeing the proper order of things reflects well on their future relationship to the church (that of being ruled over by believers.)<sup>19</sup>

### TESTIMONY OF THE INTUITIVE (13-15)

The fifth argument Paul makes for headcoverings involves an appeal to natural reason:

*11 Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with head uncovered? 14 Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, 15 but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering (1 Corinthians 11:13-15).*

Unfortunately, many people go right to this section and assert, somewhat superficially, that "nature does not teach me that!" and that therefore, headcoverings were nothing more than a cultural practice and not relevant for today. This perspective does not adequately deal with the whole of the passage, nor does it give sufficient weight to what Paul is really saying.

The English word *proper* used in this passage is a translation of the Greek word *prepon* which means "fitting, seemly, suitable." It is used in relationship to Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:15), Christ's sufferings (Hebrews 2:10), Christ's high priestly ministry (Hebrews 7:26), moral purity (Ephesians 5:3), godly good

deeds (1 Timothy 2:10) and teaching sound doctrine (Titus 2:1)—all things that are proper or fitting. The word itself, therefore, does not imply cultural conditions or personal perspective.

But the phrase *judge for yourselves* does imply a certain subjectivity; the readers are invited to look into themselves for supporting evidence. But we must ask, does this refer to only the first century readers' innate sense of things, or is it a timeless perception that all readers everywhere in all centuries and in all cultures are expected to possess? Note that the weight of Paul's argument in the immediately previous verses does not rest on the appeal in this verse. Rather, this part of his thinking takes the role of a *supporting* argument. In a sense, it is similar to the oft-repeated statement of Christ: "*Let him who has ears to hear, listen!*" Some things simply cannot be further explained, so an appeal is made to a person's inner sense of things.

An appeal like this speaks of general truths, even though exceptions may be found (this is similar to the teaching method of Proverbs). So a woman's hair is generally a major part of her *glory*. Paul uses the word *glory* as a synonym for *beauty* because the woman's *glory* presents a better contrast to the Lord's *glory*.

This understanding seems to make sense even today. To argue against this seems on the level of arguing that the emperor has no clothes on, as the fairy tale goes.<sup>20</sup> The fact that some women wear short hair and some men wear long hair does not change the general perception.<sup>21</sup>

#### ***Is a woman's hair the only covering needed?***

Some assert that a woman's long hair is her covering and no other covering is needed, based on verse 15. But this cannot be sustained. First, the underlying Greek word for *covering* in verse 15 (*peribolaion*) is used only once in our passage and is a completely different Greek word than the one used five times earlier in the passage where the English word *covered* (*katakalypto*) is used. Second, to assert these two words mean the same thing renders the whole passage absurd.<sup>22</sup> If a woman's hair is to be the covering talked about earlier in the passage, then verses 4 and 6 would then read something like this: "Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered with hair dishonors his head. Every woman who prays or prophesies without her head covered with hair dishonors her head—it is just as though

her head were without hair. If a woman does not cover her head with hair, she should have her hair cut or shaved off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head with hair. A man should not cover his head with hair ....” If that view were correct, all men should go bald during worship!

The woman’s long hair certainly covers her physical head, but at a deeper level it covers the *shame* of being without hair. Paul is saying that the reader should judge for himself or herself—baldness does not have the same connotation for a man that it does for a woman. The human covering is hair, which is natural enough. But this human covering, which brings human glory in women, should be covered when worshipping God, so that Christ’s glory will be prominent.

#### **UNIVERSAL PRACTICE OF THE CHURCHES (16)**

For the sixth and final argument for headcoverings, Paul now appeals to the collective practice of the churches of God. We might call this the ecclesiastical reason:

*If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God (1 Corinthians 11:16).*

The awkward reading in some translations (where the word *such* is used in place of *other*) may lead some readers to believe no other churches had the practice of headcoverings. This seems hardly reasonable, since that would completely undermine what Paul had been saying in verses 2-15. Rather he is saying that no other church has rejected the headcovering practice. In other words this is a universal practice among the churches. One writer summarizes: “The church at Corinth was not to raise its head above the accepted tradition of all God’s people elsewhere by rejecting the apostle’s mandate.”

#### **CULTURAL EQUIVALENT?**

Some, accepting the hierarchy truth in the passage say we might use a different but equivalent symbol today—one that is more culturally acceptable than a headcovering. If so, then what modern day equivalent to headcovering would convey the truth taught in 1 Corinthians 11? As mentioned above, some suggest a

wedding ring or modest clothing might serve in this capacity. But the ring in our culture has no sense of hierarchical relationship. In fact, both men and women wear wedding rings. Nor does modest dress convey headship in our culture.<sup>23</sup>

But there is a deeper issue than just cultural adaptability here. Humanly speaking, the apostle Paul presented a fairly thorough rationale for headcovering to a first century audience that would not have been as gender sensitive as our 21<sup>st</sup> century, North American society. One would be hard pressed to think of what more the apostle could have written to make his point. He comes at the subject with six lines of reasoning: 1) Theological, 2) Doxological, 3) Historical, 4) Angelic, 5) Natural, and 6) Ecclesiastical. Anything we might suggest today would be specific to our present day culture and intellectual persuasions. Such additions would surely not have made Paul's argument any more convincing to the Corinthians. Someone might say that if Paul meant the headcoverings to be enduring, he could have put an enduring time stamp on headcoverings the way Jesus did with baptism and the Lord's Supper.<sup>24</sup> Certainly this adds to the unique emphasis on these two ordinances. However, Paul does make it clear that he intends his teaching in 1 Corinthians to extend beyond the Corinthians:

*To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours (1 Corinthians 1:2).*

Do we begin to require that Paul specifically state with each and every instruction that these are for all time in all cultures, when he makes such a blanket statement at the very beginning of his letter? In fact, would Paul need to specifically state at the beginning of all his letters that his writings are for all Christians everywhere? It would seem that the universality of his teaching should be assumed, unless there is a compelling reason to limit the teaching. I believe that in light of the careful reasoning and the variety of those reasons Paul gives for headcoverings, the burden of proof is on those who assert that he does not mean his teaching to be enduring. In fact, one could make the case that had Paul intended headcoverings to be limited in application,

then he has done a gross injustice to generations of Christians in making this practice sound so universal through his in-depth argument for it.

### CONCLUSION

The symbol of headcovering was taught by the apostle Paul as inspired by God for all Christians everywhere. In this passage, there are two levels of symbolism. The first involves the male/female relationship as a symbol or enactment of the relationship between God and His creation. The second level of symbolism involves the headcovering as a symbol of the authority/leadership relationship between male and female.

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### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter 3:16.

<sup>2</sup> By *doxological* we mean that which has to do with God's glory. This comes from the Greek word *doxa* which means glory.

<sup>3</sup> Jesus used this word to refer to Caesar's image on a coin in Matthew 22:20 and Paul uses it in reference to idols in Romans 1:23. It is used elsewhere to indicate that Christ is the image of God (Colossians 1:15; 3:10, 2 Corinthians 4:4).

<sup>4</sup>See TNIDNTT 2:44-46. This word is used in relationship to Jesus (John 1:14; 8:50, 54, 2 Corinthians 3:18, 1 Thessalonians 2:20, Hebrews 1:3).

<sup>5</sup> An interesting question is whether "*being* God's image" is the same as "*being created in* God's image"? Does the term *image* here have the same sense as *image* in Gen 1-2? Is this phrase *image and glory* an hendiadys, which is a figure of speech using two words that are meant to be taken together to give a comprehensive whole, one idea? These two words are found together elsewhere in Scripture closely related (cf. Romans 1:23, 2 Corinthians 3:18). Christ is the image and glory of God (Hebrews 1:3, 2 Corinthians 4:4, Colossians 1:26). Mankind (male and female) were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26; 5:1-3; 9:6). This passage (1 Corinthians 11) says or implies nothing directly about whom the woman is the image of. The word *image* is not repeated. Its inclusion here cannot be written off as incidental, because the whole passage is carefully reasoned. Genesis 2 & 5 make it very clear that women *do* reflect God's image. Some argue that hers was a derived image just as Adam had Seth "in his own likeness" (Genesis 5:30). But

even if that were the case, then every man as well as woman has a derived image through Adam. Man, in his authority relation to creation and to woman, actively reflects the image of God's dominion over creation and the headship of Christ over His church. The woman has a corresponding but different role to play. The woman is not called to reflect God's image in the relation which she sustains to her husband. She is called to reflect mankind's response to God. If this is in fact the case, then it would be inappropriate to identify her as the image of God in her relation to her husband.

<sup>6</sup> Therefore, to emphasize at this juncture her being the image of God would detract from the point being made. The apostle does not deny the fact—he simply leaves it out. As well, he leaves out the idea that the woman reflects God's glory. Paul very obviously leaves out the false notion that the woman is the image of man (which is nowhere taught in Scripture).

<sup>7</sup> H. Wayne House asserts, "And just as the degree to which the man properly exercises the position God has assigned him determines his ability to bring glory to God, the degree to which the woman functions within the liberties and responsibilities assigned to her determines her ability to bring glory to man." P. 117.

<sup>8</sup> *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (hereafter referred to as B.A.G.) s.v. "kata".

<sup>9</sup> The image of God is classically defined by theologians as sharing in God's communicable attributes (life, personality, truth, wisdom, love, holiness, justice, and so having the capacity for spiritual fellowship with Him). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Zuck & Walvoord, ed. (Victor Books: Wheaton, 1985), p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> William MacDonald, *Believers Bible Commentary: New Testament*, (Wichita, Kansas, A & O Press, 1989), p. 601.

<sup>11</sup> See also 1 Timothy 2:11-14 where Paul also uses the order of the creation of Adam and Eve for his teaching that women are not to teach or have authority over men.

<sup>12</sup> Chapters 8-14 pertain in part to the limiting of rights and freedoms that the believer possesses for the sake of winning others to the gospel (see 1 Corinthians 8:9; 9:1-4).

<sup>13</sup> See Matthew 9:6; 28:18, Luke 5:24.

<sup>14</sup> Note that this verse doesn't specifically mention a "covering," but the context makes clear that it is in mind. The meaning of the symbol is being put here for the symbol itself. So strong was symbolism in Paul's day, that there would hardly be any confusion on this matter with his first century audience.

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<sup>15</sup> Some feel that evil angels are in view, who would attack women whose heads are uncovered. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul uses the term “angel” four other times, and in each case, it is not clear whether good or evil angels are in view or both (1 Corinthians 4:9; 6:3; 10:10; 13,1).

<sup>16</sup> 1 Timothy 3:16.

<sup>17</sup> 1 Timothy 5:21.

<sup>18</sup> 1 Peter 1:12.

<sup>19</sup> See 1 Corinthians 6:3.

<sup>20</sup> In Andersen’s tale *The Emperor’s New Clothes*, the clothes-loving emperor is sold a new set of clothes by a pair of scoundrels who assure him the clothes were made of material possessed with the wonderful quality of being invisible to any man who was unfit for his office or unpardonably stupid. Because no one wants to be thought a fool, the clothes are extravagantly praised and the emperor parades naked until an innocent child pipes up with the truth—that the emperor is wearing no clothes. This fairy tale points to the absurdity of remaining silent in the face of the obvious, for fear of being thought a fool.

<sup>21</sup> If one were to strenuously oppose this “general perception”, I would counter with the possibility that Paul is stating something that should be true. In our false “enlightened” feminist society, the culturally correct view can be so entrenched that we may have come a long way from the early audience of Paul’s letter who still retained a sense of these things. Maybe a failure to see this truth speaks to how far we have drifted away in this whole area of masculinity and femininity!

<sup>22</sup> See the NIV marginal reading for a poor attempt at forcing a paraphrase of passage along these lines.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. Wallace.

<sup>24</sup> When Jesus gave the command to baptize, He followed it immediately with the promise that “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 18:18-20. And when He gave the command to remember Him in the Lord’s Supper, He said, “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, ...you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26).

# HEADSHIP SYMBOL IN PRACTICE

## Chapter Ten

Challenges arise in applying the teaching about headcoverings in the everyday life of the church. The following are some of the more common ones.

### **WHAT EXACTLY IS THE HEADCOVERING?**

Is the headcovering a veil, hat, shawl or hood? It would seem that for the symbolism to be of any value, the headcovering should actually cover the hair and *not* be something that enhances a woman's appearance. However, Scripture does not address such specifics and we err if we become obsessed with trying to find scriptural warrant for the details of form, style and size of headcoverings. Individuals need to come to their own convictions about these things, without the local church becoming caught up in a multitude of specifications.

Some have dismissed headcoverings because they may perceive inconsistency on the part of those who practice it. But such thinking confuses application with interpretation. Inconsistently practicing a truth never invalidates the truth itself. By analogy, people abusing the Lord's Supper in Paul's time didn't lead Paul to abandon it. Likewise, headcovering should not be abandoned simply because those who practice headcoverings may have differing ways of doing it or may be inconsistent.

### **WHEN SHOULD THE HEADCOVERING BE WORN?**

This is probably the most thorny interpretive problem in the passage about headship and headcoverings. In 1 Corinthians 11:4 Paul specifically relates his teaching to two functions, praying and prophesying, yet in 14:34 he asserts that women should keep

silent. Interpretations vary widely on this. I am convinced after years of study that every interpretation has its own difficulties or tensions—the Lord simply has not given us enough scriptural information for us to settle the issue with absolute certainty. It is a sign of spiritual maturity to recognize and accept that some issues in Scripture are not as clear as we would like them to be; Christ-honoring believers may differ honestly on their interpretations and applications. What *is* certain is that grace should characterize the grip with which we hold our viewpoints.

The operative question can be stated as follows: which interpretation has the least amount of difficulties or tensions? The main interpretations are as follows with a brief analysis of each:

**1) Headcovering should be worn at all times by Christian women.** Although rare, this is held by some to be the safest view, in that it covers all instances. However, the repeated use of the phrase “...when you come together” throughout 1 Corinthians 11-14 would indicate a corporate meeting of the church is involved. Certainly, there is nothing wrong with a woman taking the symbol beyond the Scripture, so long as it is not conveyed that the Scripture teaches such an extensive application. I know of a divorced woman who wore a headcovering when ever she was out in public, to remind herself continually that she was under the authority of God’s direct headship. While it certainly is permissible for one to do this, Scripture doesn’t require it.

**2) Headcoverings are limited only to the times when a woman prays or prophesies in the church.** In this view, a woman can engage in these spiritual activities, provided she is covered. This assumes that the phrase, “*If a woman prays or prophesies ...*” infers permission for woman to do these things.<sup>1</sup> But this presents a difficulty when 1 Corinthians 14:34 is considered, for Paul instructs women to be *silent* in the churches (the context of chapter 14 specifically refers to prophecy).

**3) Headcoverings are not needed at all, since in the end a woman is not to be praying or prophesying in the church!** Some hold the view that Paul was revealing truth progressively. Step one: if women are praying or prophesying publicly, they should be covered. Step two: Women praying or prophesying is wrong in the end, therefore, headcoverings are irrelevant. In

other words, if women are wrongly leading in worship, they should be covered. But they should not be leading to start with. In this case, though, it is difficult to understand why Paul would spend so much effort prescribing something that in the end would not be applicable in practice anyway.

**4) A woman should be covered during times when she is allowed to pray or prophesy, namely when men are not present.** But this would mean that men being uncovered would pertain only to times when women are not present—highly unlikely. The symbolism clearly has meaning most effectively when both women and men are present together.

**5) Women should be covered during all public meetings of the church.** In this view, prophecy and praying are seen as two ends of the ministry spectrum concerning our interactions with God. Indeed, praying and prophesying are often closely linked in Scripture.<sup>2</sup> Prophecy is communication directly *from* God (through an individual to humans); praying is communication directly *to* God (from an individual or group). The praying in the passage probably refers to praying aloud on behalf of and as a representative of the people to God.<sup>3</sup> In other words, since prophecy is *group* “directed,” prayer is *group* “represented.”

Paul uses a figure of speech called *merism*<sup>4</sup> to include all spiritual activities in a community of believers. In other words, prayer and prophecy could be taken as a sampling, albeit the opposite ends of the spiritual spectrum of group activities in the church. We use this figure of speech when we say, for example, “The Sunday school picnic is for young and old alike.” Of course, all ages in between are welcome. Paul uses merism when he says in 1 Corinthians 13:1, “*Though I speak with the tongues of men or of angels ...*” He means that no matter whether the quality of our oratorical abilities is earthy or lofty, without love a person is nothing.<sup>5</sup> The point is that Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11, does not lay out a complete and exhaustive list of all the circumstances in which these things apply. Rather, he gives a principle. The two activities (praying and prophesying) constitute a “for instance.” They are foundational to our spiritual work as a church.

The idea here is that whenever the church comes together publicly, the glory of God is present and the angels are watching. Some suggest that the repetition of the phrase "... when you come together" in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 is code for this determination, that is, whenever the people of the fellowship come together, presumably under the authority of the elders. This would include all public meetings of the church.

This view is not without difficulty. There is debate whether such meetings would include Sunday school, small group meetings, funerals, weddings, camp meetings, retreats, etc. Also, some feel it is too much of a stretch to go from specifically praying and prophesying to including all church meetings.

**6) A woman should be covered whenever she is participating in the Lord's Supper meeting of the church.** This is a somewhat restricted version of the previous view giving weight to the immediate context, that being the Lord's Supper (see next section). This could be called the "minimalist" view, the covering principle applies only to the central meeting of the Lord's Supper. Of course in churches where the Lord's Supper is not practiced (or at least practiced infrequently), this may cause some applicational difficulties. The main tension of this view is that the principle of headship applies to men and women regardless of whether they are involved in official meetings of the church or not, so inconsistency may be the charge against this view. It has in its favor, though, establishing a bottom line application. Beyond this, debate can and does exist. More on this in the next section.

Which of these six views has the least difficulties and tensions? In the end, it turns on the subjective weight of each argument. I believe, on the whole, the last view is that seems to have the least amount of tension.

#### **AT WHICH CHURCH FUNCTIONS SHOULD A HEADCOVERING BE WORN?**

In dealing with the many conflicting problems in the Corinthian church, Paul develops his teaching in an orderly fashion, first laying down principles, then bringing clarity and application. How does he clarify and apply this teaching about headcoverings then?

The teaching of headcoverings does not apply to just any gathering of Christians. Although Jesus said, “*Where two or more are gathered in my presence, there am I in the midst of them*” (Matthew 18:20), the epistles speak of a local gathering of believers in an identifiable manner under the oversight of the elders and call this a church.<sup>6</sup> Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11:18, indicates the context of the headcovering teaching as “...*when you come together...*” (11:20, 22, 32), presumably as a church body. The functioning of spiritual gifts are clearly seen in operation within the local church (1 Corinthians 12:27-28, see also 14:4, 5, 12, 19, 23; “*If the whole church comes together ...*”, 14:33-34 “... *as in all the congregations ...*” 14:35). Certainly spiritual gifts can be exercised outside the gathering of the church, but they find their fullest expression within the church.

Now some might apply headcoverings to anytime a woman exercises spiritual service in a singular fashion in the gathering of believers—particularly, in a way that is the center of attention, such as special singing, reading Scripture, etc. Yet someone else could well argue that all individuals present at the gathering of the church should be involved in using their spiritual gift to the edification of others, not just those with verbal, *upfront gifts*. But if mere presence at worship is enough, then why does Paul even mention any spiritual gifts?

Part of the difficulty here is that we do not have an exact picture of what the early church meeting looked like—what we do have is small snippets to piece together. The context certainly promotes the headcovering practice during the Lord’s Supper, because that seems to be the larger context in which this teaching is contained. At the very least, the teaching on the Lord’s Supper follows immediately the teaching of the headcovering (1 Corinthians 11:23-34). If we see that chapter 14 contains further elements of what the Lord’s Supper involves, then conversational teaching, prophecy, ministry and singing times are involved—in other words, the functioning of spiritual gifts. On the whole, the early church seemed to have (at the least) a time where there was such free expression of spiritual gifts (chapter 14), which had at its focus the Lord’s Supper (chapters 10-14). At a minimum, we can assert that Paul intends the headcovering to apply in such a situation.

Should a woman be covered if she is not exercising a spiritual gift, but simply *attending* the meeting? For after all in this meeting loosely described in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, the woman is to be *silent*? Some have argued this way. While we will deal with the subject of women's silence in more detail later, we can say here that worship is never pictured as a *spectator event* in which a few *perform* while the others passively sit by. A person's silence, whether a man or woman, does not mean idleness, for he or she should be involved in the spiritual activity of communicating with God, and receiving from Him. This is just as true and real for the person worshipping in quietness as for the one expressing worship verbally. A primary reason for headcoverings, outlined above, has to do with God's glory in contrast to the glory of His people. Therefore, the presence of women and men together in worship leads to headcoverings as a way of dealing with this contrast.

What about other meetings of the church besides the Lord's Supper, such as public preaching services, small group ministries, weddings, funerals, etc., all of which are things the church today is involved in? It is said by some that since the glory of God is always present when the church comes together, then the headcoverings should be worn by women during all bona-fide meetings of the church. However, those who hold such a view argue whether or not a funeral, wedding, camp meetings, small groups and Sunday school teachers meetings constitute bona-fide church meetings. Such fine delineations suffer from a multitude of qualifications and quibblings that go beyond the scope of Paul's teaching about what constitutes a *meeting of the church*. Each church must decide these matters based on the general outline given by the Lord in Scripture. We dare not be overly dogmatic and find ourselves in the company of those who occupy themselves with *dill and mint*, while disregarding the weightier things.

Apparently the Lord has outlined only that which He has deemed important for us to know. We must be careful not to say more than what the Scriptures teach and not to say less. Our task is to further study the passage and embrace that view which most reasonably fits the text. It does not seem advisable to simply

dismiss the teaching because of the difficulties or because it doesn't conveniently fit our culture.

We conclude that the best interpretation is that the headcovering symbol applies to a worship meeting where the Lord's Supper is prominent. At that time, men should not wear any kind of covering on their head and woman should be covered.<sup>7</sup> Beyond this we are constrained to say the Lord allows liberty and mandates grace.

### **SHOULD HEADCOVERINGS BE REQUIRED?**

First of all, keep in mind that the issue is about both men and women. Men are to be submissive and not wear any kind of headcovering during worship and women are to be submissive and wear a headcovering in worship. Having said that, submission to authority must always be entered into freely and willingly as a response to the Lord's leading and command, and not because of human coercion or pressure. Forced submission to this practice belies the very concept it is intended to symbolize. Imagine a woman wearing a headcovering, but in her heart not doing it willingly? Certainly, church leaders should teach on this subject—but it should be given the same emphasis as the Lord gives to it in Scripture, no more and no less. There are many, many principles in Scripture concerning church truth and all must be held in balance.

Since the headcovering is so visible in churches that practice this truth, it invariably receives more *prominence* than other teachings—just by the nature of its visibility. However, it should not be *the* identifying characteristic of any church or be treated as the *watershed* of right doctrine. Only *love* should be the *ultimate* identifier of any group of Christians. Is this not what Paul meant when he said: “*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love*” (Galatians 5:6b)? This love should be characterized by patience, and it should protect, trust, hope and persevere (1 Corinthians 13:4a, 7)—with those who interpret or practice this differently.

The local church would do well to not mandate this practice, but to encourage it in a gentle and affirming way. Individuals should be allowed the freedom to adopt this practice in their own time, under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Certainly, this is not

something to split a church over, nor should it be a qualification for membership.

### **IS THE HEADCOVERING AN ORDINANCE OF THE CHURCH?**

A few have suggested that the headcovering is a church ordinance along with baptism and the Lord's Supper. However, though all three are symbolic, the emphasis in Scripture placed on headcoverings differs greatly from the emphasis on baptism and the Lord's Supper. First, baptism and the Lord's Supper have to do with Christ and His work on the cross, which are fundamental doctrines; the headcovering does not focus on these things. Secondly, the usual identifying characteristics of an ordinance are that it is a symbolic activity or ritual specifically 1) commanded by Jesus in the Gospels 2) practiced by the early church as seen in Acts and 3) affirmed by the apostles as taught in the epistles. In other words, these activities are raised in their level of importance by God's special and prevalent emphasis. The Lord's Supper and baptism are the only such activities or rituals that meet these criteria. The headcovering, by this standard, is not an ordinance, being found only in the writings of Paul.<sup>8</sup>

Why is this distinction important? It is simply a matter of emphasis. Those who see the headcovering as an ordinance tend to elevate it in importance to the same level as baptism and the Lord's Supper. This can easily lead to legalistically requiring women to wear the covering. It can also lead to treating the covering as a criteria for determining spiritual faithfulness. Scripture simply does not give it this level of emphasis or importance.

### **SHOULD UNMARRIED WOMEN WEAR A COVERING?**

The issue is not primarily about a husband and wife, despite what some modern translations or paraphrases may indicate,<sup>9</sup> but about men and women in general, symbolizing a truth in the worship meeting of the church. I believe it would indeed be appropriate for an unattached woman to be covered. Who then is her head, if she has no husband? She should look either to her father, older brothers, the elders or other men of the church to provide that headship function (that is, protection, leadership, guidance, etc.).

**WHAT ABOUT YOUNG GIRLS?**

Symbolism is a great way to teach children (as well as adults). It keeps before them an important truth that our world will try to wrestle away from them, the biblical relationship of the sexes. Remember the story of the Israelites in Joshua chapter 4? Moses' handpicked successor commanded that an enduring symbol, a stone monument, was to be established so that when the children of future generations asked what it meant, their parents would have opportunity to explain the underlying truth of what it represented. In the same way, the headcovering is a great opportunity to teach young boys and girls from an early age. When they ask, "What does this mean?" parents should be ready to explain at an age-appropriate level, the significance of God's design for men and women.

Some wonder if parents should wait until a child can understand it for himself or herself and come to his or her own conclusions. However, we train our children in other areas, such as praying and reading their Bibles, even though initially they might not do it willingly. If we train them gently and not with a heavy hand, they will acquire a desire for the thing we teach them—at least that is our hope. We *encourage* our children to say, "I'm sorry," even if they do not fully mean it, because we believe that they will eventually embrace the reasons for the thing we are teaching. The headcovering clearly should be within the purview of parenting.

The most powerful form of training is modeling—not only the behavior, but also the proper attitude and respect for the underlying truth of headship. Nothing will make a greater impression on a child than to see her mother and father cheerfully and willingly doing the very thing God has instructed.

**WHAT IF I DISAGREE WITH MY CHURCH'S TEACHING OR PRACTICE ON THIS SUBJECT?**

There needs to be a balance between holding one's interpretation with integrity and respecting the leadership of the church (Hebrews 13:7). At the very minimum, discussing with them the differences would be wise. Some have voluntarily submitted to the teaching of their church and wear a headcovering even though they personally do not hold the same view as their

church. Is this hypocritical? Not at all, so long as they are clear as to their reasons. It is wise to remember what Scripture says:

*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 (Hebrews 13:17).*

However, this Scripture does not replace the life of grace. In other words, there may be times where a church holds the head-covering practice in a legalistic way and wrongly elevates its importance in identifying who is faithful and who is not. Clearly, the headcovering is not at all presented in Scripture as a spiritual litmus test of faithfulness. We can learn from the apostle Paul who at one time charged the Judaizers with legalism for compelling Gentiles to be circumcised (see Acts 15 and the entire book of Galatians) and commended Titus for not giving in to the pressure to be circumcised (Galatians 2:3). Yet he had Timothy circumcised shortly after (Acts 16:3) when legalism was not an issue. In other words, there is a time to confront legalism and a time to ignore it when the issue is not on the line. Wisdom determines when one should stand by one's conviction versus gracefully submitting to avoid conflict.

What about wearing a covering in a church that teaches it is not necessary? Can a woman in good conscience simply wear a covering according to personal conviction, disregarding the local church's teaching? Obviously, this would draw attention and raise questions. I would suggest talking with the leadership and explaining your viewpoint. Hopefully, they would respect the woman's freedom to practice this according to her conscience. Care must be exercised so that this will not come across as acting "holier than thou."

The opposite concern of judgementalism will come across when a woman does not wear a covering in a church where most of the women do. The sinful human nature is always with us and, yes, both of these attitudes ("holier than thou" as well as judgementalism) may at times be present. A godly follower of Christ will adopt neither attitude, and choose to walk in integrity, humility and grace regardless of what others think.

### MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES

**Won't other people think I am strange or irrelevant to our culture?** This is a relevant question, though not really a theological or biblical one. We should not present any stumbling block to the unsaved other than the cross of Christ, which the world sees as foolishness.<sup>10</sup> Yet we Christians have many *strange* practices when we are with each other—strange, that is, to non-Christians. For example, we meet weekly on Sunday mornings to celebrate the death of our Leader, we sing and talk of His blood, we sometimes give each other a holy hug, etc. Why single out one activity, the headcovering, for special concern? The bottom line is that when we worship the Lord, we are concerned about what the Lord accepts as worship. When we are with non-Christians we are then concerned about not stumbling them unnecessarily.

On a practical level, the unsaved world for the most part does not see the headcovering, since the world does not come to the worship meeting of the Bible-believing church. The Lord has not called us to bring the unsaved to the church to hear the gospel, but rather that the church should go to the unsaved where they are. Most of the time the unsaved world is clueless about what we do in our worship meetings. However, the word invariably gets out about a church's practice about gender roles and headcoverings! If an unsaved individual is resisting the Holy Spirit, he or she will latch onto just about anything to bring objection to the gospel. Yet at the same time, we should not cast our pearls before the swine.<sup>11</sup> In other words, it makes no sense when sharing the gospel to bring up the roles of men and women in the church, unless asked.

It is only in modern times that the church has become self-conscious about what the world thinks of it. We simply cannot afford to let cultural pressure set the agenda for what Christians do in worship. Certainly our God is big enough to save people despite this perceived cultural anomaly.

**Aren't you really making a big deal out of a small issue?** As I said earlier, this subject of headcovering should not become a major or defining issue in the church. It *is* a very visible thing and it will be noticed. Some will always take offense one way or the other. But the Scripture *does* teach on the subject, spending

16 verses on it in 1 Corinthians 11. Dismissing this as *small stuff* will simply not do and may ultimately be an insult to the Author of Truth. Having said that, we must show meekness (holding the truth in humility) in this matter and resist judging those who see or practice it differently. We need to put it on the table for open discussion for clarity sake, but we should not fight over it.

**Does it really matter when so many disagree?** Some, in being overwhelmed by the difficulties and controversies, simply give up. They reason that if scholars, preachers, writers and churches fight over these things and can't agree, and if a study of the subject can be this confusing, how can the average Christian come to a conviction about what it means? Many just acquiesce to the teaching of the church they attend or personally do what is comfortable for them. However, this is the most inadequate solution, for in effect those people do adopt a viewpoint—that it doesn't really matter. Yet the fact that so many disagree and the fact that a significant length of Scripture is given to the subject along with a well-reasoned explanation indicates that the issue *is*, in fact, important.

### CONCLUSION

God has given us a beautiful, dramatic way of showing His glory in the church. This involves men and women relating to each other in ways that reflect how God relates to His creation and to His people. The simple headcovering, like a singular prop in a drama, provides a unique symbol, a visual reminder to continually focus on God's glory. We have found that there is no compelling rationale for asserting that the covering is a cultural implementation meant only for the first century Christians. Rather it is an opportunity to exalt Christ in a unique way in all cultures in all generations.

In the final analysis, each person must consider the Scriptural evidence and weight of the arguments and reasonings. May God give us the grace to humbly dedicate our lives fully to Him, male or female.

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ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> H. Wayne House, RWMT, p. 114 “Though a prophetess might pray and give inspired utterance, she apparently was restricted from the office of teaching in the early church congregation.”

<sup>2</sup> Gen 20:7, 1 Samuel 12:23, Jeremiah 27:18, Luke 2:27 are examples of prayer and prophesying being related.

<sup>3</sup> As in, for example, “John will lead us in prayer...”

<sup>4</sup> See E.W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used In the Bible*, Baker Book House, 1968, p. 435. Also, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merism>: “In rhetoric, a *merism* is a figure of speech by which a single thing is referred to by a conventional phrase that enumerates several of its parts, or which lists several synonyms for the same thing. For example, in Genesis 1:1, when God creates *the heavens and the earth* (KJV), the two parts combine to indicate that God created the whole universe. Similarly, in Psalm 139, the psalmist declares that God knows *my downsitting and mine uprising*; indicating that God knows all that he does.”

<sup>5</sup> Some would say Paul is using a figure of speech called *hyperbole*, in presenting the extreme possibilities of speech.

<sup>6</sup> See Galatians 1:2, Philippians 1:1, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, etc.

<sup>7</sup> For those churches where the Lord’s Supper is minimized or non-existent, the application of this practice of headcovering raises additional difficulties.

<sup>8</sup> In fact, the writings of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century believers and subsequent generations of early Christians reveal an emphasis on baptism and the Lord’s Supper in their writings, but do not give similar emphasis to headcoverings.

<sup>9</sup> See 1 Corinthians 11:3 in “The Message,” a modern paraphrase of the Bible.

<sup>10</sup> Galatians 5:11b, 1 Corinthians 1:18.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 7:6.

## Chart of 1 Corinthians 11

1 Corinthians 11:1 (NIV) Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. 2 I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you.	Apostolic example
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.	Principle of headship Theological
4 Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. 5 And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. 6 If 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. 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.	Rivalry of glory Doxological
8 For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; 9 neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.	Order of creation Historical
10 For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.	Witness to angels Angelical
11 In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. 12 For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.	(Interdependence)
13 Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? 14 Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, 15 but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering.	Testimony of the intuitive Natural
15 If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.	Universal practice Ecclesiastical

# GENDER & BODY LIFE

## Chapter Eleven

**B**ody life in the local church was active and rich. The spiritual gifts were to be engaged in building up one another. And the roles of men and women affected these interactions. Specifically, the apostle Paul addressed how men and women have differing roles in the gathered worship of the church:

*33 For God is not a God of disorder, but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints, 34 women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. 35 If 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. (1 Corinthians 14:33-35)*

Many Christians succumb to the temptation to explain it away or marginalize this passage as being difficult. Some even question its integrity, that possibly it may not be part of the original inspired writings of Scripture, but was added later by a non-divinely-inspired editor.<sup>1</sup> Altogether too easy are the unwarranted assumptions and faulty hermeneutics that many bring to the text. For example, one writer uses popular sociology to trump biblical hermeneutics when he blatantly asserts: “Exactly how one discerns the word of the Lord to us in a biblical passage that is socially specific is a complex question...in our day, keeping women silent brings shame on the church.”<sup>2</sup> One could ask if that writer’s concern reflects more his own discomfort or embarrassment with the Bible being out of sync with the world’s perspective, than with what God is really saying in the Bible. Is not such thinking rather *Corinthian*, in that it reflects the Corinthian

believers' (the very audience Paul writes to) attitude toward the word of truth?

Yet others insist that for the first century Christians a lack of gender role distinction would have hindered the witness of the gospel in their context. Alan F. Johnson typifies this viewpoint: "... we cannot ... deny women full participation in any form of ministry that does not create a demonstrable social offense to their husbands or an impediment to the societies' acceptance of the Christian gospel."<sup>3</sup> It seems that the bottom line for many is whether or not something offends one's society. This is a poor conclusion, when compared with offending the righteousness of God. It seems far better to be concerned about what *God* says is shameful or offensive (see 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 and 1 Corinthians 14:35 where God specifically addresses the subject of shame and disgrace) than what we perceive the world says is shameful or offensive.

To understand this passage with any hope of clarity, we must consider the context in which it comes to us, namely from Paul the apostle in his correspondence to the carnal Corinthian believers. The believers there were straying considerably from sound doctrine and practice. The entire letter is Paul's effort to correct their conflicts, disorders and difficulties. He addresses disorders in the worship of the church (in 1 Corinthians 11) by clarifying certain symbolisms of headship and the elements of the Lord's Supper. The design was to order the Lord's Supper in a way that would be honoring to God, rather than focused on self. The apostle goes on to address the abuses of spiritual gifts in chapter 12. The Corinthians there are taught how they should serve together, energized by the Holy Spirit, building up the body of believers, rather than each person building himself up through self-centered shows of worship and service.

Before he goes on, Paul poetically and poignantly focuses on love (Greek: *agape*) as the foundation and core of Christian body life and experience. 1 Corinthians 13 puts forth perhaps the most eloquent statement on self-sacrificing love ever penned. All this Paul writes as a grand parenthesis between his chapters on correcting disorders. At the heart of body life is laying aside our rights, our prerogatives and our self-promotion for the sake of

building up others and for the glory of God. Such reflects the character of God's heart for Christians.

Paul then turns back to his corrective teaching:

*And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts... (1 Corinthians 13:13-14:1a).*

This introduces chapter 14, which contains the particular passage in question having to do with women's roles in the church.

Paul's teaching identifies the context clearly as having to do with body life in the church and not private behavior or activities outside the church:

*In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church ... (11:18).*

*In the church God has appointed ... (12:28).*

*He who prophesies edifies the church ... that the church might be edified (14:4-5).*

*Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church (14:12).*

*But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue (14:19).*

*So if the whole church comes together... (14:23).*

*All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church (14:26).*

Whatever is said in this passage about men and women, it applies when the local church gathers for its meetings.

To anyone who has ever wrestled with this passage, the question of scope within the church is significant. Hardly would the words ". . . women should remain silent in the churches. They are not permitted to speak ..." (14:34) mean women ought to be absolutely silent at all times whenever the church meets together for any reason. Indeed, at the most obvious level (it seems absurd to even point this out) no one would suggest that women should not participate in congregational singing or conversing in

the foyer of the building where a church meets. No one would prohibit women from speaking during social events of a church. But then, how extensive is the scope the Divine writer has in mind?

There must be consistent, well thought out parameters for application, and these must involve answering the following questions: Who is his intended audience? When in church life does this teaching apply? What is meant by the silence of women? Why should women be the ones to be silent?

### **PAUL IS WRITING TO THE CHURCH EVERYWHERE THROUGH THE AGES**

Some suggest that while the principle of Paul's teaching is universal, specific application should be made only to the first century culture or more specifically to the Corinthian church. However, Paul made it clear that he was not speaking only to the first century Corinthian church:

*To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:2).*

First, the word *together* refers not only to the unity of Corinthians with all Christians in their being *called* and *sanctified* together. The word also indicates that the Corinthians were to be recipients of Paul's teaching *together with* all Christians everywhere. Though Paul, as in all of his writings, has a primary audience in mind, he intends his authority to extend to all Christians.

Second, the wider church audience is in mind in the context, as seen by his appeal to . . . *the churches of God* (11:16).

Third, in his remonstrance to the Corinthians, Paul chides them about their self-presumed uniqueness:

*Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached. If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command (1 Corinthians 14:36-37).*

It would be difficult, then, to sustain that the instructions Paul gives in 14:33-35 are intended solely for the Corinthians. If God's Word is not unique to them, then Paul's specific teaching

(God's Word) about a woman's silence is not unique to them either.

#### **WHEN IN CHURCH LIFE DOES THIS APPLY?**

The teaching of our passage, then, applies to all churches universally. However, *universal* church truth finds its outworking in *local* church practice. Paul identifies this when he speaks of *when the whole church comes together* (14:23, 26). But under what conditions does this refer? Any time believers from the same church congregate? As early as 1 Corinthians 11, the apostle writes of the Lord's Supper and this would appear to carry through the next few chapters (for lack of specifics to the contrary). In chapter 14, some confusion exists as to what ministry or meeting Paul refers. While we may never reach certainty on what the early church meetings were like in detail, we can identify some clues from the context. "*When you come together...*" (14:26) most naturally refers to some sort of formal meeting of the church in which the following were characteristic:

1. There was free exercise of the Spirit's work through individuals, empowering them to edify others: this would include leading in singing, teaching, speaking on behalf of God (prophecy), tongues and interpretation. (14:26-28).<sup>4</sup>
2. There was apparently wide involvement by many people in leading hymn singing and teaching.
3. Instruction and edification were prominent "...*so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged*" (14:31).
4. The meeting was an intelligible interaction, which means that if no interpreter was present, those speaking in tongues should remain silent (14:28).
5. There was interaction and evaluation concerning what was said: "*Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said*" (14:29).
6. Though free in format, the service was to be orderly (14:31, 33).
7. There was some questioning for clarification or challenge of what was said, as hinted in Paul's final instruction about

women: “*If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home...*” (14:35). The implication is that there was a free exchange, into which the women were not to enter.

Of course, the average church service in Christendom today does not allow for much of what Paul instructs here. However, in light of the topic of the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11, chapter 14 continues the same context, namely that the place where Paul’s teaching principally applies is at a meeting where the Lord’s Supper is prominent. The picture might look like this: the church met to focus on the salvation work of our Lord Jesus Christ (as symbolized in the elements), where interactive worship involved the free expression and practice of certain spiritual gifts. This was not a free-for-all, but was directed by the Holy Spirit in the atmosphere of love (chapter 13) and under *the control of the prophets* (14:32).

### **WOMEN SHOULD NOT TAKE LEADERSHIP IN VERBALLY DIRECTING WORSHIP**

Paul says three things concerning women. First, the women should remain *silent* in the churches. The word *silent* translates the Greek word *sigao* and occurs here in the active form, which together with the negative indicates an imperative to *stop talking* or *become silent*. The Corinthian women were apparently being quite verbal and Paul puts a stop to that.

The word is also used in reference to men where they are told to stop speaking if the Spirit is leading someone else to speak (14:30). And the word is also used of the tongues speaker for when there is no interpreter (14:28). In other words, everyone is to be submissive at times to a requirement of silence—but in different ways. For the men, their silence at times reflects a deference to the Spirit’s leading through other men, and to keep things orderly (14:33). For women, their silence reflects a deference to the Spirit’s leading through the men. The prohibition against women *speaking* must refer to keeping silent relative to the activities specifically mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14 (prophecy, tongues, selecting a hymn, teaching, etc.).

Some have said Paul wouldn’t have contradicted what he wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:1-16, so therefore, this passage does

not refer to a prohibition against women praying or prophesying. However, the immediate context indicates that Paul is including not only praying and prophesying, but also selecting a hymn, or teaching, etc. Some have suggested Paul was chastising the women for disorderly and disruptive speech, possibly calling across from the women's separate area of worship to the men's area of worship. It is probably true that women and men were separated during the early church worship as they were in the synagogue,<sup>5</sup> and there may have been opportunity for women to get carried away with frivolous talk or abusing their new found "freedoms" in Christ. But dismissing this passage on that basis begins with the faulty assumption that because Paul only addresses the women to be silent, therefore only the women were a problem. There is no basis in the text for asserting that the call to silence implies that only the women were abusing the "new system." In fact, Paul centers out the men for abusing their freedoms in worship and turning it into self-aggrandizing experiences of spiritual showmanship! As House says, "Women are to be silent because they are women, not because they are disorderly."<sup>6</sup> While there is no differentiation between men and women in terms of being joint heirs of salvation and righteousness in Christ, the public functioning of men and women is clearly distinguished.

Second, women, "... *must be in submission, as the law says.*" The word *submission* translates the Greek word *hupotasso* which means, "to be subject, submit to, obey, be under the authority of." This submission on one level means women must be submissive to Paul's teaching here, for it is the *Lord's command* (14:37). However, to be silent has the sense of being submissive to the leadership of the men in worship. This is not a passionless passivity, but rather an active responsiveness—a hearty *amen* to how the Lord is leading through the men.

The phrase "*as the law says*" seems problematic at first. Clearly, the OT restricted women's participation in the sacrificial system of worship and some feel Paul is invoking the Mosaic Law for his authority.<sup>7</sup> However, this would go patently against Paul's adamant refusal to let the law creep into the message of grace.<sup>8</sup> In fact, nowhere does the OT specifically restrict woman's verbal restriction in worship (though such might be

inferred by other restrictions and the general OT perspective on women). Possibly, Paul alludes to Genesis 3:16, which occurs prior to the Mosaic Law, where the curse is placed on the woman. Alternatively, he may be referring to extra-biblical Jewish laws or Gentile laws. Paul often referred to creation passages<sup>9</sup>. Finally, Paul could be simply referring to the OT teaching in general. Whatever the interpretation, it is clear that Paul sees his statement as *the Lord's command* (14:37).

The side note that a woman can inquire of her husband at home elicits interesting interpretations. Some suggest that since women were presumably separated from the men by an aisle, a woman would have had to shout to her husband to ask him a question. Godet insightfully says that Paul "... knows how easily, under pretext of putting questions, women could elude the prohibition which forbade their public speaking."<sup>10</sup> Therefore, she should wait until home to ask the question instead of disrupting the meeting.

This command is prefaced with "*They are not allowed ...*" (14:34) This word (*allowed*) is the same one used by Paul in 1 Timothy 2:12 where he instructs: "*I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man...*" Paul is unequivocal on this.

Third, Paul asserts that it is *disgraceful* for a woman to speak in the church (verse 35). He echoes the language of 1 Corinthians 11 where he wrote of the dishonor that comes from not following proper worship behavior in regards to headship and the headcovering symbol. The question is: "In whose eyes is it shameful for a woman to speak out in the church?" This question is also asked of the shame or dishonor of 1 Corinthians 11. Given the lack of further qualifying comments, Paul must be talking about God's perspective, which should also be the Christian's perspective, and which most certainly is also Paul's.

#### **WHY SHOULD THE WOMEN NOT BE THE ONES TO VERBALLY LEAD IN THIS CONTEXT?**

The silence Paul writes about refers to not engaging in the singular activities mentioned (i.e. prophecy, selecting a hymn, teaching, etc.).<sup>11</sup> These activities all involve leading the congregation in directing the flow and content of group worship (under the guidance of the Spirit). This accords with teaching elsewhere

in Scripture about the burden of leadership falling not to the women but to the men. Men should be the ones leading in the worship of the Lord's Supper. If a woman has questions, wants to interact with or challenge the teaching, she has the liberty to do this with her husband away from the meeting.<sup>12</sup>

This passage does not teach that women are inferior to men (see Galatians 3:28), but that God has a different design when it comes to leading in worship. In terms of leadership, yes, a basic hierarchy exists, but such order does not involve people's personal worth or value, only their function. Indeed, there may be times when a man has something to say, but is restrained by the Spirit to remain silent. This does not mean that he is in any way inferior to the others. Our worth as male and female is in Christ, not in our respective roles.

This passage doesn't prohibit opportunities for women to lead outside of the context of the gathered church's worship. And there may be times in church meetings when a woman may verbally participate, namely when she is not leading or directing the worship of the congregation, such as in congregational singing, reading Scripture, or in small group prayer. 1 Timothy 2:1-15 will give us further parameters for discerning women's participation in church meetings.<sup>13</sup>

#### **HOW DOES THIS APPLY WHEN A CHURCH DOES NOT HAVE A LORD'S SUPPER MEETING LIKE THAT OF CHAPTER 11 AND 14?**

The farther one strays from the indicators of 1 Corinthians 14, the more difficult it is to apply this teaching about gender roles. Often in a typical church service, only the paid staff or the "up-front" people are allowed to speak and lead in the full gathering of believers for worship—and everyone else must remain silent. Indeed, it would seem that the principal leaders of this kind of worship should be the men. There are really very few other instructions about the *logistics* of worship in the New Testament other than what we find in 1 Corinthians. The distinction between various types of services that present day Christendom embraces is really not detailed in the Scripture.

**WHEN DOES THIS APPLY?**

The difficulty in applying this to modern day church structures is a question of application rather than one of interpretation. Of course, this passage becomes much easier to apply when a church embraces the simple worship meeting as hinted at in 1 Corinthians 11-14.

However, does the teaching of this passage also apply during other kinds of meetings besides worship—for example praying in a prayer meeting, speaking up in a small group Bible study, doing drama in a teaching service or teaching Sunday school? For these, we would refer to 1 Timothy 1:1-15 for guidance, where the determining factor is whether or not the woman is leading or teaching men.

We conclude that in the context of the Lord's Supper, though, men are to assume the burden of leadership in worship and women are to assume the role of active responders, without verbally leading. Beyond this, the answer becomes more tenuous.

Paul wraps up the discussion (of correcting abuses in the church) with an overriding caveat:

*If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored (1 Corinthians 14:36-37).*

He proclaims his words as authentically inspired by the Lord, which should be acceptable to all who are spiritual.

**DOES THIS PASSAGE CONTRADICT 1 CORINTHIANS 11?**

Much has been written to address this question. Some feel that Paul is building a two-level argument against the abusive worship practice of women: they weren't covered when they were speaking up, and they should not even have been speaking up in the first place. This is plausible in that Scripture reflects such *progressive* reasoning in other places. For example, the Corinthians were so messed up in their practices, Paul says that, "*It is good for a man not to marry*" (1 Corinthians 7:1). But then, he goes on to say that because of the immorality that is prevalent, "*... each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband*" (7:2). And "*...if they cannot control themselves,*

*they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.*” So it is possible, Paul is doing something similar with the functioning of women in the church. However, it would seem strange that he would spend sixteen verses clarifying the headship truth with its symbol of headcovering in chapter 11, if it was to be rendered superfluous in chapter 14 by the woman’s silence. Furthermore, chapter 11 clearly gives the sense of women having permission to pray or prophecy.

Rather, it seems better to hold to the resolution of the problem suggested previously, namely, that the headcovering truth is to be practiced generally when the church comes together for spiritual activity, particularly for worship (chapter 11). Further, this teaching is conditioned by the constraints of chapter 14 and 1 Timothy 2, that such activity does not include directing or teaching the whole congregation in worship.

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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> House (RWMT, p. 37) refers to Gordon Fee’s questioning of the integrity of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. “The placing of the verse either at its traditional location or after 40 is in question, possibly, but not the actual inclusion of the text.” House points out that not one shred of manuscript evidence calls into question the inclusion of this verse. Fee feels verses 34-35 were a marginal note which at some time later made its way into the text.

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, WAB, p. 293.

<sup>3</sup> Alan F. Johnson, WAB, 160.

<sup>4</sup> To be sure, the Corinthians were abusing these gifts, so Paul’s prescription provides some guidelines for their use.

<sup>5</sup> House, RWMT, p. 129.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 129. “Although *lalein* [translated here “speak”] was used of chatter in classical times, in the New Testament period it was synonymous with *lego* [a more specific term for speaking].”

<sup>7</sup> Some suggest that since some translations have the word “*Law*” capitalized, it therefore refers to the Mosaic Law. However, the original Greek used in the NT did not incorporate capitalizations; such convention is an interpretive result of the translators and therefore the capitalization is not inspired. Whether the term *law* refers to the Mosaic Law or a more general sense of law depends on the context.

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<sup>8</sup> See the entire book of Galatians where Paul repeatedly goes to the wall against use of the OT law in the Christian life.

<sup>9</sup> See 1 Corinthians 11:9, 1 Timothy 2:13-14.

<sup>10</sup> Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 312-313.

<sup>11</sup> While a full discussion of spiritual gifts is beyond the scope of this book, we believe the “sign” gifts (which include prophecy and tongues) served the purpose of authenticating the gospel message and the authority of the apostles. The other “non-sign” activities of 1 Corinthians 14, though, still have relevance today.

<sup>12</sup> Or presumably the male authority figure in her life (whether father, brother or an elder of the church).

<sup>13</sup> See the discussion of 1 Timothy 2:1-15 below.

# TEACHING & AUTHORITY

## Chapter Twelve

*P*aul's first letter to his young protégé Timothy sheds considerable light on the subject of gender issues in the church:

*8 I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing. 9 I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, 10 but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. 11 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. 15 But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety (1 Timothy 2:8-15).*

We believe that this passage, taken on its own, clearly delineates different roles and emphases for men and women. Egalitarian writers, however, teach that this passage simply notes a limited instruction to a particular cultural situation. They tend to see their interpretation of Galatians 3:28 as providing the overriding principle (see previous chapter on an analysis of Galatians 3:28). The stakes are high, for as egalitarian David M. Scholer admits, “If 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is the starting point for the discussion on the role of men and women, the conclusion is inevitable!”<sup>1</sup> This is an interesting admission for it recognizes that when 1 Timothy 2:11-12 stands alone, the interpretation clearly points to differentiating roles between men and women.

This is probably the mostly hotly debated passage in the gender debate and has generated considerable study. One egalitarian, Mimi Haddad, president of Christians for Biblical Equality International, reveals a biased hermeneutical approach: “We look for the mainstream thought ... We try not to get distracted by two or three passages.”<sup>2</sup> Such methodology is faulty, for it can be used to marginalize just about any biblical passage that does not fit into one’s theological scheme. In fact, there are many ingenious and creative methods to somehow dance around the obvious meaning of this passage. Some are so detailed and confusing and rest on such a plethora of *possibilities* or probabilities, they die the death of complexity and being beyond the reach of the average Christian to see plainly. Some try to marshal what they call the “growing consensus among scholars” as evidence of the egalitarian viewpoint of this passage. Notwithstanding the questionableness of which side has the most proponents, as all children are taught in kindergarten, the majority is not always right.

Our goal, however, is not to win a debate, but to determine the truth of God’s Word. We begin by looking at the context.

### CONTEXT

Some assert that Paul’s primary intention in this letter is to combat an Ephesian heresy that Timothy faced.<sup>3</sup> After all, Paul does frequently mention false teachers.<sup>4</sup> A key factor in sound hermeneutics, however, is to allow the writer to speak for himself, and in this letter Paul’s purpose is transparent, even to the casual observer. His overreaching purpose is to address church life in general:

*... I am writing you these instructions so that...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 (1 Timothy 3:14-15).*

In other words, Paul is concerned about behavior in the church. The fact that there is so much heresy and practical application points to the fact that behavior is linked very closely with correct teaching in the church. But the point is not about having the right “head-knowledge,” but having the right attitudes and behaviors in the church.

Some feel that this is not adequate because his comments in 2:8-15 relate more to the home, especially the part about child-bearing. But in argument against this, the church *does* have much to offer about raising, nurturing and teaching children. In fact, Paul uses the familial term *household* to describe the church! Indeed, the church is like a family, and the nuclear family is part of the body of believers.

The central concern in this passage, for our purposes, has to do with teaching and authority in the church. The two functions or activities are related, as House points out:

“Teaching in the first century concerned more than mere conveyance of information ... The teacher gave his personal direction and exercised authority over the learner. The teacher expected the student to accept his teaching. Also, the authority the teacher exercised over the learner came from a distinct relationship between the two. Teachers were either heads of communities or masters who took in disciples. Instruction was accompanied by correction of those who strayed from the accepted teaching (see 1 Timothy 4:11, 4:16-5:2, 2 Timothy 4:1-4, Titus 2:15, 3:8-11).”<sup>5</sup>

#### EGALITARIAN VIEWPOINT

Let’s look first at the singularly important central portion:

*A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent* (1 Timothy 2:11-12).

Among the more common egalitarian assertions in regard to this passage are the following: 1) Paul was responding to a specific problem in the Ephesian church and 2) his prohibition was against women teaching men in a *domineering* way, and not teaching *per se*. Some feel Paul had to slow down the move to full equality because of the women who were teaching error.

Scholer sees the book as an *ad hoc* letter dealing with false teaching, specifically a problem at Ephesus which appealed strongly to women.<sup>6</sup> “*Idle and gossiping women*” (5:13) and “*weak women*” (3:5-7) could support the existence of women who were false teachers being present. Paul does indeed seem to be concerned about correct teaching versus meaningless talk in

relationship to such things as “*myths and endless genealogies*”(1:4). Other egalitarians feel that this passage applies only to uneducated women. Indeed, Paul warns about those who want to teach the law, but “*do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.*” (1:7). Some would find support in the Edenic fall, where Eve was supposedly not fully educated by Adam about the prohibition against eating the tree, as is evidenced by her misunderstanding of the sanction and her misquoting it. As one author says, “Her mistake was to exercise an authoritative function for which she was not prepared.”

There is some divergence among feminists, though. Some, like Philip B. Payne, feel that Paul indeed restricts women from all teaching in Ephesus, but only temporarily.<sup>7</sup> Others say Paul is simply restricting *overbearing* teaching by women, but not restricting their teaching over men in general.

### INITIAL RESPONSE

Egalitarians have not mounted a convincing argument against the plain reading of the text. Interestingly, Pinnock, a cautious feminist, points out that traditionalists and radical feminists agree that the Bible, taken as is, cannot support feminism. He concludes that “...unless the Bible is edited along feminist lines, it cannot be made to support feminism.” His final assessment is that the traditional viewpoint is simpler and less difficult exegetically.<sup>8</sup>

Scholer makes a good case for considering all of the immediate context. But his interpretation of the context is somewhat biased. False teaching did exist in Ephesus (1:4, 1:7). The fact that Paul wrote that women should not teach men would suggest that some women were in fact doing that and that they should stop. But there is no evidence (at least in the letter) that the problem was that the women were teaching false doctrine. Nor is there any contextual evidence that he had uneducated women in mind, for his comments in 1:7 could just have easily applied to men as well as to women. Paul’s point was that women shouldn’t teach men, period. In fact, any specific named references Paul does make to erring individuals are to men (for example, Hymenaeus and Alexander in 1:20). If false, overbearing or uneducated teaching on the part of women was the point of 2:11-15, Paul would have most certainly prohibited men in the

same breadth from this activity as well—since men are the sole referents in his specific comments about false teachings. Let’s look further into the context.

### BACKGROUND CONTEXT

The background to verses 11-12 contain instructions for prayers of intercession, requests and thanksgivings:

*I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time. 7 And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles (1 Timothy 2:1-7).*

Prayers are offered for all those in leadership with the motivation (it seems) being that this provides the best environment for winning people to the Savior (verses 3-4). The passage goes on to say that “... *there is one mediator between God and men* (Greek: *anthropos*), *the man* (Greek: *anthropos*) *Christ Jesus*” (2:5). The word *anthropos* is used generally of human beings without reference to sex—it is equivalent to “people.”<sup>9</sup> Here Christ is being identified with the entire human race, not with *males* only. His work as Mediator is *not* connected with His being male but by His being a member of the human race (verse 6). He was our replacement, one human for another—and that as a ransom.

The apostle chooses next (verse 7) to emphasize his own relationship to the truth. He is an appointed apostle, charged specifically with conveying spiritual truth to the Gentiles (i.e. non-Jews). So he speaks with authority given by God. His teaching has to do with “*the true faith*” (lit. “in faith and truth”). The apostle is emphatic about his instructions: “*I urge...*” (verse 1), “*I want*” (verse 8), “*I want*” (verse 8). These are not mere opinions of a man, for indeed in the midst of these assertions he emphasizes his apostleship which gives his statements the vested

authority of God (verse 7). In light of his apostolic authority, it would hardly be acceptable to hold that Paul teaches that the true Gospel erased *all* distinctions between male and female, as the egalitarians say, but that here he mandates (with great transparency) restrictions on women's ministries (even if the restrictions were temporary).

The ensuing verses contain a certain and plain face value. The burden of proof lies with those who would try to make the verses say something different than their patently obvious meaning, namely that women are not to teach or have authority over men.

### INSTRUCTION TO MALES

Specific instruction now is given to the males:

*I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing* (1 Timothy 2:8).

The Greek word used for *men* here is *aner*, which is different from *anthropos* used in verse 5. *Aner* in ancient and biblical Greek was always used for males, never for females. The word stands in distinction from the Greek word for a female, *gunaikos*, used in verses 9-15. The apostle singles out men for special attention here, in that it is particularly incumbent upon *all* the men to pray in the manner prescribed. It is difficult to know why men are singled out since no specific reason is given. In the context, he draws a contrast to that which pertains to women, namely their attention to outward appearances. Paul could be inferring that there is something uniquely masculine in the area of prayer, done possibly in an observable way.

Why are women not included in this command? Is this simply stylistic or incidental? Some feel this is an implied prohibition against women ever praying in the public meetings of the church, after the fashion of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. But a positive statement about men should not necessarily be construed as a negative statement about women—that would be poor hermeneutics. By analogy, if Scripture were to say, "Men are to love their wives," we do not conclude that women are *not* to love their husbands! So when Scripture commands men to pray, we ought not conclude that women are commanded to *not* pray. The apostle is making no statement at all about the legitimacy of women praying in the public meetings. He is simply urging men

to pray, and to do it with clear consciences. If anything, we could reasonably conclude that men were generally *not* praying and that they *should* have been. In light of what we have seen so far in our study beginning back in Genesis, the idea that men should be leading in the prayer effort of the local church would fit very well within the purview of this verse.

We must comment briefly on the lifting up of holy hands, because some throw this into the cultural-interpretative mix when dealing with the topic of gender issues. The argument goes like this: If we interpret verse 11 (teaching and authority over men denied to women) as being a transcultural<sup>10</sup> command, then why don't we see lifting hands (verse 9) as a being a transcultural command as well? Of course, there is nothing to suggest that Christians today cannot lift hands. The argument seems to be made more as an *ad hominem*<sup>11</sup> charge of hypocrisy against those who believe in limiting women's roles yet do not publicly lift up hands in prayer. There is a difference, though, in how Paul addresses these two separate topics. First, the lifting of hands was a common form of prayer, along with prostrating oneself. It represented an earnestness, and never simply an outward spiritual form that had value in itself. Second, there is no rationale given for lifting hands in this passage. Rather Paul is seeking to modulate the activity, that is, he desires to affect the way they lift up their hands ("*without anger or disputing*"). In other words, the form of the command gives emphasis to the *manner of* rather than the *fact of* the hand lifting. Clearly, the issue is not the lifting of hands, but the attitude of the heart when doing so. One cannot be genuine in prayer when there is conflict or sin in one's life. Third, the issue of women not teaching or having authority over men is specifically tied to something that went beyond the culture of the time, namely the theological understanding of the sequence of creation and the sequence of the fall.

#### **INSTRUCTION TO WOMEN**

The apostle now turns specifically to women with a number of instructions:

##### ***Character-Beauty.***

*9 I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or*

*expensive clothes, 10 but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God (1 Timothy 2:9-10).*

The apostle turns specifically to women, as is evident from the Greek word he uses, *gunaikos*, for women as distinct from *aner* used earlier for men. Because the passage is introduced by *likewise*, some think that women were being instructed to pray just like men—though with proper decorum. But the term “*to pray*” (verse 8) parallels the term *to adorn* (verse 9). Just as the apostle has instructed the men in their proper behavior (lifting holy hands), now he instructs the women in their corresponding proper behavior (how they should dress and live).

The vocabulary Paul uses is varied and colorful. The main verb here “dress” is a translation of the Greek word *kosmein* which means “to adorn, decorate, put in order, make beautiful or attractive (figurative), do credit to.” Women should give attention to their outward appearance in a way that reflects their inward character. In their manner of dress, the godly woman should be characterized or described by three phrases. We refer to the lexical definitions to give the full range and richness of meaning to these words:

Modestly (Greek: *katastole*)—The first word refers to deportment, that is, the manner in which one conducts oneself outwardly, as it pertains in this context to clothing.

Decency (Greek: *aidous*)<sup>12</sup>—The second word means respectable, honorable, modest—not so much the idea of *sexual* modesty, but modesty in the sense of not being lavish.<sup>13</sup> This intensifies the idea the *katastole*.

Propriety (Greek: *sophrosunes*)—The third word means reasonableness, rationality, mental soundness, good judgment, moderation, self-control. Especially as a feminine virtue, it takes on the meaning of decency, chastity.<sup>14</sup>

Paul now gives an example of how this applies. Concerning a woman’s coiffure and accessories, she should not be lavish, but rather modest—for example, braided hair, gold or pearl accessories ought to be avoided. Such apparel would have been scandalously extravagant in the early church. It is not that men have no concern over their dress, but Paul is focusing on the woman. Would it be presumptuous of this writer to suggest that the reason might be fairly obvious? All through the Scripture and life

itself, we see the recognition of a woman's outward appearance being of more importance in the social interaction of life than a man's outward appearance. Paul is here directing that in the church, such interactions should be based on what a person does as reflective of their character, rather than the superficial outward show. The godly woman's concern should be that of good works. While the world defines or tries to enhance femininity by such things as dress, makeup and jewelry, a godly woman finds her femininity in doing good deeds. The apostle uses the word *prepei*, which means that the works he speaks of are "fitting or suitable" to the woman's character.

Implied in all this is that a woman's outward appearance should be a window into her character, a reflection of her inner self. The instruction here is that a woman's conduct as reflected in her style of dress should exhibit modesty, balance and respect. In particular, good deeds are befitting the professing Christian woman. The word "profess" is the Greek word *epangellomenais*, which means "to announce, proclaim, promise, profess, lay claim to, give oneself out as an expert in something."<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Christian femininity is much more than skin deep.

Scholer<sup>16</sup> says expensive, provocative clothing indicated two undesirable characteristics—material extravagance and sexual infidelity. This was very cultural as depicted in both Jewish and pagan texts. One would be quick to point out that just about every culture has its form of dress which exhibits such undesirable characteristics for a Christian, for it concerns the outward appearances.

Most evangelicals take the comments about specific kinds of clothing and hair style to be culturally relative. The emphasis is on the manner in which one dresses, similar to the manner in which a man lifts up holy hands. Women should practice modesty of behavior.

But is it wrong for a woman to wear jewelry or braid her hair? This passage seems to be talking about focus. Peter echoes similar thoughts

*Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead 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 (1 Peter 3:3-4).*

It is clear here that Peter is not directing that women should *not* wear jewelry, braid their hair or wear fine clothing. Rather, he says they should not seek to gain their beauty from those things. She should focus attention on developing beauty that is inner beauty, specifically her character and attitude. By analogy, when Paul says that the love of money is the root of all evil,<sup>17</sup> the implication is *not* that a Christian cannot have money, but simply that he ought not to *love* money. In the same way Peter and Paul are not saying a woman cannot have outward adornment, but simply that her primary focus on beauty should be that which reflects a godly inner character.

Indeed, if true beauty were centered on outward appearances only, then beauty would be reserved for relatively few individual women fortunate enough to be born with certain desirable physical attributes that could be described as outward beauty, or who had the wherewithal to adorn their outward beauty. True feminine beauty for a Christian woman comes from within and is reachable, depending on her motive and where her attention is.

There is nothing wrong with acknowledging and appreciating feminine beauty. Even the Word of God acknowledges beauty in a woman's appearance. See, for example, Esther 2:7 where the writer describes Esther as a young lady who "... *was beautiful of form and face ...*" Consider also the patriarchs' wives who were described as beautiful: Sarah in Genesis 12:14, Rebekah in 24:16 and Rachel in 29:17. But the emphasis Paul makes is not to make physical beauty the pinnacle of femininity. "Physical beauty does not a woman make." Consider the wisdom of proverbs:.

*Outward dress can communicate inner purposes— "And, behold, there met him a woman [with] the attire of an harlot, and subtle of heart" (Proverbs 7:10).*

*Physical beauty cannot cover up lack of character— "[As] a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, [so is] a fair woman which is without discretion" (Proverbs 11:22).*

*A truly godly woman who focuses her life on inner character is rare— “Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price [is] far above rubies” (Proverbs 31:10).*

Just as men are to reflect lives of holiness not filled with anger or disputing, by lifting up sincere and holy prayer, so also the women are to reflect lives of holiness not filled with superficial values.

***The role limitation.***

*A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent (1 Timothy 2:11-12).*

Now we come to the crux of the passage, a limitation on the ministry of women. The terseness of these verses is signaled by the lack of a Greek connective term with the previous verse, which is typical for conveying an abrupt emphasis of thought in the original language. A woman’s proclamation or profession of godliness (which we saw in the previous verses) does *not* include a teaching or leadership role over men.

Some object that this lessens a woman and assaults her dignity. We have already addressed the dignity issue in earlier chapters. Suffice it here to say that a limitation on one’s freedom does not lessen one’s person or dignity—unless, of course, we say that being fully human means having complete freedom to aspire to or have every possible role. This, of course, is nonsense in many other areas of life. Limitations are common for both men and women. For example, a man cannot aspire to get pregnant and carry a child. A person’s limitations of mental facility prohibit him or her from becoming a rocket scientist. Yet in none of these cases is the limited person somehow lessened because of life or genetic circumstances inherently beyond his control. Likewise, a limitation on women in Paul’s writings does not affect her full enjoyment of humanness or her dignity as a woman. A woman’s aspirations to godliness, according to Paul’s inspired teaching, should not include aspirations to teach or have authority over men in the church.

The meaning of the word *authority* (Greek: *authentain*) has been subject to much debate. The underlying Greek word is a

*hapax legomenon*. That means it occurs only once in the New Testament. In fact, it is extremely rare in all of ancient Greek.<sup>18</sup> Thus, it is difficult to ascertain the precise meaning of the word. Egalitarians tend to hold that it means *to dominate*. But it can also mean simply *to have authority*. Both of these meanings are listed in standard Greek lexicons.<sup>19</sup> Scholer<sup>20</sup> makes a good point that Paul's use of the unusual word *authentēin* may indicate that he was not referring to normal exercise of authority. For the normal meaning Paul might have used the word *exousia*. The question is, does the term *authentēin* predominately carry a negative connotation, as egalitarians assert? Let's look at the evidence.

***Are women limited only from teaching in a domineering fashion?***

Scholer says "2:15 and 2:9-10 are limited to the threat and presence of the false teachers in Ephesus and are set within particular cultural values, so are the injunctions to silence and submission 2:11-12."<sup>21</sup> He goes on to say "... I see the injunctions of 2:11-12 as directed against women involved in false teaching who have abused proper exercise of authority in the church (not denied by Paul elsewhere to women) by usurpation and domination of the male leaders and teachers in the church at Ephesus."<sup>22</sup> This is quite the hermeneutical leap! Scholer never demonstrates that these injunctions were limited to women who were teaching false doctrine. If the only problem with the false teaching was that leading women were radically violating the norms of decency and being overly assertive, then Paul would be guilty of overkill in making such an unqualified prohibition against women teaching men. What a monstrous hypocritical legalism this would have foisted on the Ephesian women if elsewhere Paul allowed women to teach or have authority. He did not allow Peter the luxury of situational legalism (Galatians 2)! At the very least, Paul would be guilty of grossly misleading statements.

If the egalitarians are right, then why were only the female false teachers the targets in this verse, especially when, as we said earlier, the false teachers who were named in the epistle were *men*? And why does Paul's injunction speak only of women teaching men in an overbearing way, and not speak of women teaching women in an overbearing way or men teaching

men in an overbearing way? To say, as Scholer, the women were special targets for infiltration is specious, having no supporting contextual evidence.

Liefeld correctly points out that 2 Timothy 3:6-7 clearly identifies women as the victims of false teaching.<sup>23</sup> But how then does it follow that 1 Timothy 2:11-12 restricts women from teaching? It would rather make sense that the apostle, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, would restrict the propagators rather than the recipients!

Many egalitarians see teaching and authority as one function, that is, teaching in a domineering way. They look to evidences such as in 1 Timothy 4:7 (“*godless myths and old wives’ tales*”) and 1 Timothy 5:11-13 where women are admonished against being *busybodies and gossips*. These, it is asserted, support the idea that the women needed to be admonished against domineering teaching because it was causing the spread of false doctrine. Our response is that such an interpretation requires a huge background scenario to be assumed and to be forced on the text. That no one should *lord it over anyone* (“*as the Gentiles do*”) is clear from Jesus’ teachings (Matthew 20:25). But that is not really the point here. Nothing in 1 Timothy would support the idea that women were in fact domineering.

***Women are not to teach or have authority over men in the church.***

George Knight II<sup>24</sup>, in a major study of all occurrences of the *authentien* in ancient Greek, confirms the rendering *have authority* as the natural meaning.<sup>25</sup> Wilshire Leland Edward likewise, using the computer project at the University of California to examine all occurrences of the word concluded that *authentien* means to *exercise authority*.<sup>26</sup> Neither found *domineering* to be the meaning.

In other words, the apostle was not commanding women to not teach in domineering ways, but rather he was teaching women to not assume *any* authority over men. This interpretation fits in very well with the context and flow of Paul’s letter and apart from outside influences, this is the natural reading of the passage.

A more literal translation of the underlying Greek would read, “not to teach, nor even have authority.” This reflects the

grammatical construction where the Greek term *oude* is repeated before *teach* and *have authority*. It indicates the two activities are separate and reinforces the overall thought of prohibition. Rather than Paul restricting domineering teaching by women, he restricts teaching, and even for that matter exercising *any* authority over men. A similar grammatical construction is used in 1 Timothy 6:16 (lit. translation): “*No man has seen, nor can see God ...*” Two ideas are present, the second of which intensifies the first.<sup>27</sup> House concludes that, “The evidence is overwhelming that *oude* is used to join similar ideas and intensify the concepts.”<sup>28</sup> These are clearly two separate constrained activities for women.

The passage also says that women are to be quiet and have an attitude of submissiveness in respect to teaching and authority. The word *quietness* (Greek: *esuchia*) means “rest from something, peaceful, silence.” It is used in 2 Thessalonians 5:12 when the apostle commands people to refrain from busy-body living. In reference to teaching, a godly woman does not enter into lively debate with those who teach, but embraces a feminine attitude of quiet submissiveness, ready to learn. This doesn’t mean she cannot discuss or interact with the teaching, but addresses more the attitude with which she learns.

Likewise, godly femininity avoids exercising authority or leadership over men, for then femininity sacrifices itself in an attempt to take on masculinity. Some commentators extol this teaching as protection for women from being responsible for that which they are not suited. There is something uniquely feminine about being a responder and helper rather than an initiator or leader in the area of teaching and authority. Some might complain that this puts women at the mercy of men who might teach falsely. But a godly woman will always follow what she knows to be true in any teaching; her submissiveness is subject to the higher authority, that of the Word of God itself. It is the unwise woman who too easily claims that her rebellion against the leadership of her husband is really submission to a higher authority.

***Rationale.***

If we let Paul speak for himself, he explains his rationale with two lines of reason:

*The order of creation*

*For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner (1 Timothy 2:13-14).*

David M. Scholer makes the astounding assertion: “Paul’s selective and wide range of arguments is well known. He even uses some that may have reflected beliefs and practices he did not approve.”<sup>29</sup> The problem with this assertion is that it creates arbitrary uncertainty for the reader—one could conveniently say this regarding any disagreeable teaching of Paul’s, namely that Paul himself doesn’t really believe his own argument!<sup>30</sup> This is a very shaky hermeneutic. The fact of the matter is that Paul clearly indicates that he not only believes his argument, but uses facts from the OT to prove his argument. In this case, Paul uses the creation story as supporting data.

Adam as man was formed first, Eve as woman, second. The direct implication is that because of the sequence in creation, men should take the lead in teaching, not women. One could argue one’s own interpretation of Genesis (see earlier chapters), or one could accept the apostle Paul’s inspired interpretation. We choose the later. Paul’s use of Genesis removes this teaching from being limited to the first century Ephesians by basing it on an historical event that precedes all of Christianity, including the roles of men and women in the church.

*The role of deception.*

Adam’s fall was *not* a result of being deceived, but the woman’s fall very much *did* involve deception. Adam was told specifically by God not to eat the fruit (Genesis 2:15). We are not told that Eve was privy to that command initially, though by the time the serpent tempted her she did know of it (though she misquoted it). Presumably she learned it from Adam. Eve, not the serpent, was the one who presented Adam with the fruit to eat. Eve was deceived, Adam was not! Paul is straightforward about these events affecting the teaching and authority roles in the church.

The question still arises why Paul would use the creation and fall stories as support for his teaching. What is the connection? Eve was led astray by false doctrine (Genesis 3:4-5), for indeed,

the serpent had subtly twisted God's good command and misrepresented the truth. She chose to *lead* her husband to sin. Some object to characterizing Eve's actions as a form of leadership, but notice that when Adam responded to God's interrogation, he made it clear that Eve had influenced him toward sin (Genesis 3:12). The dictionary defines *leading* as "to be first, to guide on a way especially by going in advance, to direct a course of action." Certainly, Eve's actions fulfill this definition. She was first to sin and she influenced Adam to follow her lead.

In the serpent's temptation of Eve, God's goodness was called into question:

*Now the serpent ... said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?' ... "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman (Genesis 3:1,4).*

God had never said they could not eat from *any* tree of the garden, just the one tree. And He did say they would *surely die* (Genesis 2:17). In response to this false doctrine of the serpent, Eve responded with her own changes, which though subtle, were significant:

*The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die'" (Genesis 3:2-3).*

Whether Eve was aware that she misrepresented God's command or not, the Bible doesn't tell us. But small change though it was, she got it wrong. She responds with four errors (Genesis 3:2-3). First, Eve diminished the goodness of God, for she relayed that God said, "We may eat." God's command was more than this, He intended them not simply to have permission, but to fully enjoy the trees of the garden. Second, she gave undue focus to the forbidden tree when she referred to the "tree in the *middle* of the garden." God never said it was the *middle* (Genesis 2:17). Third, she put words into God's mouth that He never said, "You must not *touch* it." God simply commanded that they must not *eat* it. Eve over-intensified the command. Fourth, she diminished

the certainty of judgment by saying God told them, “*You will die.*” In fact, God had said, “*you will surely die.*”

One could make the case that Eve was simply overzealous, but that would seem a rather superficial interpretation in light of the conciseness of the passage. The serpent then openly contradicted God’s command, “*You surely will not die*” (Genesis 3:4), a bold thing for any creature to do! He denies God’s good character and represented Him as a jealous adversary (Genesis 3:5). At this point, Eve found the fruit desirable which led to her eating it in direct disobedience to the Lord’s command.

As the story plays out, Adam followed Eve’s lead and also sinned. Paul, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit says that “*Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived.*” Since Adam was not deceived, he sinned with his eyes fully opened, he knew what he was doing, yet still sinned—he never claimed he was deceived. Eve, on the other had, by her own admission, was deceived

*Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (Genesis 3:17).*

Adam’s excuse was simply to blame Eve (Genesis 3:12), a tacit admission that he was led astray by false leading, albeit knowingly. Adam should have been the godly leader and resisted the efforts to influence him away from obedience to God.

It might seem that anyone who proceeds *knowingly* in the wrong direction would be more disqualified from teaching than one who was unknowingly deceived. Certainly, Adam knowingly sinned. Eve not only was deceived, she concluded that what the serpent told her made more sense than what she heard about God’s commands. Deception does not exonerate Eve from her rebellion, for God placed a curse on her as well as Adam. We would surmise from Paul’s reasoning that it is better to have a teacher who is less likely to be *deceived* into teaching wrong doctrine, than one who is more likely to be *deceived*. Both men and women have the capacity to be knowingly wrong in decision making, and this can affect what and how one teaches spiritual things. But deception adds an additional layer to be concerned about when it comes to teaching. When it comes to teaching

God's Word, deception is foundational to conveying false doctrine.

The direct application the apostle makes is that since Eve was deceived, since she defended false doctrine, and since she influenced Adam to sin, therefore, in the church of God, women are not to teach or lead over men.

*Why do Adam's and Eve's actions affect the roles of men and women thousands of years later?*

There are a few options in attempting an answer to this question: First, there could be something inherent in femaleness that makes women by nature more susceptible to deception. In argument against this, there is no lack of evidence that men also can be deceived, a classic example of which is found in the life of Jacob:

*When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?" (Genesis 29:25).*

However, as argued earlier, women by nature are responders. This could lead to the conclusion that they are *more* inclined or have *more* of a propensity toward being deceived. Whether this is true in every case would be hotly debated today.

A second possibility is the representational theory that all women were being represented by Eve and therefore share vicariously in the consequences. In argument against this, one could assert that the cross would have nullified these consequences, in the same way that the cross nullified the consequences of Adam's sin? Why should all women continue to have to bear the consequences of Eve's sin?

However, we must take into consideration that physical death was also a consequence of the fall, which all must experience. This was not nullified in the cross. Painful childbirth is another consequence that women still experience, even after the cross. Therefore, the cross, though taking away the *guilt* of all our sin, has not removed all the *consequences* of sin. This could hold true, then, for the consequence of Eve's being deceived being passed on to all women.

The third possibility, which is similar to the previous one, is the seminal theory, that all women were *in Eve* seminally when

she sinned. That is, all women were sinning *with* Eve. This finds support in the theory that all humans were *in Adam* when he sinned.<sup>31</sup>

*... the many died by the trespass of the one man [Adam]...*  
(Romans 5:15b).

*... through the disobedience of the one man [Adam] the many were made sinners* (Romans 5:19a).

Therefore, by analogy, all women suffer the same disciplinary consequences as did Eve. Which of these three possibilities is correct is difficult to assess. Possibly, all three are involved. The bottom line is that Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit makes the connection between Eve's deception and the limitation on women teaching or having authority over men.

One of the common objections to any of these is the reality of women who are clearly gifted in areas of leadership and teaching. It should be noted that God has not eliminated all roles of leadership and teaching for women; this passage has to do only with women teaching or leading men in the church.

#### **APPLICATION**

##### ***Leading and teaching in the church.***

The most natural way of reading this passage is that because of the order of creation and the nature of the sexes, women are instructed not to have a leadership or teaching role over men in the church. This means that the roles of elder and teaching the general congregation of the local church should be the responsibility of men, not of women. Further, where there is any teaching of biblical truth with both men and women present, the teacher should be male.

This, of course, leaves much room for women in teaching, leadership and pastoring roles involving women and children. Indeed, Paul speaks to this in his letter to Titus:

*Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be*

*subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God (Titus 2:3-5).*

Although this passage to Titus doesn't specifically address teaching general Bible truths and doctrine to women and children, such ministry would not go against Paul's instruction in 1 Timothy 2. However, such ministry should be clearly under the guidance of the elders and (male) teachers of the church.

I would also say that team teaching ministry of a woman with her husband is also encouraged in some contexts. The biblical example of Priscilla and Aquila sets this example:

*He [Apollos] began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately (Acts 18:26).<sup>32</sup>*

Clearly, Priscilla was involved in teaching (correcting) Apollos and he (Apollos) went on to become a great help in the propagation of the truth. Whether this would also apply in a church setting is not specifically addressed. I would suggest that if a church does employ a husband and wife team teaching, it be limited to home or small group ministry (analogous to Priscilla and Aquila's example) and there should be a clear sense of the husband's leadership, in keeping with the general teaching of Scripture.

***What about women deacons or deaconesses?***

Some say that Paul implies the existence of women deacons:

*I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant [Greek: diakonos] of the church in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me (Romans 16:1-2).*

The Greek work *diakonos* is the same one used in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8 and 12 for the office of deacons in the church. However, the word is more generally used for "a servant" in Scripture. Hermeneutically speaking, the meaning of word is ultimately determined by its use in context. While clearly in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8 and 12 it refers to

an official role or office, while in Romans 16 it is unclear. Commentators disagree on which meaning the writer of Acts intends.<sup>33</sup> Certainly, Phoebe was a servant *par excellence*, as the passage describes.

When Paul clearly addresses the “office” of deacon<sup>34</sup>, he says, “*A deacon must be the husband of but one wife ...*” Paul clearly communicates the maleness of the role. Some assert that Paul addresses deaconesses in 1 Timothy 3:11, “*In the same way, their (Greek: *gunaikos*) wives are to be women worthy of respect.*” The word *gunaikos* can mean either woman or wife. However, Paul does not use the term *diakonos* in this regard and a more natural reading is that it means “wives.” In fact, the qualifications for the deacons versus their *gunaikos* are different. This passage does not support the idea of women being deacons (in the official sense) or even a separate office of deaconess.

With little else in Scripture to support the idea of an “office” of deaconess, Romans 16:1 is most likely referring to Phoebe simply as a prime example of servanthood in general. Indeed, serving is not something that requires an office in order to be effective. Having said that, there is nothing militating against using the word “servant” or “deaconess” to describe the ministry of committed women, so long as there is no confusion with the role of deacon outlined in 1 Timothy 3 and it does not involve leadership over men.

***What about women in fulltime, supported ministry?***

Two women are described by Paul as being “fellow workers” who have “contended at my side in the cause of the gospel” (Philippians 4:2-3). In Romans 16:3, Paul refers to Priscilla along with her husband as a “fellow-worker.” Further, Paul says Euodia and Syntyche “*contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers*” (Philippians 4:2-3). Women in fulltime ministry were embraced in NT times and should be also today, subject to the parameters of 1 Timothy 2.

Clearly, in whatever ministry women participate, Paul says they should have a demeanor that is quiet, not lavish nor preoccupied with external appearance, but rather with good deeds. They should not be characterized as those who seek to teach or

have authority over men. In public meetings men should be the ones to *lead* and to provide the general teaching.

### **SALVATION THROUGH CHILDBEARING?**

One of the most difficult passages in Scripture, and which is acknowledged as such by all sides of the gender debate is found next:

*But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety* (1 Timothy 2:8-15)

The problem has to do with the question, “In what sense is a woman saved in this verse?” Although the word translated *saved* is frequently used elsewhere to refer to spiritual salvation (see 1 Timothy 1:15, for example), that meaning would go contrary to everything we know about salvation by grace through faith (see Ephesians 2:8-9). However, the word *saved* is also used in Scripture to refer to being rescued from other things beside spiritual condemnation for our sins.

Three interpretations have been traditionally adopted:<sup>35</sup> First, a woman’s *saving* function is bearing and nurturing children as opposed to Timothy’s saving function to persevere in doctrine. Both are to persevere in life (women by childbearing in particular). The objection to this view is that it seems to relegate the ultimate functioning of women to that of childbearing, everything else is somehow secondary. What about single women or those who are unable to become pregnant?

The second possible interpretation is that women will be brought safely through childbearing. The NASB translates it “will be preserved.” This would relate back to the curse on the woman “*I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children*” (Genesis 3:16). Some feel this is a promise to women that is contingent upon their development of Christian faith, love and holiness—they will be comforted and strengthened during the child birthing process. The difficulty with this view is that non-Christian women and carnal Christian women alike have no greater incidence of difficulty during the birthing process than godly women. Conversely, godly women at times have died during childbirth. Certainly a woman may call upon God for comfort and strength in her time

of labor, but that ability is not unique to women only, for anyone can call on God in this way.

The third view is that women will be saved through the birth of a Child, Jesus the Savior. The phrase *women will be saved* should be literally translated *she will be saved*, as indicated by the underlying Greek. It is singular not plural as some translations (such as NIV) render it. Yet the second part of the verse is uniformly translated correctly in the plural, “*if they continue...*” Presumably the females (plural) of the human race, though cursed along with the “mother of all the living” (Genesis 3:20), namely Eve, are emancipated from the curse by the human mother of the giver of life, namely Mary (singular). Since she as a woman was the (singular) channel of the Savior’s entry into the world, women (plural) as a whole benefit from this, provided that they demonstrate the character of faithfulness, love and holiness. Mary’s actions were not redemptive or vicarious—but in that she as a woman bore the Savior, femininity provided Christ’s door into this world. And through Christ, all mankind can be saved. Women therefore, rather than having the curse as the predominate force in their lives, now have the presence of Christ saving them from a lost eternity.

This view has merit, but doesn’t seem to go far enough. Certainly, Mary representing all females everywhere was the feminine vehicle of Christ’s entry. But men are saved through that childbirth as well. Actually, it is not the birth, but the death and resurrection of that Child that procures salvation.

Lastly is the view that woman’s greatest achievement is found in devotion to her divinely ordained role: to help her husband, to bear children, and to follow a faithful, chaste way of life. Whereas men’s primary redemption-inspired work is leadership in teaching and prayer, women’s primary redemption-inspired work is in the area of nurture. By *redemption-inspired*, I mean that which helps one find the fullness of the *experience* of salvation, in gender relationships. This does not procure salvation, but it is the woman’s participation in the fullness of the earthly experience of salvation. She is freed up by Christ to be all that God has designed her to be. To strive toward that which is masculine would be to place herself in bondage and a frustrated and unhappy life. For a woman to seek her

redemption-inspired work by teaching or having authority over men is to place her right back in line with Eve's error and curse.

Genesis 3:16 indicates there are two parts to the curse on the woman, but 1 Timothy 2:15 supersedes each part. Pain in the childbirth part of the curse is addressed by Paul first. That which the curse brings pain to, salvation brings fullness to. Certainly, the difficulty of pregnancy and birthing continue. Indeed, the nurturing of children, with all its difficulties, discouragements, pains, rejection and trials is felt more deeply by a mother than a father. But in the same way that God's grace is sufficient in the midst of the rest of life's difficulties, so in pregnancy and birthing God's grace transforms the woman's pregnancy and birthing process.

The second part of the curse on the woman, namely conflict and power struggle with men, is addressed by Paul in 1 Timothy 2:11-12. The curse brought to the woman a consuming desire to control her husband or the males in her life (see earlier chapter on Genesis 3). But the conflict is intensified because the man will dominate the woman. In Christ, the woman is redeemed from this tyranny of both her desires and the oppression she feels as a result of her unmet desires to control her husband. Her redemption-inspired work is found in allowing men to lead and teach, and she in turn meekly and in obedience to her Lord and Master, learns quietly. Her inner spirit is at peace.

Essentially, we see grace proving to be greater than sin and the curse. The curse is not removed; instead its sting is nullified. It remains, although it loses its potency. Is not this the mystery of sanctification we find throughout Scripture? God's word says, "*My power is made perfect in weakness*" (1 Corinthians 12:9b) and "*Where sin increased, grace increased all the more*" (Romans 5:20). Weakness is not done away with, nor does sin cease to exist (this side of heaven). Rather, redemption completely envelops these things and neutralizes the power they have over us. Thus, the curse remains, but it is dealt with, and we rise far above it. William Hendriksen puts it this way, "...what Christian mother does not experience inner delight, joy, and blessing, and glory in seeing the image of her Savior reflected in little ones who belong to Him?"<sup>36</sup>

This is consistent with what Paul says in another place:

*So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander. Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan (1 Timothy 5:14-15).*

What about the woman who does not marry or does not have children? The idea here has to do with femaleness in general, not with each and every woman. However, a woman who is not married will find great fulfillment in nurturing those around her. Hendriksen says that a woman's influence on mankind should be from the "bottom up" (beginning from childbirth and nurturing) instead of from the "top down" (beginning with mature men).<sup>37</sup>

### **CONCLUSION AND APPLICATION<sup>38</sup>**

The words in 2 Timothy are *not* unfriendly words for women. Paul merely says that we should not create situations in which women do that for which they are particularly unsuited in light of the order of creation and by virtue of the sequence of the fall. Redemption does not change this order of things. Her redemption-inspired service is found in childbearing, nurturing and responding. A man's redemption-inspired service is found in teaching and leading.

To limit women from teaching as in 1 Timothy 2 is not legalistic. Rather this is a principle as with many other NT injunctions. In the normal operation of a church these are the goals.

### **WHAT ABOUT EXCEPTIONS?**

Some object that the injunctions must apply at all times if one is to be consistent. But even Jesus taught that at times exceptions were justified because of a higher cause. For example, He referred to David, the Old Testament man of God, who ate the ceremonial bread even though normally only the priest could do that.<sup>39</sup> Consider also that God raised up Deborah as a judge and leader in OT Israel, though this was the very rare exception. Exceptions, however, do not make the rule. We should conclude that, likewise, there are rare times when it may be justified for women to take the lead over men. For example, a woman missionary in the absence of male missionaries might teach new

male converts. However, the godly woman would always do this with a view to eventually seeing the men become the teachers.

What about men reading books written by women? This would not come under Paul's injunction, since in this case the book is not necessarily written under the auspices of the church. Even if the church uses a woman's book for a Bible study class, the authority rests not in her teaching, but with the study leader (this would be true even if the book were written by a man).<sup>40</sup>

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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> WAB, p.213.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Cary McMullen in "The Ledger", Saturday, April 27, 2002. [http://www.theledger.com/top\\_stories/27equa.htm](http://www.theledger.com/top_stories/27equa.htm)

<sup>3</sup> See David M. Scholer (WAB, p. 199). There are many feminists who could be cited, but we will rely here mostly on Scholer as representative of that viewpoint.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 4:1-8; Timothy 5:16; 6:3-10, see also 2 Timothy 2:16-18; 3:1-9; 4:3-4; 14-15.

<sup>5</sup> House, RWMT, p. 135.

<sup>6</sup> WAB, p.199-200.

<sup>7</sup> Payne says "...situation in Ephesus demanded that Paul restrict the activity of the women there..." though he does not believe that is applied by Paul universally. (quoted on p. 33 from Trinity Journal, "Libertarian Women in Ephesus", 2 (Fall 1981): 169-97.

<sup>8</sup> WAB, p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> See Romans 3:28, Galatians 2:16, etc.

<sup>10</sup> By "transcultural" we mean that something applies to all cultures everywhere.

<sup>11</sup> An *ad hominem* argument (Latin, literally "argument to the man"), is a logical fallacy that involves replying to an argument or assertion by addressing the person presenting the argument or assertion rather than the argument itself.

<sup>12</sup> This is the only occurrence of the word in the NT.

<sup>13</sup> This word is also one of the required characteristics of an elder's behavior (1 Timothy 3:2).

<sup>14</sup> For these words, see B.A.G.

<sup>15</sup> BAG only lists 1 Timothy 2:10, 6:21 as having this meaning.

<sup>16</sup> See David M. Scholer (WAB, p. 202).

<sup>17</sup> 1 Timothy 6:10, see also Hebrews 13:5

<sup>18</sup> Catherine C. Kroeger (“Ancient Heresies and a Strange Greek Verb,” *Reformed Journal* 29 [March 1979]:12-15).

<sup>19</sup> A survey of lexicographers shows the variety of meanings attempted: “to have full power or authority over, to be in power, to have authority, being master, to execute authority or exercise authority over, have the right or power for something or over someone. See especially BAG. Also, see Catherine Clark Kroeger (WAB, p. 229f) for word study.

<sup>20</sup> WAB, p. 205.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>24</sup> George W. Knight III, “*Authenteo* in reference to Women in 1 Timothy 2:12,” *New Testament Studies* 30 (January 1984): 143-57.

<sup>25</sup> See House, RWMT, p. 35.

<sup>26</sup> “The TLG Computer and Further References to 1 Timothy 2.12,” *New Testament Studies* 34 (1988):120-34 referred to by House (RWMT, p. 35).

<sup>27</sup> House, RWMT, pp. 50-51.

<sup>28</sup> House, RWMT, p. 52.

<sup>29</sup> WAB, p. 211.

<sup>30</sup> In reference to 1 Corinthians 15:29 “baptism for the dead”, Paul makes it clear he was referring to the practices of others and reasons from their belief (which is nowhere supported in scripture).

<sup>31</sup> See Romans 5:12-20.

<sup>32</sup> Some have emphasized that Priscilla was the primary teacher because her name is listed first in this verse. To be sure that was a common practice in NT times to list the more significant person first. It is clear from the passage, that Priscilla was not acting independently from her husband Aquila, and even his name is listed first in Acts 18:2. In fact, the KJV, NKJV and Young’s Literal Translation put Aquila’s name first in Acts 18:26, which reflects the divergence in the underlying Greek manuscripts.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd.), 1979; William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary: New Testament*. Wichita, Kansas: A&O Press, 1989.

<sup>34</sup> We use the word “office” to distinguish this ministry which requires qualification from the general ministry of serving which all are called to do regardless of qualification.

<sup>35</sup> See footnote for 1 Timothy 2:15 in the Ryrie Study Bible.

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<sup>36</sup> See William Hendriksen, "Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles" in *New Testament Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), pp. 111-114.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 111.

<sup>38</sup> See WAB, p. 194 for bibliography of articles that argue 1 Timothy 2. See also Catharine Clark Kroeger (WAB, p. 225ff) for religious and cultic background to 1 Timothy.

<sup>39</sup> Matthew 12:1ff.

<sup>40</sup> F. Scholer charges that conservatives are inconsistent in not giving 1 Timothy 5:3-16 the same weight as 1 Timothy 2:3-16.<sup>40</sup> Women should indeed be very careful how they dress, and men should pray earnestly in holiness. He is right on the mark here!

# ANALOGY OF MARRIAGE

## Chapter Thirteen

**G**reat responsibility rests on the shoulders of men. God has called them to be leaders in the church as well as in the home. To be a leader is not synonymous with having authority, although there is a relationship between the two concepts. Winston Churchill once said, “I will not take responsibility for that over which I have no authority.” Authority is necessary to accomplish what God has called men to do. But a corresponding maxim can also be asserted, “There is no legitimate authority apart from responsibility.” And in the Christian sense, this is seen in the servant-leadership modeled by our Lord Jesus Christ.

While the scope of this book is gender roles in the church, we can learn from the biblical teaching of roles in marriage.<sup>1</sup> But God uses the motif of a household to describe the church,<sup>2</sup> so there may be some teaching we might borrow from the domestic front.

Paul directly addresses men and women in the context of marriage in Ephesians when he writes:

*21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a*

*radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—30 for we are members of his body. 31 “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” 32 This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband (Ephesians 5:21-33).*

A detailed exegesis of the passage is left to others. But we want to observe a few key things that relate to the topic of the book. The passage rightly begins in verse 21 with mutual submission within the church, and this would presumably include all men and all women. Men and women are to be subject to each other in the general sense of the word. Is that not what love is all about that Paul writes about in Ephesians 5:1-2? It is a sacrificial love that puts the needs of others above needs of oneself. One example of this in the church entails the ministry of music: “*Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs*” (Ephesians 5:19).

Now when it comes to applying this to husbands and wives, Paul lays down very specific applications of this submission, albeit respectively different for the husbands and wives. When we understand this in nuclear family relationships, I would suggest that we can relate application to the church in general.

As most commentaries point out, the word submission in verse 22 is not in the original text, but is normally understood to be carried over by implication from the previous verse. The error many make is limiting this carry over to the wives only, since no translations supply it in verse 25 regarding the husbands. Paul ratchets up his thrust by using a stronger word than submission for men, namely the word *love* (Greek: *agape*)! Indeed, there is no greater submission to another than to sacrifice oneself for their good. And that is what God has called men to do.

So when Paul addresses women, he is not singling them out for submission, but he outlines the manner in which she should

show her submission. It is clear from Paul's reference to husbands as "*the head of the wife*" that he is talking about submission to their husbands authority. As outlined in chapter seven above, this is not an authoritarian view of a man with unilateral freedom to *command* his wife to do this or that. Such is the worldly way of leadership. Wives are called upon to defer leadership to their husbands, by responding to their leadership (notice the use of the word *head* – see chapter 7 of this book). This is what God has called the church to do in submitting to Christ. We are deferring to His leadership, not living by rule of law. And His leadership is one of love, which leads us graciously and wisely. This is not an onerous thing, unless one claims that following Christ is onerous—if that is the case, there is a gross misunderstanding of what it means to follow Christ's law of love. Jesus said, "*My yoke is easy and my burden is light*" (Matthew 1:30). Of course, no command in Scripture stands alone but may be subject to other scriptural parameters. For example, the wife's submission to her husband is limited by the higher principle of submission to God's Word<sup>3</sup>.

Notice that Paul does not launch into a soliloquy about how men are to wield authority and bring their wives under control! Yet how often is faulty perception embraced by many? Paul was not supplying men with a "spiritual club" with which to subjugate their women. What Paul does is call men to a greater submission than their wives. That is the submission of love! Briefly, note how he is to do this. First, the man is to follow Christ's example in loving the church. In the words of C.S. Lewis, "The husband is the head of the wife just in so far as he is to her what Christ is to the Church."<sup>4</sup> This kind of leadership involves a very deep level of sacrifice. It would do well for men to examine how Christ's example of sacrifice could be applied to their role not only in marriage, but also in the church. Second, the man is to follow Christ's example in living for the sake of building up his wife. Granted Paul is particularly speaking to marriage, but it seems reasonable that the kind of man who treats his wife like Christ treats the church will probably treat all the women in his life in a sacrificial way. By this we do not mean paying lip service or superficial chivalry, but making real sacrifices in ministering to the women in our lives. Paul speaks of ministering the

word (verse 26) with the goal of helping the women grow spiritually. Paul uses words that allude to and speak of feminine beauty. Real beauty comes from the inner person (1 Peter 3:3-4). Leadership of men ought to include the desire to help the women in the church (along with the men) reach their greatest potential in being Christ-like.

Third, the man is to treat his wife the way he treats himself (verses 28-31). This is nothing less than what Jesus instructed, “*So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you*” (Matthew 7:21).

Paul summarizes his instructions by calling each man to love his wife and for each wife to respect her husband (Greek: *phobeo*). Notice he doesn’t repeat the word *submission*, but uses a word that has more to do with attitude. If Paul had meant that only the woman was to be submissive to her spouse, this would have been an opportune time to make that clear. But he does not do that, because that is not his point.

We conclude that husbands and wives are to be submissive to each other, but that submission is shown in different ways. A wife submits by following the loving, servant-leadership of her husband. The husband submits by loving his wife with a humble, Christ-like leadership that puts her needs at least equal to his own, and further is willing to sacrifice himself for her. By analogy, women in the church should have a similar attitude toward men who are servant leaders in the church. Men likewise should strive to highly regard the needs of women in the church. How this should work in practice constitutes the skill of the dance and will grow in time. The goal is that women would be highly valued and that men would discover the joy of being servant leaders who make decisions that truly put the needs of others above themselves.

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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> An excellent book that deals with the practical side of this is, *Rocking the Roles: Building a Win-Win Marriage*, by authors Robert Lewis and William Hendricks.

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<sup>2</sup> “... you are ... members of God’s household...” Ephesians 2:19. See also Galatians 6:10, 1 Timothy 3:15.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 5:29.

<sup>4</sup> *The Four Loves*, quoted in *The Quotable Lewis*, Tyndale, 1989.

# CONCLUSION

## Chapter Fourteen

Steering a balanced path through the maze of Scripture that address the issue of men's and women's roles in the church is not an easy task. The complementarian viewpoint better fits the biblical teaching than the egalitarian viewpoint. Men and women are equal, but different. This difference is clearly taught in the respective roles of men and women in the church. These differences in roles do not diminish the dignity or worth of women, or allow men to escape with self-centered authoritarianism. In fact, they are well suited to how God created male and female as seen in the Garden of Eden before the fall.

Rather than a set of rules to be commanded as a kind of NT law, the ultimate NT law given is the law of love, as both Jesus and His disciples preached. Therefore, the teaching about gender rules must be seen in the light of the law of love, joyfully accepted and embraced by men and women.

Truly, there is a cosmic drama taking place that exudes beauty, creativity and glory. There is ultimately an audience of One, who desires to give a standing ovation, crying out, "Well done!"

Perhaps one last analogy will help bring out the beauty and enjoyment of both sexes in seeking God's design for their roles. Picture an ice dance, where the man and woman exude grace as they fluidly move about the rink. In perfect unison he lifts her up for a complicated throw; she lands perfectly on one skate. They part for a moment, then circle around, meeting in the middle. As he grasps her one hand, she spins around him and slowly drops her body parallel to the ice, he leans back, digging in his skate to provide the pivot point. Then slowly raising her up, she completes the beautiful spin and they both skate side by side to a

magnificent conclusion. The audience bursts into spontaneous applause.

This is how I picture the relationship of the sexes in the church. A dance instructor once told me that in any form of dance where a couple has physical contact, the man *always* leads, and the woman follows. One of the most difficult things for the instructor to do in her dance classes is get the men to lead. While there may be hesitation and some partners will knock knees and stumble over each other, with time they become proficient, even graceful. In the church, there is bound to be some awkwardness as the sexes learn to “dance,” spiritually speaking. There will be the equivalent of bruised toes and falls. There will be conflicts and a host of difficulties.

Those of us who are men may at times be “insufficiently masculine” as C. S. Lewis says<sup>1</sup> and in fact make bad leaders in the church, but the cure for this is not to eliminate the roles. A man may make a bad partner in dancing, but the cure is not to eliminate the sexual distinctions in dancing—rather the man should take dance lessons to better know how to dance as the lead partner. Likewise, some women have poor dance partners, but that doesn’t mean giving up on the dance.

As people and churches are committed to living out the roles for men and women outlined in Scripture, we can become proficient. The biblical picture when properly understood and embraced provides a beautiful picture of men and women moving in harmony, like graceful ice dancers. It is more than a dance—it is a drama that pictures Christ and His people, moving in that perfect harmony. In the end, the Audience of One is glorified as He sees His reflection shining clearly through us, as men and women. We anticipate His applause! To Him be all the glory!

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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> *God in the Docket*, quoted in *The Quotable Lewis*, Tyndale, 1989.

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